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THE CAREER OF MARTIN VAN BUREN
IN CONNECTION WITH THE SLAVERY CONTROVERSY
THROUGH THE ELECTION OF 1840

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University
1959

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PREFACE

Martin Van Buren was one of the most influential personalities in the political arena in ante-bellum America. He has consequently been the subject of a number of studies, but no really outstanding biography exists. As for his relationship to slavery and the slavery controversy, it is an aspect of his career that has not been fully explored. This work deals with that problem in some detail and carries the account through the election of 1840. Van Buren's active public career ended with his defeat in that year; although he was later involved in the slavery controversy, the election of 1840 was a significant breaking point in his career and hence was made the terminal date of this study.

In the course of doing the research for this work, libraries in Washington, D. C., Philadelphia, New York City, Albany, Rochester, Columbus, Cincinnati, and Delaware, Ohio, were visited. In every instance, the staff members of the libraries that were used were most helpful. A word of thanks is due to Professor Henry H. Simms who has been of invaluable assistance. He suggested the topic and offered a guiding hand while the study was being pursued and written.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Van Buren's Early Contacts with Slavery in New York</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The Missouri Controversy and Negro Suffrage</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Slavery Becomes a Factor in Van Buren's Presidential Campaign</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Vice President and the Developing Slavery Controversy</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The Election Year, 1836</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Inaugural Pledge, the Texas Issue, and the Petition Problem</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>The Election Year, 1840</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1

VAN BUREN'S EARLY CONTACTS WITH SLAVERY IN NEW YORK

During the heated campaign of 1856, Martin Van Buren found time to write an open letter to the Democrats of New York city. He discussed the Kansas situation and also indicated that he had been connected with several aspects of the slavery controversy during his political career. Indeed, he was born into a slaveholding family. The Van Burens, one of the oldest of the Dutch families in the middle Hudson Valley, were listed in the federal census of 1790 as having six slaves. Unfortunately, he left no account of his youthful impressions of the slave system in the Kinderhook area.

All things considered, his father, Abraham Van Buren, seemed to be a man of above average circumstances. He had sufficient property to be a fully qualified voter under the state constitution of 1777. He had eight children to add to his burdens, however, and, being "utterly devoid of the spirit of accumulation," very little money was

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1 Martin Van Buren, Letter of Ex-President Van Buren to Tammany Society, June 28, 1856 (n.p., /1856/).
2 Dennis Lynch, An Epoch and a Man: Martin Van Buren and His Times (N.Y., 1929), 28. This figure placed them among the more than 15,000 families in the U.S. owning 5-9 slaves. Edward Channing, A History of the United States (N.Y., 1921), V, 122.
3 A freehold worth $50 enabled the owner to vote for the Assembly; a freehold worth $250 above all debts made a man a voter for all elected offices. Lynch, Van Buren, 27.
available for the education of his children. In 1796 the brightest of the boys, Martin, was placed in a law office at the age of thirteen. As might be imagined, Martin Van Buren later lamented the deficiencies in his formal education.

The young law apprentice found a host of duties awaiting him. He made the fire, ran errands, copied legal papers, and attended court sessions. Notwithstanding the tedium of certain tasks, this work, added to the experiences gained at his father's inn, gave the young man a practical footing for the profession and invaluable insights regarding human behavior. Moreover, the law office of Francis Silvester brought Van Buren into direct contact with the bitter political strife of Columbia county and the Hudson Valley. Along with Albany, Troy, Poughkeepsie, and Ulster county, Columbia county was considered a Federalist stronghold. While observing the hurly-burly of local politics, young Martin found his position increasingly embarrassing. His father had imbued him with Jeffersonian and Clintonian ideas, much in contrast to the Federalism of the Silvester family. Yet his ability was such that as early as 1798

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5Ibid., 11-12. James A. Hamilton, writing later with some degree of hostility, said, "His knowledge of books outside of his profession was more limited than that of any public man I ever knew." James A. Hamilton, Reminiscences of James A. Hamilton (N.Y., 1869), 42.
Silvester himself pleaded with the apprentice to switch parties. In his Autobiography Van Buren recalled his reply that his "course had been settled after much reflection, and could not be changed."\(^8\)

Shortly thereafter he made his first appearance at the hustings, fighting for a Republican candidate for Congress, John P. Van Ness. The success of Van Ness compelled him to arrange for Van Buren's transfer to New York city. There in the offices of William P. Van Ness he finished his clerkship.\(^9\) Some estimation of his striking potential may be gained from a letter written during those years. John P. Van Ness expressed the hope that,

...you will (reflecting and considering that your future prospects are principally founded upon your attention to the improvement of the mind, and those talents, with which you are blessed) neglect no opportunity to accomplishing this desirable object to such a degree as to render you, an honor to your friends and your country.\(^10\)

In 1803 the fledgling lawyer joined his half-brother, James I. Van Alen, in a partnership. He soon found himself locked in combat with a group of able Federalists known as the "Columbia Junto."\(^11\) These men were among the leaders

\(^{8}\)Van Buren, Autobiography, 14.
\(^{9}\)Ibid., 13-14.
\(^{10}\)John P. Van Ness to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 6, 1802, Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.
of the New York bar and gave Columbia county a position in that department hardly expected from the size of its population. Despite Van Buren's inexperience, he established himself with alacrity and by 1805 displayed the accounts of a successful attorney.\textsuperscript{12} So successful, in fact, was he that he practiced law but twenty-five years of his life, and of those only eighteen were hard, grinding years.\textsuperscript{13}

\section*{II}

In the first two decades of the nineteenth century New York politics underwent a series of tremendous upheavals. Looking on, James Madison opined, "In general, the politics of that State are but imperfectly understood out of it."\textsuperscript{14} Some order may be brought to the apparent chaos if one remembers that in addition to the established party cleavage both groups were broken into factions, gnashing and clawing at each other in a most unrestrained manner. This situation developed out of personal loyalties and conflicts that often defied principle. During these stormy years, Van Buren rose to a position of prominence and power. Since he was involved with slavery on a number of occasions and since the maneuvers of the period help to explain his role during

\textsuperscript{12}He totaled accounts due at $2,355, March 19, 1805. Draft of Martin Van Buren, Van Buren Papers.

\textsuperscript{13}Van Buren, \textit{Autobiography}, 21.

\textsuperscript{14}James Madison to James Monroe, June 4, 1806, James Madison, \textit{Letters and Other Writings of James Madison} (Philadelphia, 1865), II, 225.
the Missouri controversy, a brief discussion of the salient events of the period is necessary.

In the 1800 elections the New York Republicans were united as never before, and their zeal was an important factor in their triumph of that year. Once in control of the Assembly, they took over the Council of Appointment. This body, originally run by the Governor, consisted of the Governor and four Senators elected annually by the Assembly; it made nearly all of the civil and military appointments in the state. Partisanship and expediency had earlier entered the appointive policy of Governor George Clinton, but it was the Federalists, under Governor John Jay, who made the first moves toward a rigid control of the patronage. Their push toward a spoils system set the stage for a policy of political removals by the new Republican Council in 1801. Led by DeWitt Clinton and Ambrose Spencer, the Council replaced many Federalists throughout the state. A Clinton-Livingston coalition gathered up the offices, while Aaron Burr's followers were largely ignored. The Federalists, staggered at this same time on the national scene, retained sufficient vigor to play a significant role in later campaigns. The

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15Alexander Flick, ed., History of the State of New
York (N.Y., 1934), VI, 40; Howard L. McBain, DeWitt Clinton
and the Origin of the Spoils System in New York (N.Y., 1907),
49-51, 157.
16Ibid., 158.
17Ibid., 128-133.
Burrites, however, were severely crippled and made a last stand in the 1804 election. Amidst unbelievable vituperation Burr lost the governorship to Morgan Lewis of the Livingston clan.¹⁸

All the while Van Buren watched from New York City as a student and then from Kinderhook as a young lawyer. Since he had already indicated his desire to work into a political career, he was forced into a choice between the warring factions. He concluded, "upon the most mature dispassionate reflection... that the support of Colonel Burr would not be proper."¹⁹ Yet there was no peace for the victors. With DeWitt Clinton back in the state Senate in 1805, a quarrel broke out between his supporters and the Governor. The remaining Burr men split over the question of helping Clinton. This situation posed another important decision for Van Buren. He remained loyal to Clinton and did all he could to advance the cause of Daniel Tompkins in the gubernatorial race of 1807. Tompkins' victory over the combined Livingston-Martling (Burr faction)-Federalist opposition brought with it the expected turnover in the state bureaucracy. One of the men rewarded by the winners was Van Buren; he was made surrogate of Columbia County.²⁰

²⁰Hammond, Political Parties, I, 263.
The young Dutchman was obviously on the move, and he gradually expanded his circle of friends until he personally knew Clinton and Tompkins. It was only a question of time for him to aim for something higher. Nominated for state Senator in the spring of 1812, he ran against Edward P. Livingston. Despite the intervention of the Federalists who rallied to Livingston, he carried the district by 193 votes in a very rough battle.

While organizing his campaign, Van Buren undoubtedly took time to meditate on the growing rift between Governor Tompkins, Ambrose Spencer, then a Justice of the Supreme Court, and DeWitt Clinton. Evidence of disagreements leaked out in 1811, and, by the spring of 1812, Clinton had alienated his powerful lieutenants. Eager to gain the presidential chair, Clinton ignored this break in his party and pressed on against James Madison. He was considered the "regular" Republican nominee by thousands of New Yorkers, including Senator-elect Van Buren, but ultimately had to depend on the Federalists for most of his out-of-state support. Very important for later developments

21Dorothie Bobbe, DeWitt Clinton (N.Y., 1933), 143.
22Later Van Buren recalled that he had not worked for the nomination in the early stages of the campaign. Van Buren, Autobiography, 29.
24See the informative letters, Samuel E. Morison, The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis (Boston, 1913), I, 316-318.
was the refusal of Rufus King, John Jay, and a small group of New York Federalists to go along with their party on Clinton.25

In the special legislative session of November, 1812, Van Buren, who was a pre-war supporter of Republican foreign policy, early introduced and secured the passage of a Senate resolution looking "to a vigorous prosecution of the war," until an honorable peace could be obtained.26 Despite Clinton's cooperation with the peace-minded Federalists, he surprised all by appointing the new Senator his floor manager for the Republican electoral caucus. Calmly forcing the Madison men into a corner, Van Buren secured party backing for a ticket giving all of New York's electoral vote to Clinton.27 In the subsequent legislative vote, some Madison-Martling men turned in blank ballots, but the Republican Clintonian electors were chosen nonetheless.

Nothing could have given Van Buren a more dramatic boost than the skillful manner in which he handled this affair. The youngest in the Senate, he vaulted into a position of leadership. Yet he, too, was destined to break with the hot tempered Clinton. Unlike some in the

25Hamilton, Reminiscences, 43-44.
26Van Buren helped direct Republican mass meetings in Hudson, N.Y. in 1809, 1810 and 1811. George Bancroft, Martin Van Buren, to the End of His Public Career (N.Y., 1889), 12, 13, 14, 15, and 22.
27Van Buren, Autobiography, 40.
state who quickly abandoned Clinton once he became hors de combat, Van Buren split with his mentor only after he became disillusioned by a series of political compromises. The first involved his own failure to receive the Attorney Generalship during the summer of 1812. He was inclined toward bitterness because he felt that Clinton's friends had approved and then subsequently blocked his appointment. In February, 1813, he gathered further evidence of Clintonian duplicity in the intrigue surrounding Rufus King's election to the United States Senate by a Republican legislature. Although loath to part with a friend and an acknowledged leader of men, Van Buren joined Tompkins and Spencer in a complete rupture with Clinton.

As Clinton swung over to closer ties with the Federalists, Tompkins and Van Buren gained control of the Republican party. They exerted every pressure to sustain the Madison Administration. During the hectic summer of 1814, Van Buren capped the preparedness measures of the state with a draft act calling for 12,000 men to join the colors. One important section of the bill permitted free men of color and slaves to fill two regiments. Under the provisions of the

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29Ibid., 45-46; Hammond, Political Parties, I, 344.
30See draft of the Republican Address to the voters, 1813, Van Buren Papers.
31Van Buren, Autobiography, 55-56.
measure, the slaves were granted their freedom at the end of hostilities. The author had a precedent for his action in a Revolutionary War bill which similarly recruited slaves and also granted them freedom.  

Van Buren's enthusiasm was recognized by the national administration, and any ambitious rival in Albany could see that the affable young leader must be stopped at this step in his rise to power. During the early months of 1815, Ambrose Spencer assayed to halt "the fox." However, Van Buren dealt the wily veteran a stunning defeat. Utilizing his friendships and a solid hold on other party leaders, he took control of the Council of Appointment and selected the United States Senator. In addition he was appointed Attorney General of the state. The ease with which he moved during all of those maneuvers understandably earned him the title of the "Little Magician of Kinderhook."

It was at some point during this phase of his career that he lost a slave named Tom. It is an interesting fact that the state Senator, accustomed to slaves about his father's inn, evidently owned one or more domestic slaves during those early years. Little is known regarding Tom

beyond the information contained in a letter Van Buren received years later.

I have ascertained that 'Tom's black man who [sic] you purchased of Ferburgh and who quit you some ten years since is now in the neighborhood of Worcester, Ms [sic]...I think I can induce him to be of some service to me if I own him. I therefore take the liberty to inquire whether you will sell him for a small compensation...if you will take the trouble to write me with terms I will then tell you whether I will purchase him or not....

In reply to Hammond's proposal Van Buren scratched on the back of the letter, "Wrote that if he could get him without violence I would take $50."

Although there is no evidence of the success of Hammond's venture, it is important to note that Van Buren attached some small value to the slave ten years after his escape. It is indeed regrettable that no further light can be thrown on his personal relationship to slavery.

With another presidential race before the land, Van Buren pushed Tompkins into the thick of the fray. Realistically few could hope for the nomination, although the sentiment against another Virginian was strong in many quarters. When he was informed by a friend that "it is now impossible for Governor T--to be elected [nominated],"

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36Ibid.
two alternatives remained. One was to unite with the Crawford men against Monroe; the second, which was selected, was to press for Tompkins and await results. Without solid backing from New York, Crawford's friends wilted before Monroe's attack and Crawford lost the nomination. In the end Tompkins secured the vice presidential spot on the ticket.

There was little hope for the Federalists in the national election of 1816, and Tompkins' anticipated departure opened a race for the governorship. Van Buren evidenced no interest, but Clinton strained for the role as he staged a political comeback. Using a canal as an issue, he rebuilt a following and then approached leading Republicans about a reconciliation. Rufus King, for one, expressed no pity for Clinton when the party caucus refused his terms in November, 1816. This rebuff only drove him on to a real test of strength with Van Buren. The two men were extremely hostile to each other by the time of the legislative session of 1817. Van Buren, "in consequence of the inaction of Governor Tompkins," could not hold the Northern and Western men in the face of Clinton's

38 William Coleman to Rufus King, April 21, 1816; Rufus King to Christopher Gore, Nov. 22, 1816. Charles King, ed., The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King (N.Y., 1900), VI, 20, 36.
39 See King's letter, ibid.
onslaught. Clinton obtained control of the Council of Appointment and then in a convention rather than a caucus gathered in the nomination for Governor. Van Buren undoubtedly bit his lip at this sudden reversal of fortune, but he accepted the nomination. Since the Federalists backed Clinton, when Tammany Hall bolted for an outsider, there was no contest.

Before Tompkins relinquished the Governor's chair he had held for nearly ten years, he recommended a change in the state's slave code. In a special message to the legislature he said, "I will now take the liberty of submitting to the legislature, whether the dictates of humanity, [and] the reputation of the state...do not demand that the reproach of slavery be expunged...." More concretely, he suggested July 4, 1827, as a terminal date for slavery in the state, thus hastening the end of emancipation processes begun in 1799. By March 17, 1817, the state Senate had a bill before it from the Assembly drawn up along lines set forth by the Governor. After some stalling, the measure was passed by a count of 20-3, with Van Buren voting in

41 Ibid., 81.
42 Charles Lincoln, ed., Messages From the Governors... of New York 1683...to...1906 (Albany, 1909), II, 880.
the affirmative. While the matter of his owning household slaves remains clouded, this vote indicated that he did not have a sufficient monetary interest in slavery to attempt to sustain the institution. Whatever the pressures from his Hudson River district were, he went along with the enlightened opinion of the state. Thus Van Buren's vote helped to bring a foreseeable end to slavery in the Empire State.

As Clinton's inaugural on July 1, 1817, approached, Van Buren's only course was to ask for "such an administration of the Government as would satisfy our old political friends. . . ." This request was in line with Clinton's earlier promises and offered the only means of healing the breach in the party. When Clinton insisted on receiving the help of the Columbia Junto and other Federalists, the atmosphere at Albany crackled with bitterness. Van Buren gathered his followers to cripple Clinton's control of appointments. He was strong enough to achieve this goal in the spring session of 1818. Likewise, he hammered out a stronger organization known as the Bucktails. By the fall of 1818, all chances for peace between the Clintonians and the Bucktails had disappeared. Van Buren's friends urged more strenuous action against the Governor. Preparing to move, he received a most interesting letter from

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44 The vote came March 28, 1817, ibid., 251.
45 Van Buren, Autobiography, 89.
46 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, 198-199.
James A. Hamilton, son of Alexander Hamilton. This note read as follows:

Private  Presuming however upon the part of your confidence that I enjoy and the partial knowledge of your news which I gathered from our recent conversations I venture to inform you that my political friends and the Clintonians are out of humour with each other....

I suggest for your consideration the propriety of taking advantage of the bad play of your adversaries...by promoting the reelection of Mr. King....

Hamilton was looking ahead to 1819 and the scheduled vote on Rufus King's Senate position. Van Buren's reply was not preserved and certain it is that no evidence of an arrangement with Hamilton exists. Hamilton was close to the King family and their letters reveal no hints of any bargain.48

As the legislature met in 1819, Van Buren trapped Clinton into backing an old Federalist for the Speakership. This maneuver of the Little Magician ruined Clinton's popularity with thousands of the Republican rank and file.49 It also widened the breach in the Federalist ranks.

"We are not yet declared enemies of the Clintonian Federalists, but if I mistake not...the choice of Senator, must... decide the matter irrevocably," wrote John A. King from Albany.50

47This letter is not catalogued among the Van Buren papers. J. A. Hamilton to Martin Van Buren, Dec. 31, 1818, Van Buren Papers.
48See also Hamilton, Reminiscences, 44.
49Hammond, Political Parties, I, 480-481.
50J. A. King to Rufus King, Jan. 8, 1818 (1819), King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 102.
Although Van Buren did not pledge support to Rufus King's bid for re-election, word came from Washington that a number of important Republicans desired that course.51 Buoyed up by that news, the King faction had some hopes that the Bucktails would unite behind the venerable statesman. In their eagerness to win, they overlooked the danger to Van Buren's future. "The great object you ought to keep in view is to avoid the least semblance of an understanding or bargain with the Federalists," warned Smith Thompson. "This is the rock on which M.C. is to split...."52

Following Thompson's advice, the Bucktails gave Samuel Young strong support as the legislature balloted on February 2, 1819. Since a deadlock resulted, New York faced another election the next year.53 Shortly after the vote, the King family learned that Van Buren and his advisers had not been dismayed at the prospect of King's re-election.54 Nevertheless, Van Buren was chiefly concerned with the destruction of Clinton, and he knew that King's long enmity for Clinton would, in all probability, prevent him from joining the

51 William King to J. A. King, Jan. 8, 1818 [7819], ibid., 102-103.
52 Smith Thompson was a close friend of Van Buren and recently named Secretary of the Navy. Smith Thompson to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 23, 1819, Van Buren Papers.
53 The vote was John Spencer (Clinton) - 61, Young - 56, King - 38.
54 For Van Buren's views see report from Walter Bowne, J. A. King to Rufus King, Feb. 26, 1819, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 216.
Governor. Thus Van Buren could view these developments with confidence for the future.

In the King camp tempers raged following the deadlocked election. As Van Buren must have predicted, their dislike for Clinton increased. Charles King suggested a newspaper to fight the Governor one week after the election. This idea drew a statement from Senator King, "if Mr. C. throws away his claim to my forbearance, I shall not offend in not permitting him to attempt my degradation, without suffering something in his turn. But this is perfectly confidential."55 Although the Senator did not agree to a paper at that moment, his sons, along with J. A. Hamilton and Gulian Verplanck, delayed a few weeks and then established the New York American. This semi-weekly sheet blazed with denunciations of Clinton's party.

Other events rapidly blurred party lines in New York. After the Senatorial election, Clinton regained control of the Council of Appointment with the help of many Federalists.56 Infuriated Van Burenites lowered their regularity to the crumbling Republican party sufficiently to cooperate with the King men and elect Henry Seymour, a Bucktail, to the canal board. Van Buren then had control of the board and all of its patronage.57 Led by John A. King, the young

55Rufus King to Charles King, Feb. 11, 1819, ibid., 213.
56J. A. King to Rufus King, Feb. 3, 1819, ibid., 201.
Federalists acknowledged their spirit of retaliation. If Van Buren had planned the battle tactics in every detail, he could have scarcely arranged a better turn of circumstances. The remains of the old Federalist organization were now torn asunder and he was in a position to gain valuable friends without damaging his honor. At this point, however, another explosive issue -- the Missouri question -- appeared on the horizon.
CHAPTER 2

THE MISSOURI CONTROVERSY AND NEGRO SUFFRAGE

In order to provide a backdrop for the Missouri crisis, it is desirable to sketch very briefly the important developments that involved slavery and the slavery controversy from the time of the Constitutional Convention. When the delegates assembled in Philadelphia in 1787 there were nearly 700,000 Negro slaves in the United States, and the members of the convention were inevitably forced to discuss certain problems relating to slavery. The most significant of these concerned the question of state supervision of the institution. It was concluded, amidst general agreement, that the states were to retain their control over their slaves.\(^1\) It was also decided that Congress could not prohibit the importation of foreign slaves for twenty years, although a tax of ten dollars per head was allowed on those brought into the country. With regard to fugitive slaves, the convention unanimously adopted a clause which provided for the return of such persons to their rightful owners. An angry debate developed, however, over the problem of apportioning representation in the lower house of Congress.\(^2\) Eventually

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\(^1\)Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (N.Y., 1918), 129.

the Northern delegates accepted a provision which divided the House of Representatives among the states "according to their several members, which shall be determined by adding to the whole number of free persons...three fifths of all other persons." This formula was also applied, at the insistence of the Northern men, to the laying of direct taxes.

The federal Union which was created when the Constitution was ratified presented an interesting picture with respect to slavery. All but forty thousand of the nation's slaves lived below the Mason-Dixon line. In South Carolina they comprised forty-three per cent of the total population. The figures for Virginia, Maryland and Georgia showed that in each state the slaves were at least thirty-two per cent but less than forty per cent of the population. In North Carolina and Delaware the percentages were twenty-five and fifteen, respectively. By way of comparison, New York and New Jersey, with the greatest number of slaves in the North, were both only six per cent slave. The contrast between the two sections of the country was further pointed up by another fact. Despite the criticism of slavery voiced by a number of Revolutionary leaders, only Pennsylvania and the New England states had moved toward the gradual

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See the results of the 1790 census in Alice Adams, *The Neglected Period of Anti-Slavery in America* (Boston, 1908), 3.

Ibid.
extinction of the institution. The emancipation plans of reformers in Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and New York had been defeated or sidetracked during the Revolutionary and Confederation periods. The divergence of the two sections on this matter was completed, however, when New York in 1799 and New Jersey in 1804 passed laws that provided for the gradual elimination of the institution.

In the early years of the Republic, Congress dealt with the slavery question on several occasions. The repassage of the Ordinance of 1787, with its prohibition on slavery in the territory north of the Ohio, was significant. Similarly, mention must be made of the 1790 law which created the Territory Southwest of the Ohio; it did not disturb the slave system already in operation in the area that was ultimately to become the state of Tennessee.

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5William Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought in the Old South (Chapel Hill, 1935), 23-24, 27, 31, 33-36; Phillips, Negro Slavery, 118-120; Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1785 that anti-slavery men were scarce south of Chesapeake Bay but common north of it. Mary Locke, Anti-Slavery in America, 1619-1808 (Boston, 1901), 87.

6Phillips, Negro Slavery, 121-122; Locke, Anti-Slavery, 79-82.

7It is important to note that in 1830 New Jersey had 2,254 slaves while Pennsylvania counted 403 slaves. Furthermore, Connecticut had a few slaves as late as 1840 when she freed them. New Jersey finally ended the system within her borders in 1846. Adams, Neglected Period, 7; Phillips, Negro Slavery, 120.

8Hermann E. von Holst, The Constitutional and Political History of the United States (Chicago, 1889), I, 309; Kentucky was part of Virginia until it was admitted to the Union in 1792. In 1790 it had nearly 12,000 slaves who were sixteen per cent of the population. Adams, Neglected Period, 5.
decision came from the House of Representatives. When the House received petitions in 1790 which urged that the slave trade be discontinued, a heated debate was precipitated. In the end the House resolved that Congress could not prohibit the foreign slave trade until 1808, and "that Congress have no authority to interfere in the emancipation of slaves, or in the treatment of them within any of the states."\(^9\) Three years after this declaration of principle was made, Congress enacted a Fugitive Slave law which spelled out the procedure to be employed in recovering runaways.\(^10\) In 1801 President Adams signed a bill which established the Maryland and Virginia slave codes over the sections of the District of Columbia which each had ceded to the federal government.\(^11\) This law clearly demonstrated the power of Congress to control slavery in the federal District.

The South Atlantic sections of the nation had been plagued by a rather general depression which settled over parts of the area before the Revolution and hit other localities with the war and the post-war dislocations.\(^12\)

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\(^10\) Carpenter, *South as a Conscious Minority*, 144.


\(^12\) Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities, Societies of the Colonial South* (Baton Rouge, 1952), 14; Francis Simkins, *A History of the South* (N.Y., 1953), 117.
A startling change in the economic situation, however, grew out of Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin. Green seeded cotton commanded fabulous prices in Europe and, as its culture spread along the coast and into the Piedmont, a wave of prosperity followed. The enthusiasm for the cotton plant was carried to the Southwest, and even the young state of Tennessee harvested a sizeable crop at the turn of the century. The subsequent acquisition of Louisiana and the development of central Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi after the War of 1812 opened thousands of acres for the cultivation of cotton.

Yet "even more important than the effect of cotton production upon the prosperity of the South was its effect upon the social system."

With a crop that increased twenty times by the end of the 1801 decade and doubled again in each of the next two decades, the demand for slave labor was understandably great. Indeed, the criticism of slavery in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware diminished, and certain profits accrued to those in this area who sold Negroes to the cotton planters. South Carolina, which had closed the foreign slave trade along with the other

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13Frederick J. Turner, Rise of the New West (N.Y., 1906), 49.
14See chart on cotton production. Ibid., 47.
Southern states, found it impossible to control the slave smugglers and reopened the trade in late 1803.\textsuperscript{16} During the next four years forty thousand persons were imported. South Carolina's action brought demands from a number of states in 1804 and 1805 for an amendment to the Constitution which would permit Congress to prohibit the foreign slave trade immediately.\textsuperscript{17} Nothing came from these proposals because the time was fast approaching when Congress could act under the existing provisions of the document.

In 1806 Jefferson brought the matter to the attention of Congress in his annual message. After considerable debate a bill was passed which forbade the importation of slaves after the close of the year 1807. The act, which was signed by the President on March 2, 1807, declared that those found guilty of violating the law were to be imprisoned.\textsuperscript{18} The prohibition was not completely effective, however, and when slave prices rose after the War of 1812 rather extensive smuggling developed.\textsuperscript{19} This nefarious activity was curbed, but not stopped, when Congress ruled in 1820 that the foreign slave trade was piracy. Despite the illicit

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 138-139.
importation of thousands after 1808, the labor supply for
the expanding Southern economy largely came from the
domestic scene.

Allusion has been made to the anti-slavery sentiments
of many Revolutionary leaders. During the period under dis­
cussion, the various activities of the Quakers kept the
question before the public in several areas of the Union.
These quiet but persistent folk were abetted by a number of
local "Abolition Societies." Most societies worked toward
the eventual freeing of all slaves, but in some regions
they were equally concerned with state non-importation laws,
the kidnapping of free Negroes, and a general amelioration
of the condition of the slaves.\(^{20}\) Significantly, there was
sufficient interest among the leaders of the movement to
permit the organization of a national convention in 1794.
By 1801 a constitution bound the state and local groups
together and generally facilitated their investigations
and publication efforts.\(^{21}\) This "American Convention of
Delegates from the Abolition Societies" aimed at a gradual
education of public opinion, both North and South, and was
influenced in its tone by the general attitude of the
Quakers, in that it was inclined to abate its efforts when
the leaders encountered severe opposition.\(^{22}\) With delegates

\(^{20}\) Locke, *Anti-Slavery*, 101-103; Northrup, "Slavery in
N.Y.,” 294.

\(^{21}\) Locke, *Anti-Slavery*, 101-103.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
attending from the Middle and Upper South, many of the reformers undoubtedly hoped that their work would lead to positive action in those states.

The seemingly quiet period after 1808 saw the anti-slavery leaders urge stronger measures to suppress the smuggling that developed. The "American Convention" continued to publish reports and circularize memorials. A few critical pamphlets, some of Southern origin, appeared both before and after the War of 1812. The slow-moving but steady attack gained some support from the leadership of two of the larger Protestant bodies during these years. Moreover, New York, as has already been noted, hastened the process of gradualism with her 1817 law. Certain it is that these strands of evidence, together with the frequent discussion and criticism of slavery cited by travelers to the Upper South, must have been most heartening to those wishing the eventual death of slavery.

However, in the South these activities, both from within and without the section, provoked a steady but quiet resistance on the part of thousands. Rather like the Revolutionary period the defense of slavery "normally remained dormant, only occasionally being aroused from a passive

23 Adams, Neglected Period, 15-16.
24 Ibid., 30-31; Channing, History, V, 145.
26 Adams, Neglected Period, 31-32.
condition to become articulate."\(^{27}\)

One problem constantly deterred many thoughtful Southerners from moving toward a plan for gradual emancipation and that involved the question of the freed Negro. Most leaders agreed with Jefferson and Madison that steps would have to be taken to colonize the Negroes once they were liberated.\(^{28}\) The overwhelming sentiment for an indispensable scheme of colonization produced the American Colonization Society in 1816. A notable list of Southerners was connected with the organization which many felt would encourage the freeing of slaves but which others thought would merely remove undesirable blacks from the country. The Society received much favorable comment, but little money, and after picking a site in West Africa managed to send a first contingent of eighty-six across the waters in 1820.\(^{29}\) The conflicting attitudes in the South are further illustrated by the tougher stand taken at this point by Virginia and Georgia toward their free Negroes, while North Carolina

\(^{27}\) Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Thought, 48; the pro-slavery argument included support from the Bible and Classical history; the good condition of the slaves compared to the European peasantry and the racial inferiority of the Negroes were stressed. The rigors of the Southern climate and the fact that slave labor was necessary for the progress of the economy were also important. Ibid., 2, 39-47.


\(^{29}\) Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 162-163.
and Tennessee still permitted such persons to vote.  

In the years under review the three-fifths rule gradually became a controversial issue. The results of the 1790 census did not produce a House of Representatives which endangered Northern interests.  

The defeat of John Adams in 1800, however, hinged on the "hidden" Southern strength which the ratio furnished to the section. After several measures, sponsored by the Jefferson Administration, had passed the House by narrow margins, which presumably were likewise made possible by the three-fifths rule, the Northern Federalists were loud in their denunciations of the Constitutional provision.  

The hotheads among the Federalists, depressed by the prospects of permanent Southern domination, which was in large measure blamed on the three-fifths rule, talked of secession in 1804 and 1811-1814.  

Because of the advantages which the South received from the rule, her leaders did not answer the attacks from the North.  

Needless to say, the fact that direct taxes had been levied only four times heightened the anti-slavery and anti-Southern sentiment which the provision engendered in the North.

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30 James Schouler, History of the United States of America (N.Y., 1885), III, 137; Adams, Neglected Period, 52.
32 Ibid., 322-323.
33 Ibid., 326-327, 329-333.
34 Ibid., 341.
In closing this discussion, the short House debate in 1818 over slavery in Illinois is worthy of note. In the midst of the third reading of the resolution which declared Illinois to be a state, Representative Tallmadge of New York spoke against the motion. It was rather common knowledge that a number of "slaves" were held in southern Illinois, and Tallmadge objected that "Slavery, if not adopted in the constitution, was at least not sufficiently prohibited." After a short exchange the resolution was voted through, but Tallmadge rallied thirty-four votes with his stand.

II

The Missouri petition for statehood presented to the House on December 18, 1818, was actually the second attempt in that direction by the territorial officials. After being stymied during the first session of the Fifteenth Congress, they renewed their bid for admission with no apparent fear of failure. Committee considerations occupied the next several weeks and not until February 13, 1819, did the enabling act come to the Committee of the Whole House. In the course of the discussion Tallmadge (N.Y.)

35National Intelligencer, Nov. 24, 1818.
"moved an amendment...to limit the existence of slavery in the new State...."36 The National Intelligencer concluded, "This motion gave rise to an interesting and pretty wide debate...."37 Until that day Missouri seemed headed for admission as a slave state without qualifications. At the time she had ten thousand slaves and a long history as a slave society.38

James Tallmadge, the author of the restrictive amendment, having earlier spoken against slavery in Illinois, appears to have been motivated by humanitarian considerations.39 Able and ambitious, he was concurrently absorbed in the struggle for power in New York state. Once a secretary to Governor George Clinton, he was running for State Senator as a Clintonian. However, there is no reason to suppose that DeWitt Clinton advised Tallmadge or knew about his motion.40

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36Annals of Congress, The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States. 15 Congress, 2 session, I, 1766; the full text of the proviso read, "That the further introduction of slavery or involuntary servitude be prohibited, except for the punishment of crimes, whereof the party shall have been fully convicted; and that all children born within the said State, after the admission thereof into the Union, shall be free at the age of twenty-five years."

37Ibid., 1170.

38National Intelligencer, Feb. 16, 1819.

39Adams, Neglected Period, 6.


40Ibid., 37, 39; also George Dangerfield, The Era of Good Feelings (N.Y., 1952), 199-200.
After the first skirmish on the restrictive proposal, the debate lengthened out for three days until the House accepted the Missouri Act with the amendment on February 17. While the House turned to the necessity for a new territory in the Arkansas valley, the Senate took up the Missouri situation. Unfortunately the debates were not recorded, but again a New Yorker played a prominent role for the anti-slavery forces. Rufus King lent a strong voice in opposition to Southern efforts to kill the amendment. As later rewritten from notes used in February, 1819, he stressed Congressional powers to prohibit slavery in any territory, although that power had not been exercised over Missouri; likewise, he emphasized the power to control the admission of new states, "entitled to the enjoyment of the same rights, and...duties as the other states." These rights, as he interpreted them, were federal rights and were uniform throughout the Union. He went on to say that, "As the admission of a new state into the Union confers upon its citizens only the rights denominated federal...," the prohibition of slavery in Missouri would not impair federal rights, but would deal with a local or state condition well within the scope of Congressional authority.

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41 Debates in Congress, 15 Cong., 2 sess., II, 1217.
42 King, Life of Rufus King, VI, Appendix 4, 690-691.
43 Ibid., 691.
44 Ibid., 694, 695.
King also found a limitation on the westward spread of slavery very expedient at that time. He was cognizant of the delicate nature of the subject and thus based his arguments on a concern for the general welfare. The three-fifths clause he found to be unfair to the free states in the manner in which it operated, and, while it was binding on the original states, he hoped the disproportionate balance of power would not be extended with the admission of more slave states. Furthermore, he asserted that slavery dishonored the freeman and "impairs the industry and power of a nation." Calling on enlightened men of all states to speak out for freedom, he termed the ultimate decision very important for the future of the Union. To the dismay of the anti-slavery leaders, the Senate defeated Tallmadge's proposal and the deadlock between the two houses was not resolved before adjournment. Despite the apparent significance of this short clash, the National Intelligencer devoted but one editorial to the subject and gave its major coverage to the Florida Treaty and the Seminole War.

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45 Ibid., 697-700.
46 Ibid., 700.
47 Ibid., 702-703.
48 See debates of March 2, 1819, Debates in Congress, 15 Cong., 2 sess., II, 1433-1438.
49 The editorial of Feb. 18, opposed the confining of slavery. It regretted the Tallmadge Amendment because each state under the Compromise of 1787 was to control the property within its borders. National Intelligencer, Feb. 18, 1819.
After Congress departed from Washington the developing monetary crisis, with its attendant problems, became one of the topics requiring constant attention from the editors of the *Intelligencer*. A second item deemed to be of interest to the readers was the presidential trip to the South and West. Although in a position to catch most of the news currents flowing through the nation, the paper printed but few articles on any aspect of the slavery question during the spring and summer months. It continued to support the American Colonization Society.\(^{50}\) While giving space to Southern arguments on Missouri, a May editorial deplored the loose talk in the South regarding sectional rights as above any federal law.\(^{51}\) Finally on August 28, the paper noted two public meetings held much earlier in Missouri to protest any interference with their right to hold slaves.\(^{52}\) These scattered and occasional references to the status of slavery in Missouri indicated a notable lack of excitement over the question.

One local gathering, missed by the *Intelligencer*, met in Burlington, New Jersey on August 30. This was the home territory of John Woolman and contained much anti-slavery sentiment.\(^{53}\) The public meeting of that day appears to have been the first important session of an anti-slavery

\(^{50}\)Ibid., April 24, 1819.  
\(^{51}\)Ibid., May 6, 12, 1819.  
\(^{52}\)Ibid., Aug. 28, 1819.  
\(^{53}\)Moore, *Missouri Controversy*, 70.
bent called to deliberate on Missouri. In spite of the prominent names associated with the Burlington meeting, weeks passed before a much larger, almost semi-official, protest meeting was held in Trenton. With the Governor and most of the legislature present some importance must be attached to this assembly. A circular letter describing the sentiments of the gathering was soon sent out by Elias Boudinot, New Jersey reformer and anti-slavery leader. Some of the papers of the New York city area promptly carried editorials on Missouri. In this way agitation arose for a public statement from New York city.

On November 16, 1819, a large group of citizens met at the City Hotel in New York. With Matthew Clarkson, a leader in many benevolent enterprises in the chair, addresses were given by Peter Jay and John T. Irving. An Address was drawn up and approved by 2,000 persons. The Correspondence Committee headed by Irving and John Coles at once contacted Rufus King for "the substance of the remarks delivered by you in the Senate of the United States upon the Missouri

54Ibid., 67.
55Oct. 29, 1819, ibid., 70-71.
57National Intelligencer, Nov. 23, 1819; a very large number of the leaders were "merchants" in a broad sense of the term. Philip Foner, Business & Slavery (Chapel Hill, 1941), 16.
Bill. The Committee believe the publishing those remarks, will promote the great object they have in view...."58

King sent his speeches to be joined to the Address with the following warning:

I am particularly anxious not be be mis-understood on this subject, never having thought myself at liberty to encourage or assent to, any measure that would affect the security of property in slaves, or to disturb the political adjustment which the Constitution has established respecting them; I desire to be considered as still adhering to this reserve; and that the observations, which I send you, should be construed to refer, and be confined, with the prohibition of slavery in the new states to be formed beyond the original limit of the United States....59

King's comments when added to the following resolves of the New York meeting made a powerful and appealing pamphlet.

Resolved, That...Congress possess the clear and indisputable power by the constitution of the United States, to prohibit the admission of slavery into any state or territory hereafter to be formed...

Resolved, that,...the admission of slavery into any such state or territory would be contrary to the spirit of our free and excellent constitution, and injurious to the highest interests of the nation.60

58 J. T. Irving and John B. Coles to Rufus King, Nov. 19, 1819, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 233.
59 Rufus King to Irving and Coles, Nov. 22, 1819, ibid., 233-234.
60 National Intelligencer, Nov. 23, 1819.
Worthy of note is the bi-partisan character of the entire operation in New York state to this point. Among the prominent Republicans connected with the proceedings were John T. Irving, Jonathan Thompson, son of the Secretary of the Navy, and Walter Bowne. In the face of such co-operativeness the anti-slavery forces were certain to awaken support wherever the news of their deliberations became known. Obviously no political leader within the state could be ignorant, henceforth, of the general implications of the Missouri situation. The National Intelligencer, undoubtedly impressed by the show of unanimity from the North, observed, "The creation of geographical parties in our country, is one of the least of the evils we apprehend from a further agitation of this question...."62

III

In the meantime the struggle to gain the ascendancy in New York politics continued during the late spring and summer of 1819. DeWitt Clinton wrote of his adversary, "Van Buren must be conquered through his fears;" "It is very important to destroy this Prince of Villains;" "he is a scoundrel of the first magnitude...."63 That Van Buren was

61Ibid.
62Ibid., Nov. 20, 1819; Madison had already hinted at a geographic party division as a major calamity. J. Madison to R. B. Lee, Aug. 5, 1819. Madison, Letters, III, 142.
63DeWitt Clinton to Henry Post, no specified date given but typical of the letters of the bitter 1817-24 period. John Bigelow, "DeWitt Clinton, As a Politician," Harper's Monthly Magazine, L (1874-1875), 563.
excited by his campaign to beat Clinton was revealed in a sarcastic six page letter sent to his old friend Gorham Worth. He derided Clinton's intellectual powers saying, "Mr. Clinton is a man of ordinary strength of mind...all beyond is gratuitous assumption & nothing else." Furthermore, he blamed the lack of harmony in the state on Clinton who was not "governed by higher & steadier considerations than those of personal sympathy and private regard."  

Since it was apparent that the King faction of the Federalist party had thrown its lot in with the general aims of the Van Burenites, the Governor solidified his position with the main branch of the Federalists by appointing some of their number to various positions about the state. The most important casualty was Van Buren, who strangely enough had been permitted to keep the Attorney Generalship under Clinton. The change of personnel was noticed even in Washington, D.C., and Van Buren received a report that "your removal & the appointment of Oakley has called out a more distinct disapprobation of Mr. Clinton's policy, than any other act of his administration." Other accounts from the field seemed to indicate that the Bucktails assumed they might get two votes for every one

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64Martin Van Buren to Gorham Worth, April 22, 1819, Van Buren Papers.
65Ibid.
Clinton gained from the dwindling Federalist ranks. As these events transpired Gullan Verplanck and his friend John Duer published one of the great poetic satires in early American history. Originally printed in the columns of the New York American and later reissued in pamphlet form, The Bucktail Bards, with an introduction by "Scriblerus Busby, LLD...Piff, Paff, Puff,..." was a sophisticated appeal to enlightened readers throughout the state. Written in a scholarly vein and weighted down with much classical bric-a-brac, this work made one long joke of Clintonian learning and the pretentions of the entire Clinton crowd. It was well timed to hurt the Governor's standing with many intelligent people in the state.

Van Buren, of whom Hammond wrote, "His splendid talents, and great political tact, are too well known to require description," needed all the help he could muster to drive Clinton from power. Bucktail gains in the spring legislative race of 1819 were but a part of an all-out effort Van Buren had begun in the fall of 1818. The target he sought in 1820 was to regain control of the legislature.

70 Hammond was writing of the 1818-1819 period. Hammond, Political Parties, I, 453-454.
while ending Clinton's career as Governor. The matter of a strong candidate who could offset Clinton's charm and voter-appeal was very important if the two "machines" were to battle on nearly even terms. The Little Magician leaned toward Smith Thompson, but "There being...strong objections to his nomination...on the part of some of our best men, we determined, before the Legislature separated, informally to bring forward Vice President Tompkins."\(^7^1\) Despite his strong following in the state, the Bucktail leader was forced into a position which smacked of desperation. Still the campaign got started by midsummer. A Clinton paper sneered at the announcements that the "people want Tompkins."\(^7^2\) Against Erastus Root, Tompkins or any leader, it predicted a victory by fifteen thousand votes.\(^7^3\) This early skirmishing was so sharp that the *Intelligencer* reported, "The next election of a Governor is already the topic of much discussion in the state of New York."\(^7^4\)

The next voting on the United States Senatorship was also the object of speculation in the state. Van Buren's independence at the last election had been a factor in forcing the King men to his support without the loss of any prestige for his party. This help from former enemies

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\(^7^1\)Van Buren, *Autobiography*, 94.  
\(^7^2\)Oxford Gazette (Oxford, N.Y.), Aug. 11, 1819.  
\(^7^3\)Ibid.  
\(^7^4\)National Intelligencer, Sept. 1, 1819.
virtually created a coalition that neither side as yet deemed wholly desirable.\(^{75}\) Van Buren, nevertheless, was forced to reexamine Rufus King's total career and all of the complexities of the political landscape in the summer months. In an Autobiography marked by amazing frankness and a conscious effort to be very accurate, he says that he came to appreciate King's contribution to the War of 1812.\(^{76}\) Moreover, the knowledge that the developing coalition would give "Tompkins the votes and support of that section of the federalists then supposed to be quite influential..." prompted Van Buren to back King's bid for reelection.\(^{77}\)

In view of the circumstances surrounding his decision the latter reason certainly overshadowed the former.

At this point a question naturally arises regarding Van Buren's awareness of the Missouri problem. Rather briefly stated, it would appear that he followed most developments in Washington as closely as might be expected. He certainly had two very dear friends in high circles there. Nevertheless, the Van Buren papers do not reveal any contemporary notation or reference to the first debates on the Tallmadge Amendment. There is no record that he grew apprehensive during the spring and summer months after the adjournment of Congress. King, as has been observed,

\(^{75}\)Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, 211.
\(^{77}\)Ibid.
was accidentally deprived of a large audience for his remarks when the reporter failed to record the Senate debates. It would be impossible to surmise how many of King's ideas had been carried back to New York and Van Buren by other sources. However, there is again no evidence that Van Buren bestirred himself to learn any of King's views on slavery in Missouri while considering his decision to back the venerable statesman in the 1820 voting.

As might be expected, a press campaign was inaugurated in the early fall to prepare the Van Burenites for the support of King. In urging his war record the Bucktail papers opened themselves to the scorn of the Clinton press. King had been rather "badly handled" by the opposition in the 1816 campaign and this "discovery" of his wartime activities seemed to be definitely opportunistic. Nevertheless, the campaign continued on into November when the Missouri question ripped across the New York scene. During the third week of that month the events already described made it impossible to ignore the problem. Especially was that so for Van Buren because his close political friends had participated in the New York city meeting. Furthermore, by November 22 King had sent the substance of his two speeches to John T. Irving. They were available for distribution by the thirtieth or earlier because King, who

78 The Oxford, N.Y. paper was a month late in handling most news items, hence the late date of this attack. Oxford Gazette, Nov. 17, 1819.
had been away from home for several days, sent a copy to Richard Peters, Jr., on that date.79

The work of the New York City Correspondence Committee undoubtedly was given the widest possible circulation. Since the Trenton Committee had already broadcast the results of their meeting, it is not surprising that the movement to protest against the spread of slavery into Missouri gained momentum. From late November, 1819, into the early part of the next year a demonstration of political awareness and unity marked the Northern States. Philadelphia had its big rally on November 24, and other cities north into New England followed.80 By early December even the anti-slavery men of Baltimore had secured resolutions from a public gathering.81

James Madison for one was alarmed at what he read from the public journals about the proceedings in the North. He protested to the publicist Robert Walsh about the extension, by some men, of the "migration of persons" clause in the

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79Peters was the President of the American Convention for the Abolition of Slavery. Rufus King to R. Peters, Jr., Nov. 30, 1819, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 235.
81Daniel Raymond, a leading lawyer, also published a strong pamphlet on the subject. Adams, Neglected Period, 20, 48.
Constitution to cover the interstate slave trade. He also wondered if new states had all of the rights possessed by the original states, and if it was practical to limit the spread of slavery. Again his fear of parties "founded on geographical boundaries and other Physical & permanent distinctions" was voiced. Old John Adams told Rufus King, on the other hand, that he ably demonstrated "the right of Congress to prescribe such a condition to the gentlemen of Missouri...." In reply to Jefferson's apprehension before a developing crisis, Adams expressed the hope that the Missouri question "will follow the other waves under the ship."

Uncertainty and tension prevailed as Congress convened for the first session of its sixteenth meeting on December 6, 1819. The men assembled in the reconstructed capitol building for the first time since the war. Although there were several problems before the nation, the Missouri controversy "by whatever name" was seen as the most important

82 J. Madison to R. Walsh, Nov. 27, 1819. Madison, Writings of Madison, IX, 1-6.
83 Ibid., 6-12.
84 Ibid., 12.
85 J. Adams to Rufus King, Dec. 7, 1819, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 240.
issue likely to come before Congress. "Memorials" and "Addresses" on the subject circulated in Washington from the opening day. At this juncture in the course of history several northern state legislatures sent official resolutions to their Congressional delegations. Obviously the total picture was unsettling to men devoted to the country. The Intelligencer attempted to provide a calming note when it announced, "We decline to publish any more essays on the Missouri Question...until the subject shall have been acted on by Congress. Further contention will only serve to exasperate into enmity what is now mere difference of opinion...."

In this atmosphere the leading citizens of Albany, New York called their neighbors to a public protest meeting. Considering the possibility of inclement weather and the furor already generated throughout the countryside, they were rather tardy in organizing the session. The meeting was convoked on December 16, "for the purpose of expressing their opinions on the expediency of prohibiting the further extension of slavery in the U. S."

An incomplete list of signatures on the summons included John Taylor, Judge Ambrose Spencer, once again Clinton's chief lieutenant, and

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87 The matter of the confused state of the currency and the general results of the panic were listed as vital for consideration. National Intelligencer, Dec. 11, 1819.
88 Moore, Missouri Controversy, 176.
89 National Intelligencer, Dec. 25, 1819.
90 Copy of the public summons, Van Buren Papers.
Martin Van Buren. The most avowed of political enemies thus joined hands in this common cause. However, the harmony was momentary because Van Buren left town sometime before the meeting and traveled down river to Hudson in Columbia county. In view of his position in New York affairs, his absence was undoubtedly very noticeable.

John Taylor assumed the chair at the gathering and Abraham Van Vechten served as secretary. A set of six lengthy resolutions was adopted. Among the sentiments expressed by the Albany people were the following:

Resolved...that the existence of slavery, in the United States is a great political calamity, as well as a moral evil, injurious to the character of the nation, hazardous to the existence of its free institutions, and repugnant to the spirit and principles of true religion.

2...whilst...it is the bounden duty of several states to provide in such a mode as may be consistent with a due regard to the acknowledged rights of property, for the effectual and speedy abolition of slavery within their respective jurisdictions, it is no less incumbent upon the national government, to prevent by all constitutional means, the further extension of the evil in the United States, or in the territories thereof.

3...the Congress of the United States have constitutional power to prohibit the introduction of slavery into any state hereafter to be admitted into the union...and to render the prohibition of the further extension of slavery in such a new state a condition of its admission into the union.

5. . . that the thanks of this meeting are
due to the members of the late congress
of the United States who opposed the ad-
mission of the state of Missouri in the
union except upon condition of prohibiting
the further extension of slavery therein.

6. . . that the Senators and Representatives
in the Congress of the United States from
this State, be requested to use their most
zealous efforts to prevent the further
extension of slavery in the United States. 92

A committee was then appointed to prepare a memorial
for Congress. Van Buren was named to serve with the group
without his prior consent. 93 Suffice it to say he refused
to work on the document and, even more important, he refused
to sign it. Criticism obviously fell upon his shoulders for
his seemingly inconsistent stand. In fact more than a month
after the meeting occurred he was called to account for his
behavior. One of the local leaders wrote,

I am informed that you declined signing
the resolutions. . . upon the ground that you
never authorized your name to be used as
one of the Committee on that occasion.

Before any steps were taken on the subject
I called upon you myself to learn if you
was willing to be one of that committee;
you replied that you was so much occupied
that you could not attend to it— I remarked
that there was enough to do the business &
that we only wished for your name— in answer
to which you observed, that you had no objec-
tion to our making use of your name. If you
have forgotten this conversation, Mr. David
who was present, will undoubtedly be able to

92 Notes on the Albany meeting, Van Buren Papers.
93 Ibid.
refresh your memory. I think that your refusal to sign your name should have been grounded upon other reasons that want of authority to use it.\textsuperscript{94}

Van Buren's reply has been preserved.

You had my permission to use my name on a committee to call a meeting of our citizens to express their opinion on the Missouri question & the propriety of your doing so has not been questioned. You surely cannot suppose that the use of my name for that purpose imposed on me the obligation to sign whatever memorial might be agreed upon at that meeting.

My reasons for doing so further than you are concerned in calling the meeting I presume it is not your intention to enquire into.\textsuperscript{95}

This entire episode constituted the Little Magician's first important connection with the Missouri controversy. As has been explained, there is no information that he appeared concerned over the first phases of the fight in Congress, even as respecting his well calculated backing of Rufus King for the United States Senate. Once the issue virtually exploded into prominence within the state and in surrounding areas, he had less than a month to determine a course of action. Careful, astute, and hard working, one can only surmise that he watched the newspapers for the development of opinions in the North and the South. He undoubtedly sought to learn the reaction to the problem in Washington. Above all the reaction in New York must have

\textsuperscript{94}Henry E. Jones to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 20, 1820, Van Buren Papers.

\textsuperscript{95}Martin Van Buren to H. E. Jones, Jan. 21, 1820, Van Buren Papers.
been cautiously assessed. Unfortunately the papers in the Van Buren collections leave no trail relative to his thoughts during those days.

Obviously as the pressure mounted for a pronouncement from the people of Albany he determined to join the enthusiasts. But he was willing to go only so far as calling a meeting. He was undoubtedly busy but his absence was in reality deliberate. Thus Van Buren stood on the ground of supporting the exclusion of slavery from Missouri in principle, because the public summons itself indicated the nature of the resolutions to be expected. However, his absence showed his objection to the manner in which the meeting was to be conducted and the spirit behind the resolutions to be adopted. Van Buren was in Albany, a center of Clintonian strength, and he said later that the Albany deliberations and the memorial he refused to sign, "bore on their face the stamp of political and partisan designs." He intimated Clinton's friends, who ran the meeting, were moved more by political than philanthropic motives. In addition to his fears for his political position within the state, he significantly pointed to the national implications

96 In the war between Clintonian and Bucktail every movement of Van Buren was scouted and reported to important leaders. See W. W. Van Ness to Solomon Van Rensselaer, July 14, 1819. Mrs. C. V. R. Bonney, A Legacy of Historical Gleanings (Albany, 1875), I, 337.
97 Van Buren, Autobiography, 100.
98 Taylor and Van Vechten were Clintonians. They were not mentioned in the Autobiography.
of attacking the "politics of the slave states and the standing of their supporters in the free states...through inflammatory assaults on the institution of slavery...."99 Nothing less than the disruption of the Republican party was involved.

These observations in his Autobiography are supported by a very important letter written the day after the Albany meeting. Penned in Hudson, the letter was sent to his friend Mordecai Noah; in it Van Buren plainly refers to his suspicions of a "plot" surrounding the Missouri agitation.100 Just one month earlier Tammany men and Clinton Federalists had worked together to produce the strong resolutions of the New York city session. In the meantime Van Buren became convinced that the Clinton party was utilizing a popular issue for advantage in the state. Therefore, his course bespoke his concern over Clinton's power and a future role in politics on the national scene.

Simultaneously, Van Buren found himself in a perplexing situation with regard to Rufus King. The old Federalist was a leader in the movement to restrict the spread of slavery. After the New York meeting his remarks were printed and then scattered in every direction. As they constituted a sharp and penetrating statement of the views of the anti-slavery men, he gained considerable prestige in certain

99Van Buren, Autobiography, 137.
100Martin Van Buren to M. Noah, Dec. 17, 1819, Van Buren Papers.
quarters during the first weeks of December. Should he be reelected, he would assume a front ranking position in Congressional debates. In this light, close association with his reelection might cloud the future of Van Buren.

Yet the young Bucktail was deeply involved in a campaign to convince his party that the support of King would be to its ultimate advantage. To reverse his course would be dangerous and would require overpowering reasons. As he grew fearful of Clintonian motives in the Missouri agitation, he conceivably might have found a way to drop King, had he been so inclined. However, he decided to stick to his original plan. He wrote a pamphlet sustaining King which he sent to George Broom for comments. The Poughkeepsie leader replied that "the circular is discreet and will prove honorable and useful to the party." As he prepared to send the booklet to all Bucktail members of the legislature, he must have reflected on the articles in the New York Columbian backing King. A party organ close to Clinton, this paper gave the best evidence that Van Buren's work was already assured of success. "The prospect in New York is certainly flattering. The only question that I perceive will

101 The original version with some alterations by William L. Marcy is in the Van Buren Papers.
102 George Broom to Martin Van Buren, Dec. 8, 1819, Van Buren Papers.
embarrass you, is that of the Senator," wrote Smith Thompson. In reality Clinton's acknowledgment of King's talents foreshadowed a near stampede for the Long Island leader.

Despite these favorable omens, Van Buren sent out his pamphlet entitled, Considerations in Favour of the Appointment of Rufus King, to the Senate of the United States. It was signed merely, "A Republican Member of the Legislature," and began to receive newspaper comment by December 14. The author stressed King's good standing before the public. There was evidence, he wrote, of a "very extensive expression of public sentiment" for King. Again the major emphasis in Bucktail thinking was King's patriotism during the War of 1812. Certainly the wavering Tammany men found his services convincingly presented as the chief reason for this contemplated switch in votes. "I am entirely satisfied," Van Buren wrote, "that I am not mistaken when I say, that the republicans of the state think and feel that the support of Mr. King, at this time, would be an act honourable to themselves, advantageous to the country, and just to him...."

104 Ibid.
105 See notes with the original copy. Van Buren Papers.
106 Martin Van Buren, Considerations in Favour of the Appointment of Rufus King to the Senate of the United States (n.p., 1819), 4-5.
107 Ibid.
"Mr. King, and his friends, all who have a respect for, and are influenced by his opinion, are decidedly and unequivocally opposed to the reelection of Mr. Clinton...."  

Significantly, the Missouri debates were not discussed as Van Buren kept his case grounded on the main theme of the campaign to that date.

In addition to this pamphlet which carried a tone of authority, Van Buren whipped his Tammany forces into line with the very important letter of December 17, 1819, to Mordecai Noah. He wrote,

I should sorely regret to find any flagging on the subject of Mr. King in N York. We are committed to his support. It is both wise and honest & we must have no fluttering in our course. The Republicans of the State expect it & are ready for it. I know that such is the case -- there was not in the Senate a dissenting voice that I could find. Mr. King's views toward us are honorable & correct. The Missouri question conceals so far as he is concerned no plot & he shall give it a true direction. You know what the feelings & views of our friends were when I left N York & you know what we then concluded to do.  

Noah surely received a direct admonition to push for a wholehearted acceptance of King on the part of the New York city leaders. Echoing his pamphlet, Van Buren frankly stated that the Republicans expected a vote for King, and that it would be a "wise and honest" move by the party.

Since King's conduct toward the Bucktails had been very

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108 Ibid., 20.
correct, no honor was to be sacrificed by either side. Of particular interest, obviously, was Van Buren's view of King's position on the Missouri question. He openly suggested there was a plot afoot, as has been noted, to utilize the excitement as a chance to embarrass Northern Republicans. However, Van Buren assured Noah there was nothing to fear along that line "so far as he [King] is concerned."\(^{110}\) This portion of the letter not only helps to explain Van Buren's conduct in Albany, but also clarifies his judgment of King's relationship to the controversy. The second half of the sentence is perhaps even more revealing. The belief was expressed that if King were reelected New Yorkers of all parties could count on him to handle the question properly. In so stating the point Van Buren disclosed that he approved of King's speeches and position on slavery in Missouri.

In this connection King's letter of November 22 to John T. Irving must be reexamined. King was explicit in his views on the total slavery picture, and his essential moderation with regard to slavery east of the Mississippi is noticeable.\(^{111}\) It is very probable that Van Buren saw that letter and was influenced by its contents in formulating his judgment of King. As a young student in New York City, Van Buren met Aaron Burr and surely came to know the

\(^{110}\)Ibid.

\(^{111}\)See page 35.
Irving brothers.\(^{112}\) In forming his rapprochement with the Martling men Van Buren recognized Irving as one of the leaders in the city organization.\(^{113}\) Hence the assumption that a quiet reading of this letter helped to shape his opinion of King and a "true direction" for Missouri.

In replying to Van Buren's short note on December 19, Noah indicated his feeling that King would not receive the backing of some of the legislators from the city.\(^{114}\) Despite this warning, the grapevine among New York politicians forecast a victory for King. Smith Thompson, writing from Washington, said, "It seems to be the general opinion here that Mr King will be unanimously chosen."\(^{115}\) He added a very succinct passage dealing with the latest intelligence from the capital:

> There has not been as yet much important business in Congress.... There will be great warmth on the Missouri question and what the result will be is uncertain. There is some apprehension that lasting evils will grow out of it.\(^{116}\)


\(^{113}\)John T. Irving to Martin Van Buren, March 7, 1817, Van Buren Papers.

\(^{114}\)M. Noah to Martin Van Buren, Dec. 19, 1819, Van Buren Papers.

\(^{115}\)Smith Thompson to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 3, 1820, Van Buren Papers.

\(^{116}\)Ibid.
After the legislature convened the Federalists held their last caucus of any consequence. John A. King administered the coup de grâce in a speech opposing Clinton and his friends. After attributing the "distracted and degraded situation of the Federal party" to Clinton, he moved an adjournment which formally split the party into opposing factions.\(^\text{117}\) The voting of the full legislature returned a smashing majority for King. Except for three Tammany ballots he received all other votes. John A. King reported,

> The unanimity of the choice...will undoubtedly be considered by the other states as an honorable testimony to the character and services of a distinguished Statesman. Much is due unquestionably to these considerations, much also to the hopes and fears of the contending parties.\(^\text{118}\)

Down state in Jamaica, Rufus King awaited the outcome of the race and upon getting the notification of his appointment replied to his son in Albany:

> The part taken by Mr. Van Buren has indeed been most liberal, and as I conceive at the risk of impairing his high standing and influence among his political friends; do not fail therefore to inform him that I can never be insensible to his generosity & that no occasion can arrive that I shall not be ready to prove to him the personal respect & esteem with which he has inspired me.\(^\text{119}\)

\(^{117}\)J. A. King to Charles King, Jan. 6, 1820, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 244.

\(^{118}\)J. A. King to Rufus King, Jan. 8, 1820, ibid., 246-247.

\(^{119}\)Rufus King to J. A. King, Jan. 14, 1820, ibid., 248.
The Senatorial election of 1820 cemented the coalition between the Bucktails and the King faction of the dying Federalist party. They had been forced to cooperate because of their common distrust of DeWitt Clinton. The ubiquitous Clinton, as he re-emerged with a personal following after the War of 1812, sought to smash through party alignments and unite all leaders under his flag. As has been described, Van Buren and King, old enemies of Clinton, brought their rival forces slowly together while each tried to frustrate Clinton's ambition. In the maelstrom of New York politics any maneuver was possible, and this turn of events was one of the important shifts of the early nineteenth century.

The hand of the Magician of Kinderhook has been traced in a long series of developments centering on his relationship to the key figures of the state. In his fight with Clinton he convinced his party to accept the union with the King men as a means of breaking Clinton's power. While couching his appeals in respectful terms, he continued to emphasize the early career of King to the last. In publicly skirting the explosive Missouri situation, he, nevertheless, studied the problem and allowed his lieutenants to share his decision that King had a satisfactory record on that phase of the slavery controversy.

Another facet of restrictionist activity in New York also involved Van Buren. There was strong pressure for the state "officially" to express its disapproval of the admission of Missouri as a slave state. The Governor who was
keenly aware of the trend in Northern thinking recommended action by the legislature at the start of the session. The pertinent sections of his message deplored discussions leading to "geographical distinctions"; it assumed there were friendly sentiments within the confederacy, but asserted that "the interdiction of the extension of slavery is a paramount consideration." "Morally and politically speaking," Clinton continued, "slavery is an evil of the first magnitude and whatever may be the consequences it is our duty to prohibit its progress in all cases where such prohibition is allowed by the Constitution."

Clinton was a member of the manumission society and was regarded as one of the enlightened leaders of the state. Senator Van Buren, however, resented and feared Clinton's strong language. He later wrote, "I was not favourable to his recommendation..." that the legislature express itself on that occasion. Undoubtedly he was alarmed at the prospect of New York passing a strong resolution that would aid in further inflaming the sections against each other and in disrupting the Republican party. That he believed in some type of limitation on slavery in Missouri has been demonstrated; he admittedly could not agree with Clinton's approach to the problem.

120 Lincoln, ed., Messages From the Governors, II, 1022-1023.
121 Ibid.
122 Bobbe, Clinton, 121; Moore, Missouri Controversy, 181.
Once the election of a United States Senator had been taken care of, the McNeil Resolution was introduced into the state Assembly. After being approved by the lower house, it was submitted to the Senate on January 19, 1820. A vote was postponed until the next day, and then, without a division of the members, the Resolution was accepted. It read as follows:

Whereas the inhibiting the further extension of slavery...is a subject of deep concern among the people of this state; and whereas we consider...that every constitutional barrier should be interposed to prevent its further extension; and that the Constitution of the United States clearly gives Congress the right to require, of new states not comprised within the original boundaries of these United States, the prohibition of slavery as a condition of its admission into the Union--therefore,

Resolved, That our Senators and Representatives in Congress be instructed to oppose the admission as a State, into the Union, any territory not comprised as aforesaid, without making the prohibition of slavery therein an indispensable condition of its admission; and that they...declare it, as the opinion of the people of this state, that no evil can result from its inhibition more pernicious than its toleration.

Van Buren was in his seat and later explained his vote "by a desire to prevent the Governor from making political

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125 Ibid., 80.
126 Ibid., 78.
capital out of his recommendation...." 127 Van Buren had no hand in preparing the resolves and said he was backed into supporting them. Another New Yorker who knew him spoke of his disapproval of the violence of many anti-slavery men on the Missouri question. 128 There is no indication, however, as to exactly what program Van Buren felt was necessary to meet the exigencies of the times.

IV

In Washington the ominous tension, noted by Smith Thompson, was broken as both houses of Congress began a full review of the Missouri question in January, 1820. The Senate did not receive the territorial petition for statehood until after a House Committee, headed by Representative Taylor (N.Y.), reported that it could find no compromise for the slavery restriction problem. 129 On January 6, the Senate Judiciary Committee reported an enabling bill for Missouri as an amendment to an act that recognized Maine as a state. 130 This maneuver was obviously favored by the Southern Senators.

127Van Buren, Autobiography, 100; D. R. Fox in his work on the aristocratic element in New York politics handled this era without an index reference to slavery or the Missouri Compromise. Fox, Decline of Aristocracy.

128Van Buren was classed, however, as a strong friend of the abolition of slavery in New York. Jenkins, Lives of the Governors, 383.

129The Senate received the petition Dec. 29, 1819, /Annals of Congress/, Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States, 16 Congress, 1 session, 1, 42.

130Ibid., 74.
When the Maine-Missouri report was considered, after a week's delay, a motion of Senator Roberts (Pa.) to recommit the combined bill was ultimately defeated.\footnote{Ibid., 118.}

In reporting the debates, the Intelligencer commented on the overflowing Senate galleries.\footnote{National Intelligencer, Jan. 15, 1820.} The paper also carried a short news item on Rufus King's election. When William King heard the news he informed his brother that it was imperative for him to hasten to Washington.\footnote{William King to Rufus King, Jan. 14, 1820, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 247.} In the same vein Smith Thompson told Van Buren that the restrictionists were "anxiously looking for Mr. King."\footnote{Smith Thompson to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 23, 1820, Van Buren Papers.}

Before King arrived, the Senate discussions on a second motion of Roberts to prohibit the further introduction of slaves into Missouri had ranged over a wide area.\footnote{The motion was made on Jan. 17, 1820, Debates in Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., I, 119.} The basic issues developed by King and Representative Taylor in their remarks in February, 1819, still remained at the core of the dispute.\footnote{For Taylor's speech opening the attack, Debates in Congress, 15 Cong., 2 sess., I, 1170 ff.} The first of these involved the power of Congress to prescribe conditions for the people of Missouri, while a second concerned the expediency of doing so. From the accounts that have been preserved it is evident that the ground was fairly well covered during
the short but able debates in February, 1819. The passionate speeches of 1820 reworked much of the material that was germane to the subject.

Thus Roberts, assuming the offensive with his motion, cited the hostility of the founding fathers to slavery. He urged his colleagues to keep faith with the early leaders and to save the "whole region west of the Mississippi" from the evils of slavery. To these emotional phrases Senator Morril (N.H.) added a lengthy set of arguments. In common with most proponents of the motion he dwelt for some time on the threat to the progress and stability of the young Republic inherent in the spread of slavery. Turning to the powers of Congress, he spoke on the "migration or importation of persons" clause in the Constitution; this section of the document clearly gave Congress authority to prohibit the migration of slaves into Missouri. Morril also examined the related problem of Congress and the territories. He demonstrated, as did other free state orators, the ways in which Congress had used its power to limit slavery in the territories. Then to buttress his remarks, he went on to the numerous conditions placed on the states admitted to the Union since Vermont. Surely, he argued, there was precedent for a just use of Congress' authority

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to put terms on a territory moving into statehood.\textsuperscript{140} Nor would the contemplated limitation violate the Louisiana Treaty and deprive Missourians of any federal right. Morrill also mentioned the added strength which the three-fifths rule gave to the South in the lower house.\textsuperscript{141} This theme was stressed by other Northern speakers pounding away on the need to restrict slavery in Missouri.\textsuperscript{142} As the debates moved along, Morrill's presentation, echoing many of the ideas of 1819, served as a foundation for a great deal of repetition among Northern spokesmen.\textsuperscript{143}

The champions of the slavery cause also found it difficult to bring in new arguments, once the fight became heated.\textsuperscript{144} That is not to say there were not degrees of emphasis or individual nuances. One of the most respected Southern leaders, Senator Macon (N.C.), declared that the amendment "is calculated to produce geographical parties."\textsuperscript{145} He hinted there was private purpose and gain behind the enthusiasm of the North. He warned the Congress that they must consider the intentions of the people of Missouri as

\textsuperscript{140}\textit{Ibid.}, 145.
\textsuperscript{141}\textit{Ibid.}, 153.
\textsuperscript{142}See \textit{ibid.}, 124, 210.
\textsuperscript{143}Sen. Mellen (Mass.) admitted he did not expect to "shed new light upon...[the] question...." \textit{Ibid.}, 176; Sen Lowrie (Pa.) observed, "so much had been written, on this subject, it was extremely difficult to say anything... that would have any claim to originality." \textit{Ibid.}, 201.
\textsuperscript{144}See Sen. Smith's remarks, \textit{ibid.}, 259.
\textsuperscript{145}\textit{Ibid.}, 220.
wise legislators. As for slavery, Macon dwelt at some length with the peculiar institution. He foresaw universal emancipation in restriction and with it a host of new problems. He did not predict an uprising as occurred on St. Domingo, but was sufficiently alarmed to remind his hearers of the depressed state of the free blacks in the North. Moving on to the South he noticed the moral tone of the slave states, the political and business acumen of her citizens, and the kindly relations that existed between master and slave. With respect to the three-fifths ratio, Macon agreed that it came as a result of a compromise in 1787. He opened the Southern defense of the rule by pointing out that blacks were everywhere counted toward representation; when emancipated they were all enumerated for representation, although they could not serve in the army. In conclusion he could not admit the power of Congress over the territories included control of private property. While not denying that conditions had been placed on other states, he argued all were admitted as equals and allowed to determine the status of slavery for themselves.

Because there were no obvious answers to the basic problems before the country, the clash jarred thoughtful

\[146\text{Ibid., 227.}\]
\[147\text{Ibid., 226, 228.}\]
\[148\text{Ibid., 229. Another example of the Southern defense of the ratio is found in Sen. Barbour's (Va.) remarks.}\]
\[149\text{Ibid., 331.}\]
men. Macon closed his speech saying the amendment would ruin the entire South. Senator Walker (Ga.) forecast resistance and with it civil wars and a host of evils if the North prevailed. Senator Lowrie told his audience the "combustible materials" lay in the South where any battles of a future war would be fought. From the cabinet John Q. Adams observed that "if the Union must be dissolved, slavery is precisely the question upon which it ought to break."

Arriving in a troubled capital, King missed Senator Pinkney's (Md.) great speeches. He soon reported, however, that the subject consumed all the attention of the body. When at last both sides agreed to a vote on Roberts' amendment, he joined the Northern minority. Following this vote, William Plumer, Jr. wrote, "A compromise is much talked of in the Senate & by many in our House." Nevertheless, King thought the decision on Missouri must be fought to the very end because it determined whether the free

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150 Ibid., 232.
151 Ibid., 175.
152 Ibid., 209.
154 Rufus King to Christopher Gore, Jan. 30, 1820, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 263.
155 Sen. Sanford of N.Y. also voted for the proviso on Feb. 1, 1820. The vote was 16-27. Debates in Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., I, 359.
156 William Plumer, Jr., to William Plumer, Feb. 5, 1820. E. S. Brown, ed., The Missouri Compromises...From the Letters of William Plumer, Junior (St. Louis, 1926), 6.
states would gradually lose their political strength in the Union.\footnote{157}

When the Maine-Missouri bill was brought forth again King occupied the floor for two hours to demonstrate the right and expediency of limiting slavery in Missouri. His speech, of February 11, came more than a week after the defeat of the Roberts amendment. In his own words he had to speak, for "the cause is desperate...and my object was, by taking a bold position...to encourage & hold up others who were languid & discouraged."\footnote{158} King's address, not covered in the Debates in Congress, was a strongly worded one in which "he spoke of Slavery as being not only an evil, but a crime & an injustice."\footnote{159} He was not much of an orator, but his speech infuriated most Southerners. After further debate, the Senate finally voted on accepting the combined Maine-Missouri Act on February 16. The affirmative decision came by a narrow 23-21 vote.\footnote{160} King rallied the Northern forces but lost this critical referendum when the two Southern born Illinois Senators voted with the South.

\footnotesize{\cite{157} Rufus King to J. A. King, Feb. 6, 1820, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 267; also Rufus King to Martin Van Buren, Feb. 6, 1820, Van Buren Papers. 
\cite{158} Rufus King to J. A. King, Feb. 11, 1820, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 270. 
\cite{160} Debates in Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., I, 424.}
Senator Thomas (Ill.) immediately offered his amendment to keep slavery in the western territory south of a 36° 30" line; the Senate passed the motion on February 17. The total bill was then sent to the House the next day.  

Over in the lower chamber, sharp differences of opinion had been evident from the first days of the session. Yet the debates did not start until January 24, 1820. From that time until the Senate bill appeared the House argued the question. There were at least twenty men ready to speak on every occasion, many of whom repeated previous arguments.

The House soon disagreed with the upper chamber's action in placing the amended Missouri act on the Maine bill. A conference committee seemed to be the only hope for those who wished either state in the Union. The special committee called for the Senate compromise in the form of two bills. After the Senate passed the Missouri act with the Thomas amendment, the House passed the same Missouri enabling bill. In order to complete the transaction the Senate took the Maine bill originally received on January 4.

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161 Ibid., 428, 430.
163 Debates in Congress, 16 Cong., 1 sess., II, 1457.
164 The vote against restriction was 90-87. Ibid., 1586-1588.
President Monroe, who earlier told John Q. Adams there was little danger in the Missouri situation, had come to regard the Northern leaders as men desiring a sectional party or even the splintering of the Union. \(^{165}\) Thus he swung behind the compromise as early as February 19. Although he had momentary doubts concerning the Thomas proviso, he signed the measure. In reconsidering the entire debate King thought the North had been conquered. He saw little value in the upper plains areas for free society, while predicting the South would try to get Texas as a land for expansion. \(^{166}\)

V

To the northward in New York, a goodly number of the political leaders displayed a disinterested and provincial manner toward the crisis on the slavery question. The gubernatorial race was at long last before the people after months of preliminary strife. Clintonians and Van Burenites girded themselves for the showdown battles. During the hectic and passionate debates in the federal Capitol, Van Buren maintained an almost monolithic interest in state politics. His personal papers do not reveal any of his thoughts concerning the drama unfolding in Washington. Later in his memoirs, he complimented those whose opposition to the


\(^{166}\)Rufus King to Oliver Wolcott, March 3, 1820, King, *Life of Rufus King*, VI, 287.
extension of slavery in Missouri was based on honest conviction. Nevertheless, he wrote, "From all I saw of it...," most of the leaders of the fight against the admission of Missouri were motivated by disruptive political considerations.  

The number one task for Van Buren in 1820 was to eliminate Clinton and his party from the scene. While the legislative contest was very important, he naturally concentrated his interest on the governorship. Although Tompkins was the unofficial candidate of the Bucktails, there was evidence that the Fox of Kinderhook still clung to his preference for Smith Thompson. At the very time when the McNeil Resolution came to the Senate, a caucus of the Van Burenites nominated Tompkins. However, Van Buren told J. A. King that he hoped to induce the Secretary of the Navy to run if Tompkins refused the offer.  

From the tone of the conversation King reported, "There is some reason to believe that the Vice President may be brought to that determination." Rufus King received another slant on the thinking of Van Buren in a letter from the Senator himself. Almost immediately after King's note of gratitude of January 14 was delivered, Van Buren thought it wise to inform the Long Island leader of his party's plans.  

168 J. A. King to Rufus King, Jan. 19, 1820, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 251.
169 Ibid.
He admitted that despite the harmonious feeling within the party some of the leaders did not want Tompkins.\footnote{170} In a very delicate fashion he indicated they were trying to secure Tompkins' withdrawal from the ticket. King was to aid in that project and to help convince Thompson to accept, "which it is conceded on all sides would effectually settle the question of Mr. Clinton's future prospects."\footnote{171} Van Buren hoped that Thompson would remain in New York as Governor for some months and then return to his post in Washington which could be "kept in reserve" for him.\footnote{172}

Van Buren's planning obviously included support from the King men. Their influence he supposed to be very considerable with old Federalists and conservatives generally. Although a number of Republicans did not trust Thompson, he had connections with the Livingston family and was more acceptable to the Federalists.\footnote{173} Moreover, the Vice President was in trouble with the State Comptroller, Archibald McIntyre. His accounts from the War of 1812 were confused.

\footnote{170}{Martin Van Buren to Rufus King, Jan. 19, 1820, Rufus King Papers, New York Historical Society.}
\footnote{171}{Ibid.}
\footnote{172}{Ibid.; Van Buren also apprised Thompson of the project in a very confidential letter. Martin Van Buren to Smith Thompson, Jan. 19, 1820, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 254-255.}
\footnote{173}{George Broom to Martin Van Buren, Dec. 8, 1819; James A. Hamilton to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 18, 1820, and Rufus King to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 31, 1820, Van Buren Papers.}
and presumably short by several thousand dollars. The uncertainty surrounding Tompkins' use of war funds was one of the reasons Van Buren struggled to induce the Vice President to decline the nomination. Looking on, the National Intelligencer commented on the impending clash of arms and added, "When Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war." Van Buren got his first indication of the Vice President's reactions in a long letter from Thompson. Writing on January 28, 1820, Thompson informed him that Tompkins would probably run. Notwithstanding pressure from King, who had arrived in Washington, all signs pointed to an upset of Van Buren's calculations. Those close to the negotiations agreed that the confusion over the accounts must be settled. Thompson for one was confident that the Vice President could beat Clinton. Optimistic as a political candidate must be, Tompkins traveled to Albany in middle February to accept the Bucktail nomination.

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175 National Intelligencer, Jan. 27, 1820.
176 S. Thompson to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 28, 1820, and also Jan. 30, 1820, Van Buren Papers.
177 Rufus King to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 31, 1820, Van Buren Papers.
178 Ibid.; Rufus King to Martin Van Buren, Feb. 6, 1820, Van Buren Papers.
179 Van Buren presided over the public meeting and had so much at stake he threw his organization enthusiastically behind the campaign.
The Clintonian chief of staff, Ambrose Spencer, was also confident; "we will cure his /Tompkins/ itch...," he wrote, "rely upon it he will fail by many thousands."\(^{180}\) Spencer introduced the shadow of the slavery controversy into the campaign by asking, "Is it true that he was against any restriction in regard to slavery in Missouri? It is very important that we should be able to fix that charge upon him if it be true...."\(^{181}\)

Thus the Missouri struggle came to hang over both candidates. Clinton could point to his long record in philanthropic causes and his strong utterances on Missouri. He had no following in the South and could ride the issue very hard. On the other hand, Tompkins had recommended greater protection for the slave and gradual emancipation as early as 1812.\(^{182}\) His proposals were rejected only to be adopted five years later by the legislature. As regards Missouri, however, his position was not too well known. Although Tompkins was in the spotlight, Van Buren was involved as his manager. As such he did not choose to mention the slavery issue in his correspondence. Urging King to come out flatly for Tompkins, he stressed the need to dispose of Clinton.\(^{183}\)

\(^{180}\)Ambrose Spencer to Solomon Van Rensselaer, Feb. 15, 1820, Bonney, *Historical Gleanings*, I, 344.
\(^{181}\)Ibid.
\(^{182}\)Lincoln, ed., *Messages From the Governors*, II, 692-693.
\(^{183}\)Martin Van Buren to Rufus King, Feb. 26, and March 12, 1820, King, *Life of Rufus King*, VI, 283, 304.
King had cooperated with Van Buren up to that time but was chary about endorsing his old enemy. The defeat of the restrictionists in Congress was a hard blow, but he still felt that the North could be aroused. Little surprise then that as his mind turned over the course of the debates he recalled Tompkins' trip to Albany as a singular defection in the heat of battle.\textsuperscript{184} Two weeks later King discarded his "reserve" in saying to Van Buren, "You cannot be ignorant of the course, that I have at first with some hesitation, believed it to be my duty to pursue relative to the Missouri Question. The discussion has revealed views...wh. until now I never saw in their naked and dangerous deformity."\textsuperscript{185} He felt that the free states would unite and added, "I wd. be unhappy to think, or fear that N York would be a divided body."\textsuperscript{186} Then striking home to the canvass before the state, he mentioned the rumors in Washington that Tompkins had been cool toward the anti-slavery position.\textsuperscript{187} The next day he continued this line of probing in an epistle to his sons.

\textsuperscript{184}Rufus King to J. A. King and C. King, March 5, 1820, \textit{Ibid.} 291.

\textsuperscript{185}Rufus King to Martin Van Buren, March 17, 1820, Van Buren Papers.

\textsuperscript{186}\textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{187}It is interesting that William Plumer, Jr., wrote, "It...appears that the Bucktails or Tompkinites, were during the late debates/ in general lukewarm on this subject, & many of them opposed to the restriction." William Plumer, Jr., to William Plumer, April 7, 1820, Brown, ed., \textit{Plumer Letters}, 16.
they had requested him to sign a common statement for
Tompkins.188 His answer read, "As respects a federal party
in the State, it is in my view dissolved; indeed I consider...
that Mr. Clinton succeeded in breaking up and degrading the
federal party in 1812...."189 However, he stalled on Tomp­
kins; he acknowledged that he was obliged to Van Buren and
that Tompkins had rendered services during the Missouri de­
bates. Before committing himself openly, though, he needed
more information on Tompkins.

Van Buren had to supply answers to these questions on
the Missouri situation. A nod of approval from King meant
far more than the support of an elder Federalist statesman.
It would presumably carry thousands of votes among those
seriously concerned with the slavery problem. The excite­
ment within the state was so fresh that it could not fail
to affect the April election. Regardless of the reaction
in the South, Van Buren was being forced by local con­
ditions to show a strong anti-slavery stand by Tompkins.

Van Buren's reply represented a crucial step in the
campaign:

188 J. A. King to Rufus King, March 12, 1820, King,
Life of Rufus King, VI, 304-305.
189 Rufus King to J. A. King, March 18, 1820, ibid.,
317.
I have only time to say that since the receipt of yours I have seen the Vice President & stated to him what I understood was reported as his opinion on the subject of the Missouri question & he informed me that he had never entertained or expressed the sentiments attributed to him, that he did not think that the restriction was unconstitutional, nor that he ever questioned its expediency.

At some future day I will give you my ideas upon the question of the expediency of making this a party question. I am persuaded that notwithstanding the people of this state have felt a strong interest in the question, the excitement which exists in regard to it, or which is likely to arise from it, is not so great as you suppose.190

King received a second explanation of Tompkins' opinions some days later and told his son that he was already satisfied as a result of Van Buren's letter.191 Although the way was now clear to declare for Tompkins, he could not bring himself to sign the public letter at that time.192 Nevertheless, King's name was silently working for the Bucktails. One party chieftain told him. "Your sentiments on the question of Clinton's administration are no secret but on the contrary are well known to every reading man in the State."193 James Tallmadge, although seemingly not connected with Van Buren, broke with Clinton and

190 Martin Van Buren to Rufus King, March 23, 1820, ibid., 322.
191 See the exchange between J. A. King and Tompkins, March 27 and 28, 1820, ibid., 322-323; on Rufus King's judgment, Rufus King to J. A. King, April 1, 1820, ibid., 326-327.
192 ibid.
193 Robert Troup to Rufus King, March 22, 1820, ibid., 321.
actively supported the Vice President on the slavery issue.\textsuperscript{194}

It is important to observe that Van Buren in his letter to King did not feel compelled to elucidate all of his own views on the Missouri struggle. Whatever may be the deficiencies of the records, King, in discussing New York politics and the debates, wrote Van Buren's "views and principles, as far as I have understood them, deserve my hearty approbation."\textsuperscript{195} As regards the future of the issue, Van Buren did not hesitate to challenge King's belief that the pressures from the slave states would unite the North into further resistance. He may have been too much the political tactician in his analysis of the New York mind, but he definitely discouraged any hopes that there would be a mass uprising, even if the people were made aware of the extremes of Southern thinking.

With the campaign drawing to a close, Van Buren headed a committee of the Senate that forced McIntyre to admit that Tompkins had not misapplied any funds. A bill was introduced and passed providing for the state to pay Tompkins the sum due him on notes signed during the war.\textsuperscript{196} Van Buren also secured from James Madison consent to publish his correspondence with Tompkins concerning the Department

\textsuperscript{194}Moore, \textit{Missouri Controversy}, 183.
\textsuperscript{195}Rufus King to J. A. King, March 18, 1820, King, \textit{Life of Rufus King}, VI, 317.
\textsuperscript{196}Van Buren, \textit{Autobiography}, 98-99.
of State. In appreciation of Tompkins' work as a war governor, Madison had offered him that important cabinet position in 1814. This maneuver served to buttress the Vice President's early record in some quarters. The last thunderbolt thrown for Tompkins came from the "High Minded Federalists." Verplanck, Duer, the King brothers, James A. Hamilton and other men from the King faction of the party published an election address in the New York American. Denouncing Clinton, they lined up with the Bucktails behind the Vice President. One notable signature missing from the document was that of Rufus King. He could not alienate his old friends and comrades of the past who were nearly all active in the Clinton camp.

One aspect of the legislative race that was significant was Van Buren's refusal to go after a third term in the Senate. The Middle District was traditionally Federalist, and he must have considered the enemy too strong. Prudently withdrawing, he directed his side of an exciting and acrimonious canvass. The results constituted a victory for the Van Burens in the legislature while Clinton squeaked by Tompkins by 1,457 votes. Smith Thompson complimented Van Buren on his "half a loaf," saying, "If you are certain

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197 Madison to Martin Van Buren, March 27, 1820, Madison, Letters, III, 173.
198 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, 222-223; March 25, 1820, Adams, Diary, 235-236.
199 The total vote cast was 93,437. Flick, History of New York, VI, 53.
that you have the Assembly you have plucked Mr. Clinton's string, and he will be very harmless."  

Van Buren was not satisfied with the outcome and wrote bitterly to Worth, "I had intended to have left here for New York this fall, in the event of the War being ended, but as it is, my desire to serve your dear friend The Great Clinton will keep me here a few years longer."  

While lamenting Clinton's narrow victory he knew that Thompson was right -- he and his followers could isolate the Governor and dominate the political life of the state.

In the calm that followed the stormy election, he laid the groundwork for his next personal move. Details are lacking, but it is evident that he approached a number of Bucktails about replacing Nathan Sanford in the United States Senate. The special session of the new legislature in November enabled him to press his case at first hand. As the recognized leader of his party, he had no opposition except from some of Sanford's friends who wanted him to wait for his turn.  

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200 Thompson to Martin Van Buren, May 9, 1820, Van Buren Papers.
201 Martin Van Buren to Gorham Worth, June 1, 1820, Van Buren Papers.
202 There is one unconfirmed report that Clinton offered him the Attorney Generalship again. John Frost, The Presidents of the United States (Boston, 1857), 293.
203 A. King to Rufus King, Nov. 20, 1820, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 355.
204 DeWitt Clinton to Henry Post, Nov. 30, 1820, Bigelow, "DeWitt Clinton," 414.
for Van Buren, inasmuch as he had been the dominant figure behind Sanford's election in 1815. There were no specific charges against Sanford's record, but he could not muster the votes in a naked test of strength with Van Buren. In the caucus which nominated Van Buren, the King men participated with the Bucktails. The Clintonians did not have the strength to prevent his election, and the full legislative voting was a mere formality.

During those winter days of 1821, the Missouri question was again before the country. The people of the territory had proceeded during the summer of 1820 to fashion a constitution modeled on the Kentucky document. After the convention passed the constitution into law, state officials were selected and the government activated. Missouri's Congressional delegate presented the constitution at the beginning of the new session. No one expected immediate recognition for the territory, however, since it was generally known that her constitution contained a clause preventing free Negroes and mulattoes from entering the state.

Madison felt it would be awkward to admit the state and then declare the clause null and void. He advised

Monroe of several snares in the new situation and said it...

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205 J. A. King to Rufus King, Feb. 2, 1821, King, Life of Rufus King, VI, 382-383.
206 Martin Van Buren to Rufus King, Feb. 2, 1821, Rufus King Papers.
would be best to send the document back to the people of Missouri. Many Northern Congressmen knew that John Scott, the territorial delegate, had fought the clause in the convention. They were determined not to admit the territory with the objectionable phrases. Following a long discussion, a resolution recognizing Missouri as a state was defeated in the House on December 13, 1820. When the subject was resumed, all efforts in the lower chamber to secure a recognition of Missouri's status as a "state" were frustrated.

The House then turned to a Senate Resolution admitting the territory with a proviso that Congress was not responsible for any clause in the constitution of Missouri which might contravene the federal Constitution. Every attempt to amend the Senate Resolution, whether favorable to a more extreme Northern or Southern point of view, was defeated. On February 2, 1821, Henry Clay secured the creation of a select committee of thirteen which took the Senate proposal under advisement. Although the committee's amendment anticipated the final resolution on the subject, it was narrowly defeated.

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208 James Madison to James Monroe, Nov. 19, 1820, Madison, Letters, III, 186; the same spirit was evident in Washington, Smith Thompson to Martin Van Buren, Dec. 18, 1820, Van Buren Papers.
211 Ibid., 982-1027.
Every avenue had presumably been explored, and regardless of any theories Missouri was not yet in the Union. On February 21, Clay in desperation gave the House notice of an impending motion to bring Missouri into the Union. A few minutes later Rep. Brown (Ky.) moved the House consider repealing the entire compromise enabling act for the territory. When put to a vote this extreme idea was defeated, but it must have impressed many with the seriousness of the deadlock.\(^{212}\) On the succeeding day, Clay offered a resolution for a joint committee to study the much debated problem.

Time was running out and the committee reported almost immediately. In the lower house a short argument preceded the crucial voting which gave the resolution a narrow victory.\(^{213}\) Over in the Senate, Clay's motion for a joint committee was accepted by a wide margin.\(^{214}\) The report, which provided for the admission of the "state" after the legislature agreed not to bar the entrance of the citizens of any other state, was accepted on February 28.\(^{215}\)

The way was cleared for Missouri to assume her station in the Federal system. Much ill will had again been present, particularly in the House, during these debates. One important sidelight on the status of Missouri was the count of the

\(^{212}\)Ibid., 1209.
\(^{213}\)The vote was 87-81, Feb. 26, 1821, Ibid., 1238-40.
\(^{214}\)King and Sanford voted against the proposition.
\(^{215}\)Again King and Sanford voted "nay." Ibid., 390.
electoral vote on February 14. As had been foreseen, conflict was bound to arise regarding the Missouri vote. Once more Clay was a prime mover in securing the passage of a plan whereby the vote of the "state" would be both omitted from and added to the totals announced by the President of the Senate. Luckily Monroe and Tompkins were assured winners under either tabulation.

It is impossible to determine Van Buren's reaction to the third fight over Missouri. No informative letters remain in his correspondence. His first interests centered on New York affairs, and he tightened up the lines of control throughout the party preparatory to leaving for Washington. With a constitutional convention definitely in prospect, he countenanced a vindictive policy by the Council of Appointments. Led by his old friends, Roger Skinner and Walter Bowne, the Council eliminated nearly all known Clintonians from office. Van Buren and his lieutenants executed a ruthless housecleaning which was indicative of their intense dislike for Clinton.

The Bucktail leaders knew that the Council was a doomed institution in New York political life. Men of both parties agreed that some new system would have to be devised.

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216 Ibid., 1147-1166.
217 Hammond, Political Parties, I, 566-569.
Earlier, in 1818, Ogden Edwards, a Tammany legislator, proposed a constitutional convention hoping it would reform the appointment machinery. The suggestion was in part aimed at Clinton's control of the Council and hence opposed by the Governor. By 1820, however, pressure had developed for a review of several aspects of the old constitution. The suffrage qualifications, to mention one point, were under heavy fire, and both parties sought to gain control of the enthusiasm being engendered throughout the state. The legislature of 1821 provided for a convention which was approved by the voters in the regular April election.

In the early summer months delegates were chosen for the session; Van Buren, fearful of revenge by the Clintonians, did not run in Albany county but sought election in a traditionally Republican county, Otsego. As a self-confessed moderate on most of the questions before the state, delegate Van Buren found himself in good company. Nearly one hundred of the men in attendance were similarly labeled by contemporaries. The ultra-conservatives and the radical "democrats" did not have a chance to regulate the direction of the meeting. It was immediately evident that

219 Hammond, Political Parties, I, 469.
221 Martin Van Buren to Elisha Root, June, 16, 1821, Van Buren Papers.
222 Martin Van Buren to Rufus King, Jan. 14, 1821, Van Buren Papers.
the Governor, with a term cut from three to two years, would be given the power to nominate most state officials. The Senate passed on all such nominations in the new constitution. County officials were elected or appointed locally, and city councils were permitted to choose their mayors.\textsuperscript{224} The spoils system was not abandoned, but no machine could henceforth control the affairs of every hamlet in the state.

The suffrage question produced a long and rancorous discussion. There was actually little support for universal manhood suffrage. The predominant sentiment of the men was for a militia service, or road work, or tax paying requirement to replace the old freehold requirement. Van Buren was one of the leaders in fighting off the objections of the conservatives to these ideas.\textsuperscript{225} While considering the subject, the delegates had to go on to the problem of Negro voting. Free Negroes who met the standard requirements were permitted to vote under the old document.\textsuperscript{226} In view of this fact, a group of Negroes asked the convention on September 12, to continue the equality which Negroes had in the matter.\textsuperscript{227} The suffrage committee report, however, mentioned only white voters. In the Committee of the Whole, Peter Jay moved to strike out the word "white", and it was approved

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{225}Jenkins, \textit{Lives of the Governors}, 390-391.
\textsuperscript{226}Northrup, "Slavery in New York," 299.
\textsuperscript{227}Journal of the Convention of the State of New York (Albany, 1821), 49.
\end{footnotesize}
by a vote of 63-59 with Van Buren voting "aye."\(^{228}\)

Within two weeks, after continuous quarreling, a select committee added a special set of restrictions on Negro voting. The most important requirement stated that free Negroes were obliged to own a two-hundred-fifty dollar freehold and to show that they had paid taxes within the year. This report was adopted 72-28.\(^{229}\) Later when a move was made to delete the provisions which dealt with Negro suffrage, Van Buren said that he had voted against the total exclusion of free Negroes from the polls and that the qualifications that had been passed held out inducements to industry. The Bucktail leader indicated that he would not support the motion before the house. When the vote was taken, the motion failed 33-71.\(^{230}\) After this crucial test, everyone understood that the clause pertaining to Negro suffrage was to be made a part of the new constitution. In the end, the qualifications for white voters followed the terms outlined above.

Van Buren's essential moderation on all questions before the house temporarily cost him the support of the more radical Republicans. Nevertheless, his views on both white and Negro suffrage harmonized with those of the majority of the party. Since they controlled the convention, they

\(^{228}\)Ibid.


\(^{230}\)Oct. 8, 1821, Thurlow Weed, ed., The Votes and Speeches of Martin Van Buren on the Right of Suffrage, the Qualifications of Colored Persons to Vote....(Albany, 1840) 23-24.
secured a broadened white suffrage. This provision presumably would work to the detriment of the Clinton-Federalist forces. Likewise, they deprived the opposition of several hundred Negro votes which traditionally had been cast for the Federalists. As Van Buren prepared for the adjournment of the convention, he wrote to John A. King, "I am on the whole well pleased with the actual state of things & happy in the circumstance of having been a member of the convention."

231 Martin Van Buren to J. A. King, Oct. 28, 1821, Van Buren Papers.
CHAPTER 3
SLAVERY BECOMES A FACTOR IN VAN BUREN'S PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Martin Van Buren joined the United States Senate in December, 1821. He soon was recognized as one of the important personalities in the Washington scene. Although his career had its ups and downs in the succeeding years, his election as Vice President in 1832 stamped him as Andrew Jackson's heir apparent. In this capacity his record of the Missouri question and Negro suffrage in New York became a political issue. Moreover, he was drawn into the fierce controversy over slavery which had arisen in the country. In order to furnish a suitable background for these developments, a short discussion of the slavery controversy from the time of the Missouri debates is necessary.

The bitter struggle, which the Tallmadge amendment produced, encouraged thousands of Northerners to think seriously about slavery. The result of their reflection was noted by the American Convention of Abolition Societies. It reported in 1821 that a change of opinion was noticeable all over the Northern states. The Convention said that

2Adams, Neglected Period, 109. 
3Ibid., 108.
resistance to the work of the anti-slavery men had diminished considerably. Indeed, the evidence indicates that the fight over Missouri marked a turning point in Northern thinking. The ten years that followed the debates saw the "peculiar institution" attacked more frequently in that section.4

In the South the anti-slavery societies in the border and middle states continued to be active. That indefatigable Quaker, Benjamin Lundy, estimated in 1827 that four-fifths of the societies in the country were located in the South.5 Nevertheless, the Missouri controversy made most citizens realize that the South had practices and ambitions which were different from the other areas of the nation. The section as a whole became increasingly resentful of criticism of slavery. The vocal elements in the South began to attack the local anti-slavery men.6 At the same time, some men went beyond the standard arguments that were used to defend the institution and proclaimed that slavery was a positive benefit to the nation. Although these views were voiced by prominent leaders in the section, one may question the

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4The attempt to legalize slavery in Illinois in 1824 helped to arouse Northern opinion. Ibid., 109, 57-62, 33-34.
5Ibid., 37.
6W. B. Hesseltine, "Some New Aspects of the Pro-Slavery Argument," Journal of Negro History, XXI (1936), 11; despite the stiffer attitude in the North and the activity in the South, the American Convention lost its vigor in the 1820's and held its last session in 1829. Hart, Slavery and Abolition, 161-162.
degree to which they were accepted by the end of the de-
cade. 7

In this atmosphere of increasing sectional divergence
with regard to slavery, the militant abolition movement arose
in the North. The abolitionists associated with this crusade
obviously built upon the anti-slavery spirit which had been
aroused in the 1820's and the preceding decades. One wing
of the movement centered in the activities of William Lloyd
Garrison. In 1830 he left Lundy, whom he was assisting in
Baltimore, and returned to New England to establish his own
paper. The Liberator which was started in Boston in 1831
declared for immediate, uncompensated emancipation. 8 This
demand contrasted with the gradualism that was advocated
by most anti-slavery men in earlier years. 9 Garrison's
savage attacks upon all slaveholders and his appeal for
support from the free Negroes of the North also helped to
draw attention to his work.

While Garrison endeavored to build up a following for
his program, a group of men who were interested in humanitar-
ian reform met in New York city in June, 1831, and discussed
the possibility of creating a national anti-slavery society. 10

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7 Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Argument, 2, 71-77.
9 For early discussions of immediatism see Adams, Neg-
lected Period, 26-28, 57-62; Channing, History, V, 145.
10 Gilbert Barnes, The Anti-Slavery Impulse, 1830-1844
(N.Y., 1933), 35.
It was to be patterned after the English anti-slavery society. Two wealthy merchants, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, were among the prime movers in calling the meeting, which ultimately decided to hold up the project until the British government began the emancipation of slaves in the West Indies. Public opinion in England was such, however, that the New York group did not expect a delay of more than a year or two.

It must be said of the Tappans and their associates that they were already connected with a number of benevolent societies which had been copied from English models. The world peace movement, the temperance crusade, the drive for educational and prison reforms, and the promotion of Christian missions were but some of the worthy causes that these philanthropic organizations sponsored.11 In view of the excitement which the British Parliamentary debates on abolition had generated in America, it is not surprising that the reformers turned their interest toward the slavery problem.12

Two months after the New York conference was held the Nat Turner insurrection occurred in Virginia. Turner, a Baptist preacher who had considerable influence among his fellow slaves, led a slave uprising that claimed the lives of sixty white persons before it was put down. In the

12The project had first been talked over in 1830. Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 33.
process of breaking up Turner's gang, a number of slaves were killed, and twenty more were hanged after they had been tried by the local courts. This revolt threw a chill over the South; many persons immediately connected it with Walker's Appeal, a pamphlet written in 1829 by a free Negro, David Walker, which urged the slaves to rise up and seize their freedom. Walker's Appeal was written in Boston, but copies had been found in several Southern States. Although it was never proved that Turner had read the pamphlet or any of Garrison's strongly worded papers, thousands in the South understandably suspected that he was influenced by these sources.

In Virginia itself the uprising led to the great legislative debates of 1831-32. During the session the lower house discussed the various problems that related to slavery and the free Negroes in the state. While there was much sentiment for some plan of gradual emancipation and colonization of the slaves, the house voted against any action along those lines. This decision was most consequential, for it came after a full and frank debate. Coupled with

13Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 225-226.
14The ruling classes in some of them responded by toughening the laws which governed the blacks within their borders. Clement Eaton, "A Dangerous Pamphlet in the Old South," Journal of Southern History, II (1936), 323-324.
15Thomas Ritchie and John H. Pleasants, the powerful Richmond newsmen, both aided the anti-slavery cause. Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 227-228; the Southern slave codes were generally tightened after the Turner revolt, Clement Eaton, A History of the Old South (N.Y., 1949), 268.
the narrow defeat in the Kentucky legislature in 1830 of a proposal for an abolition amendment to the Constitution, it indicated that the Upper South would not abandon the slave system.16

Following the adjournment of the Virginia legislature, the proponents of slavery went on the offensive and carried their case to the people. The treatise on slavery written by Thomas Dew was the most influential of the printed works that appeared at this time.17 It stressed the inequality of the races and contended that slavery was as old as human civilization. Dew listed all of the time honored arguments to show that slavery was beneficial to the Negro. He also demonstrated that colonization was economically impossible. The Negro would have to stay then as a slave, and Dew stressed the advantages which the South received from the system.18 This work was widely circulated in the Old Dominion and the other states of the Upper South. By all accounts it was well received and was important in helping to stiffen the attitude of the section on the slavery issue. Indeed, it fostered the "positive good" opinion in the area and brought the attitude of the Upper South in line with opinions that were gaining wide acceptance in the Lower South.19

16Adams, Neglected Period, 34-35.
17Dew's work was entitled, An Essay on Slavery. Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 228-229.
19Jenkins, Pro-Slavery Argument, 87-88.
The year after Dew published his study, the British Parliament began to move toward a law which would gradually free the slaves in the West Indies. As a result the "New York Committee," a central conference of the city's leading reformers, proposed that a national anti-slavery society be established in the fall of the year. However, the strong objections that came from well placed sources in Philadelphia, the announced site of meeting, caused the reformers to hesitate.  

This situation was soon changed, nonetheless, when Garrison insisted that the organizational meeting be held. He had considerable prestige in anti-slavery circles at that time, having just returned from England where he had met the leaders of the British movement. Thus it was that a convention was quickly called for December 5; at the meeting the American Anti-Slavery Society was formed.

Garrison's fanaticism gave the new organization a bad reputation with most citizens. His influence secured the adoption of the statement that the society advocated immediate emancipation. Unfortunately all efforts to explain that this bold stand meant immediate emancipation gradually accomplished were never really understood by the general public.  

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21Ibid., 49; Theodore Weld agreed with James G. Birney that with emancipation the abolitionists would have to push for civil rights for the Negro. Social privileges would then follow naturally. T. D. Weld to James G. Birney, Aug. 7, 1834, Dwight L. Dumond, ed., *Letters of James Gillespie Birney*, 1831-1857 (N.Y., 1938), 1, 128.
considered Garrison's paper the official journal of the organization. Since the New Yorkers, who actually controlled the society from the first, did not disassociate themselves from him at once, the odium of "Garrisonism" hampered their early endeavors.

A survey of the organization's activities in 1834 reveals that its printed material and lectures were not well received in the North.\(^{22}\) In fact the hostility toward the abolitionists was strong enough to result in violence on occasion. With regard to Southern opinion, the society's propaganda was instantly rejected in that area. One bright spot appeared during the year, however, and that was largely the work of Theodore Weld. This talented young man had been recruited to the cause of social reform in the 1820's by Charles G. Finney, a powerful preacher who stressed man's perfectibility. Weld later became associated with the Tappans.\(^{23}\) His main concern centered on the slavery question, and he led the debates on abolition at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati in May, 1834. This protracted discussion resulted in the conversion of an unusually able group of students to militant abolitionism.\(^ {24}\)

\(^{22}\)Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 59.
\(^{23}\)Ibid., 33; Benjamin P. Thomas, Theodore Weld, Crusader for Freedom (New Brunswick, N.J., 1950), 25.
\(^{24}\)Ibid., 70-72.
The work that these men did for the abolition cause in Cincinnati soon led to their dismissal. While some went to Oberlin College and made it a citadel of anti-slavery feeling, others used Finney's revival techniques and won converts to the crusade in Ohio. Spurred on by these victories, the Lane rebels worked zealously from late 1834 to mid-1836 and succeeded in planting abolitionism in parts of Indiana, Ohio, Western Pennsylvania, upper New York and parts of New England. As a consequence of this tremendous effort in the face of great hostility, thousands of persons were affected by their message and the parent Society reported in May, 1836, that 527 local groups were formally organized.

Once the prospects of the abolitionists brightened in 1835, the central office turned its attention to a stepped-up pamphlet and tract campaign. The Society approved a plan to publish a wide variety of material. The Slave's Friend, Human Rights, The Emancipator and the Anti-Slavery Record were monthly prints and were augmented by the Quarterly Anti-Slavery Magazine and other publications. In the year that ended in May, 1836, the Society circulated 1,095,000 periodicals.
With respect to the main themes that the abolitionists stressed in their literature, the natural right of liberty for the slave received much attention.²⁹ Closely linked with this principle was the argument that slavery was contrary to the Bible and Christianity. The abolitionists also lashed out at the cruelties inherent in the institution and attacked the domestic slave trade severely. Slaveholders were stigmatized as coarse brutes who had no humility and any number of bad personal habits. In the eyes of the reformers, miscegenation was very common and the Christianity of the slaveholders was virtually a fraud. The social fabric of the South was thus dominated by a rich and wasteful slavocracy which exploited the Negro and ruthlessly pushed the poor white aside.

While there was a measure of truth in the written and spoken assault of the abolitionists, the program, the abusive tone, and the exaggerations of the reformers stung the South to the quick. The anti-slavery elements in the Upper South could not go along with the abolitionists who saw few if any social problems involved in emancipation.³⁰ Isolated as they were, they gradually disbanded their local organizations in the face of mounting Southern hostility to any anti-slavery sentiment.³¹ As Southern opinion hardened in a pro-slavery

³⁰Ibid., 370, 380.
³¹Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 242.
mold, it became obvious by the middle of the decade that no one suspected of anti-slavery proclivities, not even the Vice President, could get any political support in the section. The North Carolina Standard pointed up this attitude by remarking that while Southerners divided on other subjects there was only one sentiment in the South on this matter.32

II

In turning to Van Buren's career during the years before his nomination for the Presidency, one must note that he maintained an attentive interest in New York political affairs after he left the state. He surely recognized the patent fact that a commanding role in the nation's capital depended in a large measure upon the support given to him and his party by the people of the state. A brief look at the record shows that the Bucktails were in an ascendant position when the Little Magician departed to serve in the Senate. Led by William L. Marcy, Azariah Flagg, Benjamin F. Butler, Silas Wright and a host of capable men, the party maintained control of the state's affairs up to the late 1830's. The only notable defeat suffered by the Van Burenites, who were dubbed the Regency, was in the 1824 election.33 They immediately regained their dominant position,

32 North Carolina Standard (Raleigh, N.C.), March 22, 1837.
33 Fox, Decline of Aristocracy, 297-298.
however. During this period, Van Buren worked closely with the leaders of the Regency and surely received all of the backing that he could have desired.\(^\text{34}\)

On the national level the Fox of Kinderhook had been in the Senate but three months when he was involved in the debate on the question of limiting the domestic slave trade in Florida Territory. The Spanish government ratified the Florida Treaty in October, 1820, but Congress could not get at the matter of providing a law to establish a government for the newly annexed territory until it met in December, 1821. The Judiciary Committee worked several weeks on the question and did not report a bill until February 6, 1822.\(^\text{35}\) When the proposed act was discussed on February 21, the salary of the Governor of the Territory was fixed; a number of scattered amendments were offered, however, and the entire bill was recommitted. One week later the committee reported an amended bill which was not debated until March 4.\(^\text{36}\) In the course of "maturing its numerous provisions" the Committee of the Whole deleted a clause which would have prohibited the introduction of slaves into the Territory

\(^\text{34}\) His position was fraught with danger, nonetheless, for a leading member of the Regency once wrote, "He has been censored...for a too busy interference in our state affairs and will be censored for his present caution." Michael Hoffman to _____, Aug. 14, 1826, William L. Marcy Papers, Library of Congress.


except by bonafide settlers.\textsuperscript{37} When the Senate considered the committee's action on March 6, Van Buren spoke against concurring with the decision of the previous day. His remarks were not caught by the Senate reporter. He later voted with the minority, as the committee was upheld by a 23-20 count.\textsuperscript{38} The question was a closed issue after this vote was taken, and the only provision in the bill dealing with the slave trade pertained to the foreign slave trade.\textsuperscript{39} Van Buren's actions on this matter were subsequently mentioned by his opponents when they attacked him during the long 1836 campaign.

The negotiations over the purchase of Texas brought the New Yorker, as Secretary of State, into contact with a project that involved the expansion of slavery. The American claim to Texas rested on the French claim to a "vaguely defined region in that quarter" of the continent which they insisted was part of Louisiana.\textsuperscript{40} When the United States purchased Louisiana from France, the government made no effort to take control of Texas which had been under unchallenged Spanish control since 1763. American officials did not forget the United States claim to the area, however, and it was reluctantly renounced in the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819. Adams, in particular, did not want to yield the

\textsuperscript{37}Ibid., 277.
\textsuperscript{38}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., II, 2583-2584.
\textsuperscript{40}Justin H. Smith, The Annexation of Texas (N.Y., 1911), 5.
country's pretensions to Texas at the time of the negotiations. As a consequence, he sought to regain the province as soon as he became President. The Administration plan to readjust the international border to the west and south of the Sabine River was not well received by the new Mexican republic. A second offer to buy all or part of the territory extending to the Rio Grande River was not even presented to the Mexican officials by the American minister, Joel R. Poinsett. Matters were then allowed to drift until President Jackson and his Secretary of State surveyed the picture in 1829 and decided to renew the American offer.

At the time several thousand Americans had moved into the Mexican state of Coahuila-Texas. The Mexican government had encouraged the immigration, and, although most Mexican leaders were opposed to Negro slavery, the government did not seriously attempt to prevent the Americans from bringing in slaves in the first years of the republic's history. It was assumed at the time that cotton and sugar would be the major crops of the area, and slave labor was presumably needed for the rapid development of the economy. It is apparent from the contemporary sources that the better class

41 George P. Garrison, Westward Extension, 1841-1850 (N.Y., 1906), 86; see also James Monroe to Thomas Jefferson, May, 1820, Monroe, Writings, VI, 119-122.

42 Eugene C. Barker, "President Jackson and the Texas Revolution," American Historical Review, XII (1906-1907), 788; Adams favored a vigorous policy of expansion and said that he was the first to claim the Pacific coast for the United States. Garrison, Westward Extension, 86.
of immigrants had to be reassured with regard to the slavery situation before they became serious about the move to Texas. On the other hand, the evidence does not substantiate the charge that was later made that the American slavocracy plotted to rush slaves into the state as part of a plan to extend their institutions and power to the Southwest.  

When Jackson looked into the Texas question, his desire for the purchase was whetted by the report which he received from Colonel Anthony Butler on the prospects of the area. He sent Butler's document to Van Buren along with a rough draft of a new set of instructions for Poinsett. The Secretary reworked Jackson's material and wrote to Poinsett on August 25, 1829. He told the minister to try to buy any one of four sections of Texas. Poinsett was advised that he should stress the Texas-Mexican troubles which had become serious and threatened to involve the United State and Mexico in future difficulties. Other arguments that might induce the Mexicans to sell included the small value of the land for Mexico, the heavy expense of policing the frontier.

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43 Eugene C. Barker, "The Influence of Slavery in the Colonization of Texas," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XI (1924-1925), 3-36. The main themes in Barker's article were anticipated by George Garrison, "The First Stage of the Movement for the Annexation of Texas," American Historical Review, X (1904-1905), 80.

against Indian raids, and the depressed state of Mexican finances.45

Poinsett endeavored to make some headway with the negotiation in Mexico City, but he was not popular and accomplished nothing.46 In mid-October, Jackson told Butler to proceed to Mexico to continue Poinsett's work, for the South Carolinian had been recalled. When Butler arrived, he found public opinion so aroused against the American plans that he wisely waited until June, 1831, before he began to move. By that time, Van Buren had left the State Department and the negotiations were handled by his successor.47

Despite Van Buren's stand against the spread of slavery into Missouri and his course on the Florida Territory Act, he cooperated with Jackson in urging Mexico to cede Texas to the United States. The number of slaves that would have been affected by the purchase was small, and Benjamin Lundy seems to have voiced the only noticeable anti-slavery opposition to the scheme.48 Nonetheless, one wonders if Van Buren thought of the potential of the country which Rufus King noted in 1820 when he predicted that a future slave

45Ibid.
48A good Mexican estimate in 1834 gave an immigrant population of 20,000 which was ten per cent slave. Barker, "Slavery in Texas," 5-36; for Lundy's work see Adams, Neglected Period, 26-28.
state could be formed there.

III

After the election of 1832, the Little Magician was generally accepted by men of all political persuasions as the unofficial Democratic nominee for the next presidential race. Although the slavery question had not been an important issue in the 1832 campaign, there was evidence the next year that it was destined to become a significant political issue for the South. James Madison wrote to Henry Clay that it was painful to observe the efforts being made to alarm the South over the supposed designs of the North against the "peculiar institution." He declared, "You are right, I have no doubt, in believing that no such intermeddling disposition exists in the Body of our Northern brethren." The former President also termed it madness to talk of Southern rights conventions and even disunion.


50An important Georgia politician indicated in 1840 that no one thought of getting any pledge from Van Buren regarding slavery in the 1832 race. Public letter of W. T. Colquitt, Georgia Journal (Milledgeville, Ga.), May 19, 1840; Van Buren's public letter on the issues of the campaign was addressed to a Shocco Springs, N.C. group (Martin Van Buren), Letter from Martin Van Buren in reply to the letter of a committee appointed at a public meeting held at Shocco Springs, North Carolina... Oct. 4, 1832/ (Washington, 1834).

51James Madison to Henry Clay, June, 1833, Madison, Writings of Madison, IX, 517.
That the anti-Jackson state rights men were working along the lines sketched by Madison was shown by the Richmond Whig. The paper highlighted the endeavors of Northern anti-slavery leaders to start a crusade against the slaveholders of the South. In contrast with the Whig, the Richmond Enquirer noted the activity in the North but said that it was designed to aid the formation of a Calhoun party. A few weeks before this exchange occurred, the leaders of the Regency received an interesting report from one of their keenest observers, Congressman Michael Hoffman. Van Buren and his lieutenants undoubtedly discussed Hoffman's letter which analyzed the policies of the state rights men in the following words:

I have not been in the Senate -- but I think the course there will be like that in our House -- On the Tariff the North & South are not irreconcilably divided -- but on Slavery they are. The quarrel is to be transferred from one of taxes & imports to protection & slavery -- and this is designed to affect a more perfect Union at the South --.

The strategy of the Southern state rights leaders to rally the South around the defense of slavery became more obvious as their papers stepped up the campaign in the

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53 Richmond Enquirer, May 14, 1833, cited in ibid.
54 Michael Hoffman to Azariah Flagg, Feb. 4, 1833, Azariah Flagg Papers, New York Public Library; see also the letter of James Petigru, quoted in Avery Craven, The Coming of the Civil War (N.Y., 1942), 177.
winter of 1833-1834. The Evening Post of New York, a Democratic organ, commented early in 1834 on the exaggerated statements in certain Southern papers regarding the strength of the abolitionists in the North. It said that the accounts falsified the real tone of Northern opinion. The flaming appeals to Southern prejudices which were part of the articles were considered as bad as the course of certain "crackbrained" men of the North. The Richmond Enquirer expressed similar sentiments and warned the people of the South to watch the extremists who wanted to panic the section over the work of the abolitionists. Thomas Ritchie, the editor, wrote that these men were attempting to unite a party in the South on the slavery issue—a party which might even move toward the dissolution of the Union.

These developments were important for Van Buren who was officially nominated for the Presidency for the first time by the Ohio Democrats in January, 1834. As the state rights men focused Southern opinion on the slavery issue, his record on several questions which involved slavery was certain to be reviewed by them. Moreover, the policy of overstating the menace from the North put Southerners on their guard against all Northern political leaders,

56Ibid.
57Richmond Enquirer, quoted in ibid.
58Ibid., Jan. 18, 1834.
who, if not abolitionists themselves, would have to court the anti-slavery men who were presumably so numerous in the area.

It must be said that the Southern state rights men who were pushing the slavery question acknowledged John C. Calhoun as their leader. In view of the fierce antipathy which existed between Calhoun and Van Buren, the state righters were certainly not displeased at the prospect of damaging Van Buren's standing in the South with their campaign. They faced another problem in the spring of 1834, however, and that concerned a union with the National Republicans.

The two groups had little in common ideologically, but they both desired the overthrow of the Jacksonian Democrats. The chief Jacksonian editor, Francis P. Blair, had warned the nation in late 1833 that the continued cooperation between the Bank Party and the Nullifiers was producing a new coalition. Calhoun, himself, felt in early 1834 that there was danger that his nullifying group would be merged into the other party. The cooperation of the two parties


in the fight against the removal of the government deposits from the United States Bank virtually sealed the union of the groups. The new party, which also came to include most of the Anti-Masons, was labeled the Whig Party by James W. Webb of the New York Courier and Enquirer. At first glance the party would seem to have little chance of surviving for more than a few months. But it weathered a number of storms and remained an inter-sectional party that influenced American history until the mid-1850's.

In the spring of 1834 there was evidence that Van Buren's political reputation in the South was directly affected by the agitation of the slavery issue. The Vice President received a letter from Clinton, Mississippi, which informed him:

Among the numerous new coined charges that are daily engendered in this hot bed of intrigue, is one that you are in favor of an interference by Congress in manumitting our slave property. This subject you know is one of the most extreme delicacy in the Southern states. Scarcely an subject could be more so. When driven from every other point they take refuge in this shell & it is in vain to reason from your...devotion to our free institutions as guaranteed by the Constitution, yet there is no positive denial from you.

Van Buren did not miss the significance of this attack against him. With the adjournment of Congress he wrote

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63 Samuel Gwin to Martin Van Buren, May 20, 1834, Van Buren Papers.
an answer to Gwin which expressed surprise that his views on the subject of Congressional power over slavery in the states were being twisted. He stated categorically "The subject is in my opinion exclusively under the control of the state governments & I am not apprised nor do I believe that a contrary opinion to an extent desiring consideration is entertained in any part of the U. States." He went on to express the opinion that Congress could not interfere with slavery in the states unless the Constitution were changed.

There is no record as to the effect of this reply in combatting the charges that the Southern extremists leveled against Van Buren. The United States Telegraph, however, continued the efforts to excite the South over the prospect of a Northern crusade against the slave system. The Evening Post fought back and ridiculed the idea that the North was all in favor of an abolition program. A short time later, Blair spoke out for his wide audience and asserted that South Carolina (the Calhoun force) was using the slavery issue to work for a Southern confederacy. He reiterated the Democratic stand, which clearly helped Van Buren, that the North was really very hostile to the abolitionists.

64 Draft of Martin Van Buren to Samuel Gwin, July 11, 1834, Van Buren Papers.
65 Evening Post, quoted in Globe, Aug. 15, 1834.
66 Blair said that northerners did not want the free blacks as economic competition. Ibid., Aug. 29, 1834.
In the Democratic camp the regulars of the South and West were asked to support the New Yorker in a public letter written by Thomas H. Benton. He addressed his remarks to Major General Davis of Mississippi. Van Buren was called a strong Jeffersonian in every regard. Although no mention was made of the slavery issue, Benton was obviously seeking to calm Southern fears of a Northern candidate for the Presidency. He admonished the Southern Democrats to think of the results that would flow from a refusal to back Van Buren. Not only would the party crack apart, but it would also array the sections against each other.

As the year 1835 began the Whigs were well aware of the Vice President's position before the country as the heir to Jackson's mantle. Divided as they were on several points of policy, they had no single spokesman to push before the people. Thus, the only recourse that had any chance of success was to allow strong, sectional favorites to run in the hope of forcing the election into the House of Representatives.

The first movements that brought an available Whig

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68 At a party dinner in Jackson, Miss., attended by 150, Van Buren was toasted as the man who would receive the state's vote. Globe, Oct. 3, 1834.

69 C. C. Cambreleng had warned of such an election in 1832. C. C. Cambreleng to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 4, 1832, Van Buren Papers.
into the open surrounded the flurry of excitement for Justice John McLean. Although the *Globe* tended to doubt that McLean would actually run, a more dangerous turn of events in Tennessee produced an insurgent, Southern candidate from within the Jackson camp. Senator Hugh White's defection was soon the object of strong criticism from the regular Democratic editors. While some Northern Whig observers watched this White-Van Buren struggle with interest, Silas Wright, Van Buren's close friend in the United States Senate, received an important note from Virginia regarding the Vice President's political record.

Joseph Watkins explained to Wright, "I have every day to submit to attacks on Mr. V B's character without the requisite information to repel them, especially on those points, in relation to which he is most objectionable to the Virginia people." Watkins said that Van Buren had not answered an earlier letter requesting the desired information. He told Wright that the Whigs would attempt to hurt

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*Francis P. Weisenburger, The Life of John McLean* (Columbus, 1937), 81-92.


*Richmond Enquirer*, Feb. 5, 1835; see the veritable barrage against White appearing in the winter of 1835 in the *Globe*, *passim*.


*Joseph Watkins to Silas Wright, Jan. 29, 1835, Van Buren Papers.*
Van Buren's standing in the state in connection with "those subjects, about which you know the Southern people are very sensitive...."75

This letter revealed that an important aspect of Whig strategy, in the critical state of Virginia, was aimed at hitting Van Buren's record on issues of particular interest to the South. Furthermore, Watkins conceded that the opposition had been able to hurt Van Buren's reputation with many in his district. In view of these circumstances, Wright was compelled to deliver a rather detailed answer to Watkins' inquiry. As in the case of the Gwin letter, the best defense against the efforts of the Whigs to inflame the sensitive Southland was to quash their attacks with a direct reply.

Wright addressed himself to the task on February 9. He discussed Van Buren's conduct in regard to the presidential election of 1812, the Missouri controversy and the tariff of 1828.76 He explained that the Little Magician's course on the first and last questions followed the wishes of the people of his state. Southerners could hardly object to his record when they knew the facts. As for the Missouri controversy, Wright handled the events that involved Van Buren in their chronological order. He first described the

75Ibid.
76Silas Wright to Joseph Watkins, Feb. 9, 1835, Van Buren Papers.
mass meeting held in Albany on December 16, 1819. He did not deny that Van Buren signed the call for the gathering, but he emphasized Van Buren's absence when the meeting was held. Wright also stated that the Bucktail leader had "cause to apprehend" that some of those who were active in the matter wished to agitate the question "for the formation ... of new political divisions dangerous to the harmony... of the union...." Therefore, the writer concluded, Van Buren refused to sign the resolutions of the meeting.

Turning to the vote for Rufus King in 1820, Wright said, "it is not true that his support of that gentlemen had any connection with the Missouri question...." He related the principal facts concerning the deadlock in 1819. Van Buren's pamphlet for King was mentioned, as was the final outcome of the senatorial race which saw both parties unite behind King in 1820. The author of the letter asserted that the Missouri question developed as a heated issue after King's election. Naturally, the course adopted by King was one "exclusively his own." The very strong resolution adopted by the state legislature at the time of the crisis was also examined.

Watkins was told,

77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
This resolution was not introduced by him nor did he advise its introduction, nor advocate it upon its passage, but as he was a member of the Senate by which it was passed and did not oppose it, he must and should be regarded as having gone with his State to the extent of the expression thus made by its Legislature.®

Less than one month later Thomas Ritchie wrote to Wright and opined that his letter would do much good for the Jacksonians in the state. He suggested that it was a successful antidote to the propaganda of the Whigs. In actuality the letter was rather solid. It was calm and dispassionate. The Albany session was treated very fairly. As for the Bucktail support of Rufus King, the letter outlined the basic political facts of that complex period in New York history. The Missouri question was not mentioned in Van Buren's pamphlet, and it was not fundamental in bringing Van Buren behind King. Yet the good effect of Wright's document was enhanced by the inaccurate statement that the Missouri controversy became an important issue after King's election. Obviously, Wright did not have to refer to Van Buren's letter to Noah of December, 1819. Van Buren's vote for the New York Resolution of 1820 was minimized in a barrage of qualifying phrases. In truth, however, the evidence indicates that Van Buren really was passive regarding the resolution. All in all, despite the hedging,

® Thomas Ritchie to Silas Wright, March 2, 1835, Van Buren Papers.
the author answered the Whig attack with a letter that was a strong campaign document.

This counterblow for the Democrats did not end the quizzing. In the letter already cited, Ritchie sent along an enclosure from a state senator. Wright was asked about Van Buren's opinions concerning the power of Congress "to interfere with the relation between master & slave in any of the States."82 The administration members of the legislature were also anxious to know if it "would be politic to abolish slavery within the District of Columbia?"83

Wright penned an answer to Ritchie within a few days. A most interesting feature of this second letter was that it followed a draft from the hand of the Little Magician. While Wright's manuscript letter has not been preserved, it was soon offered to the public in the columns of the Richmond Enquirer. On March 14, Ritchie printed an article in his paper headed "Mr. Van Buren's Opinions." He laid Wright's letter (dated March 5, 1835) before his readers as one coming from an intimate friend of the Vice President.84

The main sections of it read as follows:

My Knowledge of Mr. Van Buren's opinions... enables me to answer your queries without hesitation....

He would consider it impolitic for Congress to pass a law abolishing slavery in the

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Richmond Enquirer, March 14, 1835.
District of Columbia; and, in his opinion, the Constitution of the United States does not give that body the right to interfere with the relation between master and slave, in any of the States.\(^{85}\)

In comparing this version of the note with that from Van Buren's own hand, one observes the older spelling of "impolitick" in the original.\(^{86}\) This form is seen often in Van Buren's correspondence. Otherwise the accounts were identical, with the exception of two minor changes in the wording. As for the thoughts expressed by Van Buren, one section of the letter merely reiterated the main theme of his Gwin letter. The other part of the note put him on record as against an exercise of Congressional power over slavery in the District of Columbia. Van Buren was simple and direct in his language. Undoubtedly he felt a concern over the situation in Virginia. He must have believed that his answers would allay much apprehension respecting these matters, in Virginia and the other states of the South.

It was apparent that Ritchie was enthusiastic about the tone of the letter for he gave it a prominent position in his editorial column.\(^{87}\) Actually the powerful editor used this second letter from Wright two days earlier in rebutting certain Albemarle county men who were broadcasting the "current charge" against Van Buren. Although Ritchie did

\(^{85}\)Ibid.

\(^{86}\)Draft letter in the hand of Van Buren, no date, Van Buren Papers.

\(^{87}\)Richmond Enquirer, March 14, 1835.
not then quote any part of the letter, he denied that Van Buren would violate the rights of the South as regards slavery in the states or the District of Columbia. Furthermore, the charge that the New Yorker backed King in 1820 because of the Missouri crisis was unfounded. Ritchie referred to a copy of the 1819 pamphlet, which had been sent to him, as the proof for this assertion.89

Two articles in the Enquirer so close together demonstrated the importance which the slavery question was coming to have in the campaign. Wright's letter to Watkins covered Van Buren's record on the Missouri issue and it was being used with good effect among the people.90 On the other hand, these articles featured the current anxieties of the voters. Regardless of the real authorship of Wright's second letter, it was undeniably satisfying to the Democrats; it proved that Van Buren was safe for the South -- he was not tainted with abolitionism.

Obviously, Van Buren saw the seriousness of these developments. In this connection another draft letter in his papers is worthy of mention. It is in his rounded and sometimes undecipherable script. Van Buren warned the reader,

88Ibid., March 12, 1835.
89Ibid.
90Before this letter circulated, Richard H. Baptist defended Van Buren on the Missouri question at the Mecklenburg court house on Feb. 16, 1835. His speech is interesting because he did not have the facts for a strong case. Richmond Enquirer, March 14, 1835.
"I am very apprehensive of detriment to the general harmony from any unnecessary agitation of the slavery matter. There has been for several sessions a strong desire manifested in the north & West to distract Congress & the country by...discussion of this disturbing subject." He continued that it was in the interest of all concerned to keep the discussion at a minimum. This was particularly true "in the midst of a Presidential canvass when all parties are so ready to seize upon anything that can be turned to advantage." The letter stated that since the author had seen Van Buren in the Senate for some years he knew these to be his views on the matter.

There is no name on the paper which would indicate who was to use the letter. In filing the item among the great mass of Van Buren papers, Elizabeth H. West, of the Library of Congress, felt that it was designed for Senator Elias Kane (Ill.). Presumably it was to be sent to Ritchie who was in a sensitive and powerful post in the Old Dominion. Despite the uncertainties surrounding the draft, it is significant because it reveals Van Buren's feelings before the gathering storm.

91Draft letter in the hand of Van Buren, no date, Van Buren Papers.
92Ibid.
93Kane died in Dec., 1835; he was a native of New York, and the Albany Argus expressed regret at his sudden passing, Albany Argus, Dec. 19, 1835.
As much as the Vice President deplored "any unnecessary agitation" of the question, it was soon evident that the Virginia Whigs were not so disturbed by the discussion.  

In a long review of Van Buren's career, "A Virginian" sought to answer the charges against him in an article printed in the *Enquirer*. After cataloguing Van Buren's record on the important economic issues of the day, this article concluded that he was a solid Republican. Thus the Whigs, after two years of effort, failed to destroy him on these points. Faced with this situation they then brought up a new issue in the midst of the abolition and slavery excitement. The correspondent said that the opposition called him the "Little Magician," or the "Arch Magician," and spoke of "New York Tactics" and the "Albany Regency." Yet a main theme of their new propaganda endeavored to link him to the New England fanatics. This development was destined for failure, the writer concluded, because Van Buren was on record against any Congressional power over slavery in the states.

Despite such Democratic counter-charges that the Southern Whigs were leaning on slavery as a desperation measure,

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94 Richard Baptist earlier complained of the discussion of slavery-abolition subject. He added that it was a delicate matter in a mixed population and "like female virtue, may be tarnished, by too frequent and indiscreet handling." *Richmond Enquirer*, March 14, 1835.


the question was so packed with practical and emotional qualities for the South that the Whigs would not let it die. They undoubtedly knew they were making converts in their fight against Van Buren. In order to counteract the various "misrepresentations" of the Whigs, and especially the "calumnies" respecting Van Buren and slavery, another letter was prepared by a close friend of the New Yorker. This time the author was Benjamin F. Butler; he wrote to a prominent Virginia Democrat, Hugh A. Garland. Once again the Richmond Enquirer was the first to print an important campaign statement from a source next to the Vice President.

In giving the letter to his readers, Ritchie noted that there were no "New York Tactics," and no magician tricks connected with it. He pointed out that Van Buren did not consider it politic to touch slavery in the District of Columbia. Furthermore, Ritchie reminded his farflung audience that Van Buren had also denied that Congress had any power over slavery within the individual states. Despite Van Buren's vote for the New York resolution of 1820, Ritchie assured the South that no pressures could jeopardize slavery in Arkansas or Florida because of the Compromise of 1820. This introduction was well tailored to fit the letter.

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97 Richmond Enquirer, quoted in the Albany Argus, March 28, 1835.
98 Butler answered Garland's letter of inquiry which was dated March 16, 1835. Richmond Enquirer, April 3, 1835.
99 Ibid.
A brief glance at Butler's remarks reveals an account that ran to several closely printed columns. He described Van Buren's record during the War of 1812, as well as his position on various facets of the slavery controversy, the tariff, internal improvements, and the United States Bank. It is apparent that this letter was planned as an important pronouncement from the Vice President's camp.

The slavery section of this detailed campaign statement was the longest in the letter. It began with a consideration of Van Buren's course during the Missouri controversy. In discussing the episodes involving the New Yorker, Butler leaned heavily on the letter sent by Wright to Watkins. In some paragraphs he copied Wright word for word. However, he did add the letters exchanged by Henry E. Jones and Van Buren regarding the latter's refusal to sign the memorial drawn up by the leaders of the Albany citizen's meeting. Butler also went on to say,

He sincerely deprecated the existence of slavery in the United States, and was willing to concur in any measure to prevent its extension west of the Mississippi, consistent with the Constitution, and not calculated to disturb...nor to endanger the rights and securities of slave owners east of the river.

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid., April 3, 1835.
Turning from these much discussed events in Van Buren's early career, Butler quickly passed over the question of Congressional interference in the District of Columbia and the individual states. He said that the Richmond Enquirer had already published a letter which stated Van Buren's opinions respecting these matters.103 Butler then proceeded on the assumption that Garland, and the general public, knew the details of Wright's letter to Ritchie. This letter, he maintained, was in harmony with the thinking of the great mass of the people of the Middle and Eastern States. In fact Butler cited a letter of Daniel Webster (1830) as further proof for his contention that, a noisy minority notwithstanding, the controlling sentiment of the North plotted no injustice to the South. Slavery in the South was recognized as a peculiar institution governed by the Southern states.104

With regard to the agitation for emancipation in the District of Columbia, Butler wrote that the petitions from the North had aroused little sympathy among Northern Congressmen. They were laid on the table with the help of Northern votes at the last session of Congress.105 In the same vein the vocal elements in the North did not bring the slavery question into the nullification excitement, although almost every other problem was discussed. Butler continued his

103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
plea for moderation and forbearance by reminding Southern political leaders that no one in the North had quizzed the Southern candidates for high national office about their views on this delicate subject. While he acknowledged the sensitivity of the South, Butler concluded, "may it not be suggested that the liberality...of the reflecting portion of our Northern population, ought to be met in a corresponding temper, by their brethren of the South."106

In appraising these paragraphs on slavery, it is evident that Butler endeavored to send a calming note to the voters of the South. Using Wright's unpublished letter to Watkins, he minimized Van Buren's participation in the anti-slavery excitement that prevailed in New York during the Missouri crisis. However, as a gesture to Northern sentiment, he mentioned Van Buren's distaste for slavery and his desire to restrict its extension in the trans-Mississippi country. In the same spirit Butler did not deny that abolition fanatics were active in the North; nevertheless, he stressed the good sense and moderation of the vast majority of the people of that area. He wove Wright's letter to Ritchie into this pattern of thought and thereby demonstrated Van Buren's soundness on the slavery issue for the intelligent Southern voter.107

As for the other divisions of Butler's letter, they

106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
furthered Van Buren's standing as a strong Jacksonian. This significant document was the most comprehensive account of Van Buren's political record to be published since 1832. Unfortunately, there is no indication in the Van Buren Papers as to how much of the work was done by the candidate himself.\textsuperscript{108} The importance of the letter was not missed by Francis P. Blair and Edwin Croswell. The \textit{Globe} carried it, introduction included, on April 9, while the \textit{Argus} printed it one week later.\textsuperscript{109} Shortly thereafter it was published as part of a campaign pamphlet entitled \textit{Mr. Van Buren's Opinions}.\textsuperscript{110} This pamphlet also contained Silas Wright's letter to Ritchie. Taken together they made a sensible combination.\textsuperscript{111}

At this time Van Buren sent an interesting letter to William C. Rives of Virginia. This able, young Democrat was a friend of Van Buren and a candidate for the Vice Presidency. The New Yorker complained to him of answering inquiries from the Old Dominion. He wrote, "Since I was a boy, I have been stigmatized as the apologist of Southern institutions, and

\textsuperscript{108}In printing portions of the letter a Whig paper said the unsigned letter was understood to be from B. F. Butler but was probably revised by Van Buren. \textit{National Gazette} (Philadelphia, Pa.), April 6, 1835.

\textsuperscript{109}\textit{Globe}, April 9, 1835; \textit{Albany Argus}, April 16, 1835.

\textsuperscript{110}\textit{Mr. Van Buren's Opinions} (n.p., 1835).

\textsuperscript{111}Wright's letter was altered slightly from the earlier printed version, and the phrase "highly impolitic" found its way into the document. \textit{Ibid.}
now your good people have it that I am an abolitionist." Rives replied to Van Buren, "I see you have been a little annoyed by the pertinacious cross examination to which you have been subjected from Virginia. But you must bear with this, (as we are a famous people for principles, you know) ...." Rives interjected a serious theme into his letter by asking Van Buren and the other party leaders to be tolerant of Virginia's peculiarities. He was very anxious because, "knowing as I do what deep root the scheme of a Southern Confederacy has taken in the South," Virginia must be kept "as the fulcrum of the South" if these schemes were to be defeated. One can only speculate as to the influence this friendly note had in crystallizing an indulgent policy on the part of Van Buren toward the sensitivity of the state.

In this excited atmosphere the Virginia Whigs preferred another charge against Van Buren. On March 24, Ritchie reported that the Lynchburg Virginian was quite alarmed over Van Buren's attitude toward the suffrage question in the state constitutional convention of 1821. It had printed certain excerpts from the record of the convention which showed that the Bucktail leader voted against an exclusive

114Ibid.
115Richmond Enquirer, March 24, 1835.
white suffrage for New York. Although slavery was not in­
volved in the discussion, the Whig editor obviously was using
this item as additional proof of Van Buren's hostility to
Southern patterns of thought regarding the Negro.

Ritchie lashed back at the incomplete account in the
Virgini an. He said the Whigs had refused to print the truth.
As a corrective he began with the 1777 Constitution of New
York which made no distinction between free Negroes and whites
on this matter. 116 In the 1821 gathering there were three
blocks of opinion, he continued. A majority of the Buck-
tails were hostile to any Negro voting because it aided the
Federalists; many Federalists, on the other hand, wanted to
keep the arrangements of the first constitution. A third
group of delegates wished to restrict Negro voting but would
not go along with total exclusion. 117 Ritchie admitted that
Van Buren was one of the last group and had voted with the
majority of the convention to strike out the word "white"
when it occurred in the first suffrage committee report.
Nevertheless, he pointed to the final version of the docu-
ment which discriminated against Negroes and had received
Van Buren's vote. The increased property requirements
severely reduced the number of Negro voters, he said,
although "inducements to industry" were extended to the
free colored population. Ritchie remarked in closing that

116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
North Carolina still permitted free Negroes to vote. 118

Ritchie's article was marked by its reasonable tone. Within a week Blair reprinted it in a slightly enlarged version. 119 However, the Globe did not carry Ritchie's introductory comments. They are worthy of note only because they reveal the importance of the slavery issue in Southern Whig strategy. The Virginia editor gave it as his belief that the "burden of the song" of the opposition emphasized slavery and the South. 120

As the Whigs talked, the Democrats continued to fight back. Blair published Van Buren's letter of July, 1834, to Samuel Gwin as a means of demonstrating the Vice President's early concern that his views, on Federal interference with slavery in the states, be properly understood. 121 The loose gossip of the Whigs that Van Buren had abolitionist sympathies brought a public letter of denial from "A Virginia Democrat." 122 In this defender's opinion the charge was ridiculous. He maintained that the Northern Democratic party was a labor party. No one could seriously believe that Van Buren or his party wanted to free the Negro and thus provide cheap

118 Ibid.
119 Richmond Enquirer, April 1, 1835.
120 Richmond Enquirer, March 24, 1835.
121 Globe, April 13, 1835; the letter was also printed in Niles' Register (Baltimore, Md.), May 2, 1835, and Charleston Courier, May 26, 1835.
122 Richmond Enquirer, April 24, 1835.
competition for the white laborers of the North. The letter said that Van Buren was a real friend of the South and would receive the writer's support if nominated for the Presidency.

This reference to a nomination indicated that the Democratic convention would soon convene. An extra-legal conference of the party faithful, it had been called to meet on May 20. Events had moved rapidly following Senator White's defection. Since the national convention system was not firmly established, his legislative nomination was embarrassing to the Democratic high command. The desire for action among the party regulars was well expressed in Richard E. Parker's letter to the Vice President. He wrote, "It seems to me that the Baltimore convention ought to meet, with as little delay as possible, so as to gain as a rallying point [sic]." At the same time, Jackson wrote to James Gwinn and firmly supported the idea of a convention made up of delegates "fresh from the people." The call for a convention was formally put to the party by the New Hampshire Democracy.

Needless to say, it was a foregone conclusion that

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123 He charged Duff Green with attempting to spread these ludicrous ideas. Ibid.
124 Parker was a Virginia political leader. R. E. Parker to Martin Van Buren, Feb. 22, 1835, Van Buren Papers; see also footnote 73 above.
Van Buren would be named for the Presidency. Because of this fact, the Democratic victories in the state elections held during the spring were most satisfying to the leaders of the party. It was a confident group of men that assembled in Baltimore on the appointed day. Without examining the details of the proceedings, it is sufficient to note that the two-thirds rule was adopted after a strenuous floor fight. Van Buren was then nominated unanimously.

As for the second place on the ticket, a sharp struggle developed between the forces of William C. Rives and Richard M. Johnson. New York voted for Johnson, and he was named on the first ballot. Immediately thereafter, the Virginia delegates announced that their state would not support the Kentuckian in the ensuing election. The primary reason for this decision lay in the unacceptable domestic relations of "Tecumseh" Johnson who made no effort to conceal the fact that he had lived with a mulatto woman. In this manner,

126 For typical Whig comments see ibid., and Boston Courier, March 18, 1835.
127 Roberts Vaux to Martin Van Buren, April 27, 1835, Van Buren Papers; the Richmond Whig said the state was "sold to the Dutch" after the votes were counted there. Quoted in Western Hemisphere (Columbus, O.), May 13, 1835.
128 Niles' Register, May 30, 1835.
129 Blair predicted Johnson's nomination before the convention opened. F. B. Blair to Andrew Jackson, May 19, 1835, Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress.
130 Niles' Register, May 30, 1835.
delicate questions concerning racial amalgamation were brought to bear on Van Buren and the Democratic ticket. On the other hand, there is no indication that the Southern delegates were disturbed by anything that Van Buren had done or said regarding slavery. He was a worthy leader for the South and the North.

While Van Buren picked up newspaper support for his nomination, the situation in the Whig camp was more fluid. The Southern Whigs had generally fallen in line behind White. Many of them must have worried about White's record as a Jacksonian. Ritchie reported that when pressed about their reasons for backing the Tennessean, they would merely say that they were for White and against Van Buren. Since no other prominent man had been brought forward in the South, it was undoubtedly a practical policy to fight the Jackson-Van Buren forces with a dissatisfied Jacksonian. The Northern Whigs were not unhappy about the reports of a

132 Although he did not anticipate Virginia's action, Alfred Balch warned Jackson that Johnson's nomination would not be popular in the South for this reason. Alfred Balch to Andrew Jackson, April 4, 1835, Jackson Papers.

133 In supporting the New Yorker the Louisiana Courier said that he was unscathed by the "malevolent shafts of his adversaries." Louisiana Courier (New Orleans, La.) May 22, 1835.

134 Ibid., May 29 and June 8, 1835; Richmond Enquirer, June 2, 1834; Western Hemisphere, June 17, 1835.

135 Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 5, 1835; Boston Courier, March 18, April 1, 1835; Charleston Courier, April 14, 1835; National Gazette, May 18, 1835; Globe, March 19, 1835.

136 Richmond Enquirer, March 24, 1835.
sizable rebellion against the administration in the South. However, the prominent Boston Courier stated that it preferred Van Buren over White, if a choice had to be made.

Such guarded pessimism indicated that McLean’s name had failed to arouse any enthusiasm and the campaign for Daniel Webster was moving slowly. Some Northern Whig editors recognized that Van Buren would win many northern states by default unless Webster were given vigorous backing. His supporters among the old line families and financial interests endeavored to popularize his cause during the early summer. In the meantime, there was some talk in the Ohio Valley about William Henry Harrison as a possible candidate. This movement was strong enough to bring recognition from the Democrats in May. Although the Democrats belittled his chances, Harrison’s followers kept the movement alive. Such was the opposition Van Buren faced as the campaign rolled into the summer.

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137 Boston Courier, April 1, 1835.
138 Ibid., April 14, 1835.
139 Webster had been named by the Mass. Whig legislators in early 1835. Claude M. Fuess, Daniel Webster (Boston, 1930), II, 40; Boston Courier, April 30, 1835.
140 Boston Atlas, quoted in National Gazette, May 2, 1835.
141 National Gazette, May 18, 1835; the New York American also backed Webster, Boston Courier, April 30, 1835.
142 Freeman Cleaves, Old Tippecanoe (New York, 1939), 289, 293; Cincinnati Gazette, Feb. 21, 1835.
143 Western Hemisphere, May 6, 1835; Louisiana Courier, May 29, 1835.
144 Thomas Benton wrote, “to say that you will be elected, is to speak my opinion faintly & imperfectly; for my opinion is that you will be elected without opposition....” T. H. Benton to Martin Van Buren, June 7, 1835, Van Buren Papers.
CHAPTER 4

THE VICE PRESIDENT AND THE DEVELOPING SLAVERY CONTROVERSY

During the summer the slavery issue continued to come before the public. By way of keeping Van Buren's record straight, the Globe reprinted the Little Magician's letter to Samuel Gwin, Wright's letter to Ritchie, and Butler's long account to Garland.1 Two of these letters had appeared in that important national organ in April. Nonetheless, Blair demonstrated his awareness of the value of repetition, with respect to the "documents," as a means of overthrowing the charges of the Southern Whigs.

On the other side of the political fence, they were also cognizant of the principle. On June 27, the Richmond Whig reminded its readers that Van Buren was unacceptable to the South on the key issues before the land. His stand on slavery was offensive as was his record on the tariff and internal improvements. This article brought a sharp answer from the Enquirer. Ritchie said the opposition had raved on recklessly, painting Van Buren as a devil.2 All of this, moreover, in the face of his letter to Gwynn [sic] which expressly denied any Federal power over slavery within the states. Similarly, Van Buren had recanted on his vote for the Cumberland Road toll gates, while his vote for the tariff

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1Globe, June 20, 1835.
2Richmond Enquirer, June 30, 1835.
of 1828 followed instructions from the state legislature. Thus Ritchie concluded that the Democratic candidate was not an enemy of the South.

As he had done in the past with other items, Blair carried Ritchie's article in his paper, thereby insuring it a wider audience. At the same time the *Whig* returned to the subject and acknowledged that Van Buren's Gwin letter was favorable to a southern point of view. However, John H. Pleasants added that he had referred to two acts of the Vice President which were not in harmony with his professions. The first of them was spelled out in Butler's famous letter, he continued. Van Buren had voted for the New York Senate resolution of 1820; likewise the constitutional convention minutes indicated that he approved of Negro suffrage for the state in 1821. Although he gave no details concerning either event, Pleasants submitted that they proved Van Buren to be hostile to the slaveholding interests.

This exchange both helped and hindered Van Buren's campaign. The *Whig* was able to resume the party's sniping at the Little Magician. In specifically drawing attention to these aspects of his early career, it continued the process of damaging his prospects with many who were sensitive on the slavery issue. Conversely, the *Enquirer* was able to

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3 *Globe*, July 3, 1835.
4 *Richmond Whig*, July 3, 1835.
spotlight the Gwin letter which dealt with the contemporary threat, real or imaginary, of federal interference with slavery in the states. By answering Pleasants' other charges, the paper presented Van Buren to the Virginia voters as a friend of state rights and the federal compact. Certainly many could overlook the Whig data, for this man was pledged to respect slavery in the South.

Nevertheless, the Whigs hammered away on their strong point. Of the numerous local rallies held in the South during the summer, the one at Gloucester county, Virginia, was rather typical. William Robins was in the Chair, and N. Beverley Tucker was a guiding figure at the session. In an Address to the People, the gathering referred to several aspects of Van Buren's record. His vote in the New York Senate on the Missouri issue received appropriate coverage. He was described as one of those who sought to turn fanaticism to the advantage of the North. In the course of events the South was nearly deprived of its rights in the rich Missouri territory.

The Address spoke of fanaticism in connection with the Missouri crisis. The word was often applied to the spirit of the abolitionists in 1835, and this linking of current terminology with the deep excitement of 1819-1820 cleverly implied that Van Buren had earlier turned the work of the

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5The meeting occurred on June 13, 1835. Ibid., July 14, 1835.
6Ibid.
abolitionists to the advantage of his section. This despite the fact that the anti-slavery societies of 1819-1820 were not abolitionist in the manner of the 1835 organizations. Needless to say, such public statements aggravated the assault on Van Buren's political character in the South.

While the Democrats continued to complaint that the opposition was endeavoring to take the presidential election out of the hands of the people, the Whigs informed the South of the growing abolitionist menace in the North. They followed the activities of the abolitionists and emphasized their strength, thus distorting the real condition of Northern opinion. As in 1833-1834, the inference was plain; since the North was infested with agitators who were gaining the ear of the people, no Northern political leader could be trusted. Although Van Buren's name was seldom mentioned, he was caught up in this attack.

An excellent example of the Whig strategy was the careful attention given to the Address of the American Anti-Slavery Society of 1835. Although many Northern papers did not pay much attention to it, the United States Telegraph and the Richmond Whig featured the entire document. Recalling for their readers that few attended the anti-slavery meetings in 1832 and 1833, they pointed out that the

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7 The Enquirer said that the Whigs were running White and Webster in order to divide the vote and force the election into the House. Richmond Enquirer, July 14, 1835.
abolitionists had established 250 branches in thirteen states.\textsuperscript{8} Without attempting to balance the admitted growth of the movement against the total population of the North, they then proceeded to print the Address. It was the enthusiastic and optimistic call for action in the field and through the mail that spurred the abolitionists on to greater activity during the remainder of the year.\textsuperscript{9} Undoubtedly this publicity spurred many Southerners on to exaggerated fears of the North.\textsuperscript{10}

The \textit{Enquirer} struck back immediately against this type of journalism. It printed a long editorial on "Fanatics and Factious Politicians."\textsuperscript{11} Ritchie conceded that the abolitionists were dangerous and worth watching. He warned them not to move on slavery in the South. He also stated that the great proportion of the Northern population was uninfected with the virus and ought to help in putting down the fanatics. As for the \textit{Whig} and the \textit{Telegraph}, they were utilizing this Northern movement for political advantage. They were busy

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8}United States Telegraph, quoted in Richmond Whig, July 17, 1835.
\item \textsuperscript{9}Some $30,000 was set forth as the new budget. The report was issued after the anniversary of the society and was taken by the \textit{Telegraph} from the \textit{Emancipator}. \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{10}The \textit{Whig} hit the Democratic ticket hard at this time by reprinting a clever but insulting poetic attack on Johnson's domestic life. It openly hinted that he planned to marry a daughter to the future President. Quoted from the United States Telegraph, \textit{ibid.}, July 21, 1835.
\item \textsuperscript{11}Richmond Enquirer, July 21, 1835.
\end{itemize}
stirring up distrust of the North and bore watching by all good men of both sections.\[^{12}\]

Three days later the paper returned to this theme. In answering the Philadelphia Inquirer's public questions regarding the effect of the abolition crusade, it reiterated its fear of the anti-slavery men. They were not helping the slaves, and, as they embittered the slaveholders, they weakened the Union.\[^{13}\] In the same spirit Ritchie hit Duff Green and his allies severely. Since they were the minority party in the South, they used the abolition excitement to poison the mind of the South against all things Northern. The Enquirer said that the opposition really wanted to dissolve the Union and had threatened to use force against Van Buren, if he were elected, because he was so unacceptable to the South.\[^{14}\]

This propaganda battle to preserve a moderate, rational block of Southern opinion, in the face of the flaming missives coming from the North, obviously carried overtones for Van Buren's campaign. Other Democratic editors were quick to join the fight. The Petersburg Constellation (Va.) echoed the sentiments of the Enquirer. It noted that the fanatics were few in number and so unpopular that the law had to protect the Tappans in the summer of 1834. It assured the

\[^{12}\text{Ibid; the Charleston Courier later labelled the Telegraph a mischievous print. Charleston Courier, Nov. 3, 1835.}\]

\[^{13}\text{Richmond Enquirer, July 24, 1835.}\]

\[^{14}\text{Ibid.}\]
reader, in this article copied by the Globe, that it was scrutinizing the work of the abolitionists. Likewise it was aware of the insidious efforts of a Whig cabal to stir up the South, dissolve the Union, and make Calhoun lord of the South.

A similar attack also followed from the Albany Argus. This Democratic mouthpiece had carefully avoided the slavery controversy in the main. Now, however, it spoke of the "misguided and ambitious" abolitionists who, against the Constitution and sane reason, agitated the slavery question. Croswell said that their demands for immediate abolition actually hurt the slaves; it was hard to see what they expected to accomplish. Contrariwise, it was easy to appraise the profligate Southern Whig press which represented the anti-slavery schemes as "embracing a formidable portion, if not the great mass, of the people of the North." The Argus went on to say that these political papers hoped to inflame the South and to advance the cause of their party at the expense of national tranquility. It concluded that the two leaders in the onslaught were the United States Telegraph and the Richmond Whig.

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15 Petersburg Constellation, quoted in the Globe, July 28, 1835.
16 Ibid.
17 Albany Argus, July 31, 1835.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.; Ritchie repeated the essence of his earlier editorials on August 4. Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 4, 1835; see also the Globe, Aug. 1, 1835.
This type of language brought replies from the embattled Whig. In a moderate anger to the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, it explained that the South could tell the difference between the fanatics and its friends in the North. It warned, however, that unless the North took steps against the "assassins," the people of the South might not retain "the disposition to discriminate" between friend and foe.\(^{20}\) For apparent reasons the Whig did not admit that its policy tended to blur the thinking of the South respecting the relative strength of the abolitionists. In a later note it commented on Ritchie's "cunning" in suggesting that the Southern Whigs were as dangerous as the anti-slavery men and were attempting to drive all Southern support away from Van Buren.\(^{21}\) In Pleasants' thinking the Democratic policy was designed to underrate the abolitionist movement. He charged that Ritchie and the Democrats would be more conscious of the fanatics if Van Buren were a Southern man.\(^{22}\) Thus both parties agreed that the reporting of the abolition agitation was colored by presidential politics.

In this excited atmosphere, a meeting of Southern merchants and planters was held in Tammany Hall on July 20. It had been announced in the local papers and a sizable number of men attended.\(^{23}\) In view of the discussion which

\(^{20}\)Richmond Whig, July 24, 1835.

\(^{21}\)Ibid., July 31, 1835.

\(^{22}\)Ibid.

\(^{23}\)New York Courier and Enquirer, quoted in Niles' Register, Aug. 1, 1835.
developed, it was decided that a proposed convention of the Southern states would only highlight the abolition problem. Most of the men present concurred that the overwhelming spirit of the North was friendly to the South.²⁴ A resolution expressing confidence in the ability of the North to put down the excitement was passed.²⁵

This meeting was soon projected into the arena of partisan politics. The United States Telegraph did not believe that it meant anything to the South.²⁶ Naturally Ritchie delighted in the discomfiture of the Whigs. He stressed the fact that these men were on the scene and vindicated his opinion that the people of the North were to be trusted.²⁷ The Albany Argus felt that the meeting was scarcely necessary since the North was so adverse to the designs of the abolitionists. The paper approved, nevertheless, of the spirit manifested at the session.²⁸ Van Buren's name was not mentioned, but thinking citizens saw that his campaign was favorably affected by this event.

²⁴ The Southerners were undoubtedly influenced by the attitude of the New York City merchants who were generally hostile to any agitation of the slavery question. Foner, Business & Slavery, 14.
²⁵ This resolution also said that if a crisis over slavery did develop, property rights would have to be respected. Niles' Register, Aug. 1, 1835.
²⁶ Quoted in Richmond Whig, July 31, 1835.
²⁷ Richmond Enquirer, July 31, 1835.
²⁸ Albany Argus, Aug. 5, 1835.
During the early days of August, the Argus, which had begun to participate more actively in the slavery controversy, was forced to answer the charges of the New York Evening Star that Van Buren was the abolition candidate. The Star was edited by a one time member of the Regency, Mordacai Noah. A man of strong passions, Noah detested his former associates. Moreover, he strongly feared the abolitionists and the free Negro. His charges against Van Buren were important because they came from a Northern Whig print. Since the Northern Whigs had generally shunned the slavery issue in dealing with the campaign, Noah's pronouncement gave the Southern extremists excellent ammunition. The Argus pointed up this fact and replied to the Star by publishing the essential core of Van Buren's letter to Gwin, Wright's letter to Ritchie, and Butler's letter to Garland. It said, by way of conclusion, that the abolitionists were really the friends of the Star, the Telegraph, and the Whig. Shortly thereafter, the Whig, and the Enquirer exchanged a verbal volley over Van Buren's supposed abolitionist sentiments. The Whig would not say that the Vice President was an abolitionist or approved of their work, as much as

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30 Albany Argus, Aug. 3, 1835. The National Gazette later said that Noah ought not to appear too serious about his various fictions. He was charged with outraging truth on every occasion. National Gazette, Dec. 1, 1835.
31 Albany Argus, Aug. 3, 1835; this article by Croswell was repeated by the Globe on Aug. 13, 1835.
it disliked him. It did state, however, that he was an abolitionist in sentiment because of his vote on the state resolution regarding slavery in Missouri and his approval of Negro suffrage for New York.\textsuperscript{32} In addition, the paper charged that the abolitionists supported his candidacy. Thus the Whig fell back on its strongest evidence against Van Buren while assigning the abolitionists to his ranks.

As might be imagined, the Enquirer angrily denounced the Whig's attempt to place the Democratic standard-bearer dangerously close to abolitionism. It replied with yet another reprinting of the letter to Gwin and urged the reader to consult the other epistles that had been published so often in the Democratic organs.\textsuperscript{33} This skirmish was but another episode in the campaign which involved Van Buren and the controversy over slavery.

The oft-repeated Democratic argument that the New Yorker was safe for the South was well stated by Charles J. Ingersoll, a Pennsylvania politician, in a speech delivered on July 4. His remarks were given to the general public in August. The Argus labeled the speech a particularly good one.\textsuperscript{34} Croswell felt that Ingersoll presented Van Buren in a fine light as the "Northern man with Southern politics." The Globe was likewise pleased to run the entire discourse in its columns.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{32}Richmond Whig, Aug. 7, 1835.
\textsuperscript{33}Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 7, 1835.
\textsuperscript{34}Albany Argus, Aug. 7, 1835.
\textsuperscript{35}Globe, Aug. 10, 1835.
A brief survey of the speech reveals that Ingersoll urged his audience to remember the rights of the South respecting slavery under the federal compact. He then turned to the South and reminded it that a candidate from the Middle region of America who was sympathetic to the South was its best protection.\textsuperscript{36} Such a man was Van Buren; he did not believe the federal government had the power to interfere with slavery in the states and was surely to be preferred over a Southerner who might have an anti-democratic Northern following. Ingersoll contended that the Democratic candidate would stand up to the fanatical reformers of the North. He remarked that the Southern extremists ought to support a Northern man with Southern policies because he would be satisfactory to that section.

This bid for Southern support was published in a semi-official manner and further committed Van Buren to the defense of slavery in the South. By the time it was given wide publicity, however, another problem had arisen to highlight some of its statements. During the summer the South had become aroused by the publications of the abolitionists which flooded across the Mason-Dixon line. In Charleston, South Carolina, Postmaster Huger withheld delivery of the literature in late July, pending a ruling from Washington on the disposition of the material. Before Amos Kendall, the Postmaster General, could reply to Huger a mob broke into the

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
post office in Charleston and burned the anti-slavery literature which was known to be there. The fear and anger of other Southern communities mounted to a high pitch during the early days of August. This situation made Ingersoll's pledges stand out in bold relief for the Northern as well as the Southern citizen.

Actually, important events bearing on the crisis transpired almost simultaneously in early August. Kendall wrote to Huger on August 4. He explained that he had no personal acquaintance with the printed tracts of the abolitionists which Huger had detained. With regard to the law, he had no power to sanction the exclusion of any such material from the mail. Kendall observed, however, that he could not order Huger to deliver the papers, since the post office was not created to aid in the destruction of any segment of society. He told the South Carolinian to use his judgment while remembering that all officials had a high obligation to the community in which they lived.

This decision of Kendall's received the President's approval. Jackson wrote to his trusted aide,

But until Congress meets, and makes some arrangements by law...we can do nothing more than direct that those inflammatory papers be delivered to none but who will demand them.

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37 Charleston Courier, July 30-31, 1835.
38 Quoted in Western Hemisphere, Aug. 26, 1835.
as subscribers; and in every instance the Postmaster ought to take the names down and have them exposed thro the publik jons as subscribers to this wicked plan of exciting the negroes to insurrection and to massacre.

In this manner the responsible national officials approved the policy of not delivering the inflammatory abolitionist literature.

Before Kendall's letter could be sent to all points of the compass, there was evidence of Southern regret at the action in Charleston. The Charleston Courier and the Richmond Enquirer deplored the burning of federal mail before any instructions could come from Washington. Although both papers inferred that vigorous action would be taken if the Postmaster General did not sanction the withholding of the material, they were also aware of the danger that mob violence could get out of hand. The Courier printed a call for a meeting of the leading citizens in order to control the activities of the populace. The assembly that met in Charleston on August 3, set the stage for corresponding gatherings throughout the South.

The Charleston leaders expressed their fear and apprehension at the growing strength of the abolitionists in the

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39Andrew Jackson to Amos Kendall, Aug. 9, 1835; see also Amos Kendall to Andrew Jackson, Aug. 7, 1835, John S. Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Andrew Jackson (Washington, 1931), V, 359-361.

40Charleston Courier, July 31, 1835, and Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 7, 1835.

41Charleston Courier, July 30-31, 1835, and Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 7, 1835.
North. They also lamented the fact that the Federal mails were being used to spread the anti-slavery assaults on their constitutional rights and vital interests. In conclusion, they recommended that the South act as a unit to secure legislative protection from the Northern States and the general government. They warned that failure to grant such protection would necessitate action by the Southern States to suppress the evil. Since no word had been received from Washington, the citizens' committee established at the public rally proceeded to make arrangements with Huger to impound all of the abolitionist publications. This action calmed the city and received official sanction when Kendall's letter arrived.

As has been suggested, other Southern cities and localities held public meetings during August to protest against the work of the abolitionists. These sessions demanded action in the North and often created vigilance committees which were instructed to help police the locality against disruptive influences. All of this activity played into

42 Charleston Courier, Aug. 4, 1835.
43 Ibid., Aug. 5, 1835.
44 A meeting was held in Richmond on Aug. 4, Albany Argus, Aug. 13, 1835; John Tyler addressed a rally in James City county and at Gloucester courthouse, Va. in late Aug., 1835. Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers (Richmond, 1884-1896), I, 573-574.
the hands of the Whigs. Their repeated articles and editorials made them look like the wisest of prophets and the real guardians of Southern institutions. In the midst of the turmoil evident in the South, they continued to hammer away at the mad and dangerous schemes of the abolitionists.\textsuperscript{46} When news arrived, with surprising alacrity, that Northern meetings were to be held on the abolition problem, the Whig was not satisfied as the Enquirer was.\textsuperscript{47} Pleasants said that he did not care about rebuking the fanatics again; it had already been done a hundred times. He was looking for concrete legislative action in the North.\textsuperscript{48} This demand for laws and sanctions was undoubtedly appealing to the South, but it was dangerous for the North because of the constitutional guarantees, both federal and state, under which the abolitionists operated.

As Northern civic leaders of both parties prepared for the coming mass rallies, the Democratic papers of the North began to show their Southern colleagues that the Van Burenites

\textsuperscript{46}Richmond Whig, Aug. 4, 1835, also the series signed "Corn Planter" beginning Aug. 14, 1835.

\textsuperscript{47}The National Gazette condemned the violence in South Carolina but said there was provocation in the misguided philanthropy of the abolitionists. National Gazette, Aug. 7, 1835. Ritchie was pleased to notice calls for meetings in Boston and Philadelphia and felt they would answer the Whig charges that the North was full of abolitionists. Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 7, 1835.

\textsuperscript{48}Richmond Whig, Aug. 7, 1835; Tyler introduced resolutions at the Gloucester courthouse rally which demanded legislative action. They were adopted. Tyler, Letters of the Tylers, I, 574.
intended to stand up to the abolitionists as Ingersoll had pledged. The opportunity came as the papers fell in line behind Kendall's policy on the distribution of abolition material in the South.\(^49\) It should be noted that Kendall had written to other postmasters in addition to Huger. The *Albany Argus* specifically mentioned his letter to the postmaster at Richmond in commenting on the situation. "It will be conceded," the paper began, that Kendall's opinions were the only ones that could meet the exigencies of the times.\(^50\) These problems were new problems and he had no other course under the existing laws.

While other Democratic papers followed these views, the *New York Evening Post* struck out on an opposite trail. It could not go along with its political brothers and approve Kendall's action. In fact, the *Post* termed his decision an arbitrary one, creating a kind of practical nullification.\(^51\) The paper did not support the abolitionists except to say that they must not be denied complete freedom with regard to the use of the mails. This editorial policy, expressed as it was in a prominent New York journal presumably close to the Vice President, was not missed by the *Richmond Whig*. It asked if the article in the *Post* carried Van Buren's

\(^{49}\) For Ritchie's joy over Kendall's letter to Huger, see *Richmond Enquirer*, Aug. 11, 1835.

\(^{50}\) *Albany Argus*, Aug. 13, 1835.

\(^{51}\) *Richmond Whig*, Aug. 18, 1835.
sentiments. Pleasants threw the prickly question to the Democrats as he praised Kendall for allowing local postmasters to choose their own course on the abolitionist material.

The stalwart administration editors naturally tried to overcome the bad effect of this split in the party's press. Ritchie could not answer for Van Buren specifically, but he gave his Southern audience an editorial from the New York Times. This Democratic organ supported Kendall's decision and offset the voice of the Post. In a like manner, the Enquirer also quoted the Syracuse Standard, the New Haven Register, and the Portland Argus to show that the party was really solidly behind Kendall.

While Ritchie endeavored to quash Pleasant's insinuation that Van Buren possibly had sympathetic ties with the abolitionists, some Northern Whig papers joined the Post in protesting against Kendall's action. However, they made no effort to exploit the awkward situation created by the policy of the Post. The National Gazette testified to the surprising unanimity of the Northern press on the issue.

52 Ibid.
53 Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 18, 1835.
54 Ibid., Aug. 21, 1835.
56 National Gazette, Aug. 15, 1835.
Nonetheless, Pleasants and Noah would not let the position of the Post slip from the public view. Their agitation of the issue forced Croswell to turn on the Post. In his capacity as a leading member of the Regency and a close friend of Van Buren, he answered the dark hints of the opposition by linking the Post with the Whig paper, the New York American, on this matter. He also defended Kendall with a partial apology for his letter to Huger which concluded that the Charleston people had to act rapidly.

It is apparent that the Democratic chieftains were embarrassed by the policy of the Post which thundered away on the delicate theme of censorship of the public mails. With the rest of the party lined up so well behind the administration, they felt they had no alternative but to drum the paper out of the party. The Argus said that the Post was to be pitied for its ideas; it pointed to the colossal ego of the paper which would even dare to criticize Jackson if he agreed with Kendall. The Enquirer stated that the Post was not close to Van Buren and could not speak for him in any special sense. Finally, the Globe

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57 See the attack on the Post from the Evening Star, quoted in Richmond Whig, Aug. 21, 1835.
58 Albany Argus, Aug. 24, 1835.
59 Ibid.
60 The Western Hemisphere said that circulation of the literature was "out of the question." Western Hemisphere, Aug. 26, 1835.
61 Albany Argus, Sept. 11, 1835.
62 The New York Times was cited as the authority for this statement. Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 15, 1835.
finished the attack by virtually excommunicating the Post.63

This protracted incident was important for Van Buren and the Democratic party. It showed that the high command of the party believed that the fear and anguish of the South before the assault of the abolitionists were deep and genuine. Van Buren and the other party leaders had followed the tense developments of the mid-summer very closely. After the attack on the post office in Charleston, the situation was described by Richard Parker. "Before I left Richmond," he wrote, "much feeling began to be displayed respecting the designs and measures of the Northern Abolitionists and it has increased since."64 He warned the Little Magician that unless there were steps taken in the North to disavow the anti-slavery men, the parties would be disrupted. Parker expressed the hope that such action would begin in New York. In view of these circumstances, the attitude of the Post became a matter of the highest moment. When that paper refused to change its policy, Van Buren and the party leaders rather tragically had to disavow the print in order to present a united front to the South. As the Northern man with Southern politics, Van Buren found his campaign strategy again affected by the slavery issue.

63 Globe, Sept. 18, 1835.
64 R. E. Parker to Martin Van Buren, Aug. 21, 1835, Van Buren Papers.
Meanwhile, the great upsurge of Northern indignation against the program and tactics of the abolitionists swept through the section. Meetings had been called in some places to denounce the abolitionists even before the news of the action in South Carolina became known. As the fear and anger of the South became more manifest, a corresponding spirit developed in the North. The *Argus*, for one, praised the firmness and moderation of the Richmond meeting and called for rallies throughout the North as well as in Albany. Croswell said that the mass of the citizenry was in sympathy with the South and hostile to the fanatical reformers. At the same time, John Q. Adams commented on the divergent patterns in the land in his diary. He noted the current trend toward democracy and humanitarianism, the powerful influence of British emancipation, and yet the antipathy of the people to the propaganda of the abolitionists. He wrote that men of both parties were calling for meetings to put down the abolitionists, but he doubted that the movement could be stopped by resolutions.

Others in the North may have shared Adams' feelings, but anti-abolitionist enthusiasm was evident as the early

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65 An example is the meeting in Boston cited in the *Richmond Enquirer*, Aug. 7, 1835.  
meetings convened. Among the larger cities, Portland, Maine, held its meeting on August 17, while Boston's leading figures staged their rally four days later. The Boston session, held in famous, old Fanueil Hall, was watched with interest because of the work of Garrison. Since the Philadelphia area was the center of much of the Quaker spirit, the public gathering there was also important. Writing on the day of the Philadelphia meeting, Croswell was happy to report that the "ball" was rolling across the North. As almost every town of any size was busy planning a demonstration, the South was made aware of the disrepute and contempt which covered the abolitionists at home.

As might be expected, the Richmond Enquirer and the Globe gave liberal coverage to the sessions in the North. Ritchie consistently said that the Southern Whigs exaggerated the real strength and threat of the abolitionists for their own divisive purposes. Speaking as a leading Southern Democrat, he had been well pleased to hear of the preparations for the meetings of the North. His reaction to the first of them was summed up by the statement that the North was

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68 The National Gazette was favorably impressed by the 1,500 prominent names fixed to the call for the meeting in Boston. National Gazette, Aug. 20, 1835.
69 Albany Argus, Aug. 24, 1835.
70 Ritchie printed the proceedings and resolutions of many of the meetings as well as shorter notices of the less important gatherings. He began with the Portland and New Bedford, Mass., meetings. Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 25, 1835; the Globe followed a similar policy.
71 Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 7, 18, 21, 1835.
speaking out and would crush the fanatics. He was delighted to know that his views on the North were correct; with cooperation between the sections, the South might sleep in peace in the future.

Despite Ritchie's optimistic tone, other Southerners, and especially Whigs, looked beyond the expected denunciations in the North for concrete legislation to curb the abolitionists. James H. Hammond spoke for many defenders of slavery when he told Mordacai Noah that the Northern States must pass laws denying protection to the fanatics who violated the laws of the South. He asserted, "This alone can save the Union--so soon as it is clearly ascertained that this will not be done, we shall dissolve the union, & seek by war the redress denied us...." In the same vein the Charleston Courier asked that the Boston Daily Advocate be suppressed for defending the local abolitionists. Pleasants repeated his request for legislation when he lashed out at the August 3 editorial in the Argus which said that the abolitionists were the friends of the Whig. He called the Argus the most cold-blooded party print in America. Furthermore, he added that the time had come for action in New York.

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72Ibid., Aug. 25, 1835.
74Charleston Courier, Aug. 19, 1835.
75See page 139.
76Richmond Whig, Aug. 14, 1835.
"Mr. Van Buren's friends are all powerful in the Legislature," he wrote, "and the South will soon know whether they value the lives of Southern people, or the abstract 'freedom of opinion' most highly."\textsuperscript{77}

The pressure on the Van Burenites was also well expressed by the prominent Georgia Democrat, William Schley. He wrote that "The late movements of the abolitionists" alarmed the people of the South so badly that unless the citizens of the North did something by way of "legislative enactment" the Union was in jeopardy.\textsuperscript{78} He said, furthermore, that the Whigs were accusing Van Buren of desiring freedom for the slaves. This letter was followed by one from the North Carolina leader, Romulus N. Saunders. He penned a note to the Vice President and said that Webster, as the leading Northern Whig candidate, might suggest legislation on the abolition question. Saunders asked Van Buren to consider a law against the printing of inflammatory material. "Such a law in New York would have a favourable result. But it should not be undertaken without a certainty of success," he concluded.\textsuperscript{79}

As the resolutions of the Northern meetings were rushed into print, it became apparent that the leading political figures who controlled the sessions generally avoided a

\textsuperscript{77}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{78}William Schley to Martin Van Buren, Aug. 22, 1835, Van Buren Papers.
\textsuperscript{79}R. M. Saunders to Martin Van Buren, Aug. 25, 1835, Van Buren Papers.
definite commitment for legislation. The *Boston Courier* explained to Pleasants that despite the Northern indignation against the domestic and foreign "renegades and hypocrites," no power in the section could "infringe the liberty of the press or establish censorship of it...."80 The *Western Hemisphere* deplored the activities of Amos Dresser and the other abolitionists, but it did not like the threats of the *Nashville Republican*. The Columbus paper told the Tennessee Whigs that Ohio could no more control its citizens than Tennessee could in keeping horse thieves from going to the Buckeye state.81

Thus, despite the initial enthusiasm of many like the *Richmond Whig*, which said that the abolitionists must be like Sir Henry Vane if they did not fall before the public excitement, those who called for laws and sanctions were gradually disappointed as the North backed away from the constitutional issues involved in the problem.82 As an illustration, the *Charleston Courier* editorialized that it could not approve of the work of the great New York city rally, because it did not demand state legislation.83

Interestingly enough, many intelligent citizens of both sections of the country must have realized that as the days

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80 *Boston Courier*, Aug. 12, 1835.
81 *Western Hemisphere*, Aug. 19, 1835.
82 *Richmond Whig*, Aug. 28, 1835.
83 The Philadelphia resolutions were the only set that was deemed strong enough by the paper. *Charleston Courier*, Sept. 3, 1835.
slipped by no word had been heard from Albany. Van Buren's reputation and standing before the electorate were involved in the tardiness of his adopted city to make its views known. Croswell had called for a public session on August 13; eleven days later he said that the Whigs objected to a rally to denounce the abolitionists because it would help Van Buren's campaign. He countered that Van Buren's views were already known in the South. He did point out, however, that a bipartisan meeting would shame and confuse that branch of the Whig press which was led by Noah and Green. Notwithstanding the delaying tactics of the opposition, he confidently asserted that a meeting would be held.

As had been described, the pressure mounted for Van Buren and his friends to stand up to the abolitionists. Croswell became quite indignant over the indifference of the crosstown Daily Advertiser. More than the Albany Evening Journal, it was responsible for the lack of civic harmony in the community. Croswell was most emphatic as he insisted that a demonstration must be held to inform the South that the reformers had no strength in the capital of the Empire State. Finally, during the last days of August, a call for a meeting on September 4 appeared. It was signed by a long list of locally prominent men.

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84 Albany Argus, Aug. 24, 1835.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., Aug. 27, 1835.
87 Ibid., Sept. 3, 1835.
the session occurred, the *Argus* printed a long editorial from the *Richmond Enquirer*. It said that the North must not touch slavery in the Southland or the Union would split.88 This gesture was possibly designed to stiffen the backs of some citizens who wavered in their determination to hold the meeting.

The Albany anti-abolitionist meeting was presided over by the Governor, William L. Marcy. As Croswell had predicted, a bi-partisan group directed the affair. The venerable, old fighter, Ambrose Spencer, addressed the assembled throng, as did the Rev. Cortland Van Rensselaer and an important young member of the Regency, John A. Dix.89 Dix also had a leading role in the preparation of the resolutions which were, of course, adopted by the townspeople.90

Turning to a glance at Dix's address, it is evident that his main theme was the protection of slavery in the South during that hour of peril. He did speak out against the slave system, however, and expressed the hope that Southern leaders might gradually terminate the use of slave labor.91

The resolutions adopted at the rally contained the following sentiments:

91 *Albany Argus*, Sept. 5, 1835.
Resolved, that under the Constitution... the relation of master and slave is a matter belonging exclusively to the people of each State... that the general Government has no control over it....

....., That we deprecate... the conduct of individuals who are attempting to coerce our brethren in other States into the abolition of Slavery....

....., That while we would maintain inviolate the liberty of speech, and the freedom of the press, we consider discussions, which... tend to enflame the public mind... at war with every rule of moral duty...[and] as disloyal to the union....

There is no doubt that the Albany demonstration, once it was held, was a distinguished affair. The presence of the Governor, Comptroller Flagg, Secretary of State Dix, and other officials lent dignity to the gathering. Similarly, the patroon, Stephen Van Rensselaer, and Abraham Van Vechten, Harmanus Bleecker, Rufus H. King, and Edward Livingston, to mention but a few, added prestige to the rally. Van Buren did not see fit to attend, but his personal and political friends were present in sufficient numbers to put a stamp on the meeting.

The proceedings of the session and the resolutions adopted by the people constituted a strong defense of Southern rights under the federal system and a strong rebuke to the abolitionists. Along with many other Northern rallies, nevertheless, this one did not produce a definite call for

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92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
a set of laws to smash the reformers.

The Argus triumphantly laid the entire record of the assembly before its readers and said that the "predominant sentiment of the North" was captured by the bi-partisan meeting.94 Once the local papers had carried the details of the rally, a booklet was printed which was sent out to publicize the gathering. Because of the important political overtones associated with the meeting, the press generally noticed it in some manner. The National Gazette was pleased with the reports it received and printed the resolutions beside an account of an anti-abolition meeting of the clergy of Richmond.95 The Globe gave the rally very extensive coverage.96 Ritchie published a full report on the meeting along with a short account of a number of other sessions held in New England. He said that the public ought to examine the Albany rally at which the Governor presided.97 With a bow to the Whigs, he thereby gave the electorate the Democratic proof that the Van Burenisites were stern enough to take a strong stand against the abolitionists.98 Needless to say, Van Burens's name and reputation were silently involved in the mind of the reader.

94Ibid.
95National Gazette, Sept. 7, 8, 1835.
96Globe, Sept. 10, 1835.
97Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 11, 1835.
98Ritchie also noted that travellers coming from the North spoke of the excitement in that section. Even the Charleston Courier admitted it was impressed. Ibid.
On the other side of the political fence, the *Richmond Whig* was happy to learn that Marcy attended the demonstration; the paper stated that the proceedings indicated a good attitude. "Nothing is wanting indeed....," Pleasants wrote, "But the recognition of the legislative right to pass a series of laws." In closing the article, he said that Van Buren's friends were prominent at the gathering and that one could only infer that they rejected the idea or were afraid to speak out. The *Charleston Courier*, which maintained a rather independent position while defending the South, hailed the sentiments of the Albany rally, but lamented that they were "not spiced with a demand for... immediate legislative action...."

After the press had passed judgement on the Albany meeting, the well edited *National Gazette* said, "The abolition question is more and more mixed up with the Presidential Question, in the Southern journals. Mr. Van Buren's conduct...in regard to the former... warmly discussed with reference to the candidateship." Undoubtedly the *Gazette* was late in recognizing the influence of the slavery issue in the campaign, but its editorial pointed to the persistent efforts to destroy Van Buren's political character.

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99 *Richmond Whig*, Sept. 11, 1835.
100 *Ibid.*
101 *Charleston Courier*, Sept. 15, 1835.
102 *National Gazette*, Sept. 18, 1835.
in the South. Even as the passions of the section cooled somewhat, the fight continued. The Richmond Whig was called to task by the Gazette for stating that, the rallies in the North notwithstanding, the majority of the people were infected with the anti-slavery spirit. The Gazette said that the Whig was aiming at a Southern convention and the defeat of Northern men in the campaign. It chided Pleasants for publishing articles on abolition and anti-slavery material when he wanted similar literature choked off in the North. This theme was later picked up by Blair and repeated with strong sarcasm.

In addition to the publicity which the press gave the Albany anti-abolition rally, Van Buren saw to it that William C. Rives received a personal copy of the proceedings. This move was a judicious one considering Rives' defeat in the Democratic National Convention. Van Buren wrote to the Virginian, "I send you enclosed the proceedings of our friends here. With prudence & moderation...this excitement may be

103 Ritchie published quotations from the Alexandria Gazette, the Baltimore American, and the Lynchburg Virginian, to show that the solid Whig papers, as contrasted with the Richmond Whig and the United States Telegraph, approved of the spirit manifested in the North. Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 22, 1835.

104 National Gazette, Sept. 29, 1835.

105 Ibid.; the paper later reminded Pleasants that in 1831-1832, he was for anti-slavery measures. Ibid., Oct. 2, 1835.

made to strengthen & improve the relations between the North & the South & greatly fortify the union."  

In a similar way, the Vice President had written a letter to Schley, the Georgian, in order to highlight his views on the Albany meeting. Van Buren told Schley that he concurred with the thoughts expressed at the meeting. He went on to say that he advised the calling of such a gathering, but that he was not present when it was held. The Democratic candidate also answered the Whigs who charged that he was in favor of freedom for the Southern slaves. He stressed the fact that there was no evidence for the allegation, especially since he earlier denied "all authority on the part of the federal government to interfere in the matter." Moreover, Van Buren reminded Schley that he was on record "against the propriety of agitating the question in the District of Columbia."

The Schley letter was a strong campaign document. It rebutted once again the unending Whig gossip that Van Buren leaned toward abolitionism, and it tied him to the Albany rally as a non-voting adviser. In addition, the letter was the first public statement from his desk on the crucial issues of the campaign in nearly fifteen months. After

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109 Ibid.
Schley had time to use the letter in Georgia, it was copied by the Democratic press. Blair gave it to the country as "a renewal of the declaration of Mr. Van Buren against the movements of the abolition party...."  

He asserted that the Vice President used his power to call the Albany session. In concluding, Blair stated that the New Yorker considered the abolition-slavery question involved in the fate of the confederacy.  

The Richmond Enquirer printed the letter with a reminder that it had recommended the sentiments of the Albany meeting to its southern audience.  

In the Crescent City, the Courier accompanied the document with the comment that it "must forever put to rest the vile attempt to connect him in any manner with the abolitionists."  

Van Buren's enemies acknowledged the letter. The Richmond Whig refused to charge the New Yorker with Tappanism as it printed the entire document. Pleasants did say, however, that Van Buren had avoided the question of Congressional power over slavery in the District of Columbia. This oblique attack signified the general acceptability of the Schley letter.  

Niles' Register followed the letter with an

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110 Ibid.  
111 Ibid.; the Western Hemisphere copied the Globe account. Western Hemisphere, Oct. 28, 1835.  
112 Ritchie also printed the proceedings of a general Tammany Hall rally held on Sept. 29, which dealt with the abolitionists. Richmond Enquirer, Oct. 6, 1835.  
113 Louisiana Courier, Oct. 9, 1835.  
114 Richmond Whig, Oct. 9, 1835.
article from the Columbus Enquirer (Ga.) which assailed Van Buren for backing Rufus King in 1820. The Georgia paper stated that a man of that calibre could work with the fanatics and rob Georgians of their property. It is interesting to note that the independent Charleston Courier published the letter with no comment.

The Democrats had reason to be pleased with the favorable reception given to the Schley letter. Ritchie replied to the sniping of the Whig with a long article on the letter and the Albany meeting. He said that he was satisfied, but that the Evening Star, the Petersburg Intelligencer, and the Whig were papers that would print anything to keep the political fight going. Actually the urgent excitement evident in both sections of the country since mid-summer gradually died down during the early days of October. Ritchie printed a lead editorial on the French negotiations on October 16, and thereby ended a series dealing with the abolition question which extended back to early August. Blair featured a two column article from the Louisville Advertiser on October 5. It summarized Southern Democratic opinion that the South had nothing but praise for the manner in which its constitutional and political rights regarding slavery

115 Niles' Register, Oct. 10, 1835.  
118 Ibid., Oct. 16, 1835.
had been defended by the North.\textsuperscript{119} It went on to say that those who continued to talk of legislation by the North were Calhoun men -- dangerous extremists.\textsuperscript{120} In order to pound the point home, Blair gathered editorials from the Southern press favorable to the Albany rally and reprinted them during early October.

Thus the Democrats seem to have scored a victory for Van Buren with the Albany demonstration. It proved that his immediate followers could take a strong stand against the abolitionists. As Croswell foresaw, the rally was a necessary step in enhancing the New Yorker's stature as the Northern man with Southern politics. Moreover, the bipartisan character of the meeting appears to have been a sincere move to deflate the worst insinuations of the Southern Whigs. In view of the grave warnings he received from the South, Van Buren's letter to Schley was a master stroke which personally linked him to the rally as well as answering the charges that he had abolitionist tendencies. In the North the meeting and the letter were also important because of the hostility to the reformers. They were undeniably significant for thousands of Northern voters.

The Southern State Righters, however, showed that this

\textsuperscript{119}Globe, Oct. 5, 1835.

\textsuperscript{120}Calhoun thought the South was excited about the fanatics. He foresaw resistance even to disunion, but hoped that abolitionism would be stopped before that step was necessary. J. C. Calhoun to Duff Green, Aug. 30, 1835, Jameson, ed., "Calhoun Correspondence," 345.
rally, in common with others in the North, did not call for repressive legislation against the abolitionists. In a large measure, they were able to keep the slavery issue alive by publishing reports on the abolitionists and by stressing the fact that the North, with the Van Burenites in the foreground, would not take adequate steps to protect Southern rights.

III

As the presidential race developed, a market for campaign biographies was created. The book by Davy Crockett, *The Life of Martin Van Buren*, was advertised by the Whigs in August.\(^{121}\) Noah recommended it, but the *Richmond Enquirer* said that it was worthy of a buffoon.\(^{122}\) In Charleston the *Courier* labelled it a biographical denunciation; it reported that there was some humor in the work but more bitterness and malignity.\(^{123}\) The *Courier* also thought that it was beyond Crockett's literary ability. With regard to the last point, modern research points to Augustin Smith Clayton, a Georgia State Righter, as the probable author of the work.\(^{124}\)

The book was uneven and at times inaccurate in its coverage of Van Buren's career. It began by calling the

\(^{121}\) *Boston Courier*, Aug. 1, 1835.
\(^{122}\) *Richmond Enquirer*, Aug. 7, 1835.
\(^{123}\) *Charleston Courier*, Aug. 17, 1835.
\(^{124}\) James A. Shackford, *David Crockett, The Man and the Legend* (Chapel Hill, 1956), 119, 158.
Democratic Convention of 1835 an officeholder's caucus dominated by the insiders of the Jackson Administration. The people had tired of the caucus system, Crockett wrote, and yet they saw Van Buren nominated by a group of closely screened delegates.\(^{125}\) This un-republican maneuver brought before the country a "secret, sly, selfish, cold, calculating, distrustful, treacherous...." candidate.\(^{126}\) According to Crockett, the warmhearted and passionate Jackson turned to Van Buren for one reason only -- revenge. Revenge against Calhoun was the controlling passion that made the President a friend of the New Yorker. The book continued that "there is no manner of good thing in him \(\text{Van Buren}\).\(^{127}\) It stated that if the Vice President were elected, it would be "wholly and solely upon the strength of General Jackson's popularity...."\(^{128}\) While there is a degree of truth in some of these statements, the bitterness and the partisan tone of the book are apparent.

As it developed Van Buren's record, the account turned to the Missouri controversy. The leader of the Northern forces at that time was identified as Rufus King, a veritable fanatic on the question of slavery. In Crockett's

\(^{125}\)David Crockett, The Life of Martin Van Buren (Philadelphia, 1835), 8, 16.
\(^{126}\)Ibid., 13.
\(^{127}\)Ibid., 6.
\(^{128}\)Ibid.
words, King and Van Buren had acted together against the War of 1812, and they "thought, or pretended to think alike on the Missouri question." He said that Van Buren's support of King in the New York Senatorial election was part of a bargain which involved the Missouri situation. The chief item of evidence produced to substantiate this conclusion was an altered copy of Van Buren's letter to Noah written on December 17, 1819. Although the original letter now rests in the Van Buren papers, Noah, knowing full well that it would damage Van Buren's standing in the South, loaned a copy, or the original, to the author of this work.

A comparison of the original with that printed in Crockett's biography reveals that the Whig account omitted the reference to the Republican party's anticipation of King's forthcoming election. The other editorial changes are evident when the last part of the Crockett version is presented.

Mr. King's views toward us are honorable and correct. The Missouri question conceals, so far as he is concerned, no plot and we shall give it a true direction...My 'considerations' & the aspect of the Albany Argus will shew you that we have entered on the work in earnest. We cannot, therefore, look back. Let us not then have any halting. I will put my head on its propriety."

129Ibid., 73.
130Ibid., 76-77.
131See page 52 and Ibid., 87.
132Ibid.
The substitution of "we" for "he" in the key sentence dealing with the Missouri question was the most harmful alteration for Van Buren's cause. The new wording made the Little Magician a full participant in the drive to restrict slavery in Missouri. The other changes and additions highlighted Van Buren's decisive role in the Bucktail rapprochement with the King men. Crockett, who spoke of the Regency when referring to the Bucktails, also offered a rather accurate account of the facts in the senatorial election, and the additions to the Noah letter served as convincing documentation for his presentation.\textsuperscript{133} It need scarcely be added that once this book got into circulation, the pertinent section of Butler's letter to Garland fell under a cloud.

If the Democratic leaders worried about the effect the biography would have in the troubled South, they did not betray their feelings. It was not long, however, before the Whigs drew attention to the Noah letter in their press. The \textit{Boston Atlas}' New York correspondent wrote that Van Buren was a Northern man who would not sacrifice himself for patriotism on the Negro question. He offered the Crockett version of the Noah letter to his readers as proof of the Vice President's hostility to the South.\textsuperscript{134} Nearly

\textsuperscript{133}Ibid., 75-87.
\textsuperscript{134}Quoted in \textit{Richmond Whig}, Aug. 21, 1835.
a month later, on September 14, the United States Telegraph printed the same epistle.\textsuperscript{135} When Pleasants ran the letter a second time, he referred to the silence of the Democrats on the matter. Furthermore, he said that if Van Buren had changed his views since 1819, there was nothing to prevent him from switching again. This "unmasking" of Van Buren, as Pleasants termed it, was renewed within a week. Strangely enough, he did not remind the South of Butler's letter.\textsuperscript{136}

Although the Democratic press would not touch this new issue involving Van Buren and the Missouri controversy, the semi-official biography of the standard bearer did handle the question along with other related matters. This work, entitled The Life and Political Opinions of Martin Van Buren, was published by William A. Holland, a professor at Trinity College, Connecticut. It was available to the public in the fall of 1835. The complexion of the book was described as color de rose by the National Gazette.\textsuperscript{137} Nevertheless, the paper praised the author for recording Van Buren's speeches and votes on many issues before the country. It concluded that the biography created a more favorable impression of the talent and frankness of the Magician than was generally admitted.\textsuperscript{138} In the South, the Richmond Whig

\textsuperscript{135}Quoted in \textit{ibid.}, Sept. 18, 1835.
\textsuperscript{136}\textit{ibid.}, Sept. 25, 1835.
\textsuperscript{137}\textit{National Gazette}, Nov. 23, 1835.
\textsuperscript{138}\textit{ibid.}
would merely say that it feared a eulogy in the book.\textsuperscript{139} Blair should have reviewed the work at the earliest opportunity, but he blamed Congressional business for a delay until February, 1836. The \textit{Globe} stated rather surprisingly that the volume was not written to advance any one man but was intended to show how the party grew with Van Buren.\textsuperscript{140} Blair pointed to the labor Van Buren lavished on the cause as he rose from an "obscure attorney" to his high station. He recommended that the remarks of the candidate on the origin of the parties and the banking system be read closely.

As the \textit{National Gazette} indicated, Holland endeavored to give a full account of Van Buren's career. His work was weighted down with excerpts from many speeches but, with its balance, was superior to Crockett's biography. After considering Van Buren's youthful years and the events of his early course in New York politics, Holland dealt with the Missouri crisis.\textsuperscript{141} He was undoubtedly influenced by Butler's letter in composing his remarks. The Albany mass meeting of December, 1819, was discussed in terms that bore the clear imprint of the spring campaign document.\textsuperscript{142} As for the backing given Rufus King in 1820, this work said,

\textsuperscript{139}\textit{Richmond Whig}, Nov. 24, 1835.
\textsuperscript{140}\textit{Globe}, Feb. 17, 1836.
\textsuperscript{141}He did not mention any of Van Buren's early contacts with slavery in New York. William Holland, \textit{The Life and Political Opinions of Martin Van Buren} (Hartford, 1835).
\textsuperscript{142}\textit{Ibid.}, 144-146.
"There are few acts in the public life of any statesman more liberal and highminded than Mr. Van Buren's support of Mr. King; yet few have ever been assailed with greater violence and unfairness."\(^{143}\) In answer to the Whig charge of a King - Van Buren bargain, Holland asserted that the 1819 pamphlet written by Van Buren contained the reasons for the Republican support of King. He went on to say that no evidence revealing any other motive had been brought forth.\(^ {144}\) At this point in the narrative, he admitted that the Whigs had printed a letter, purported to be from Van Buren, which was concerned with King's election. Although he would not rule on the authenticity of the letter, Holland included it in his account.\(^ {145}\) He said that the reader must judge if any harm were done to Van Buren's cause.

The New York Resolution of 1820 was quoted in the next section of the book after Governor Clinton's request for legislative action was described. In a passage that was not quite as complex as Butler's, Holland wrote that Van Buren voted with the Senate to accept the resolution, although he had no hand in bringing it before the legislature.\(^ {146}\) The three episodes involving Van Buren and the Missouri crisis were thus discussed by Professor Holland.

\(^ {143}\)Ibid., 143.
\(^ {144}\)Ibid.
\(^ {145}\)With a few minor changes it was the same as the copy printed by Crockett. Ibid., 144.
\(^ {146}\)Ibid., 146-147.
The influence of Butler's explanation was apparent. At the risk of reopening Whig debate on two of the events not mentioned by Crockett, Holland repeated the nearly standard Democratic format. He cast a shadow of doubt over Van Buren's letter to Noah and printed it with a minimum of comment. Actually there was little else he could do with the letter. Interestingly enough, none of the 1835 discussions touched on the fact that the Missouri question became involved in the gubernatorial race of 1820, which was so important for Van Buren. Taken as a whole, Holland's handling of Van Buren's relationship to the Missouri issue was unimaginative.

The biography mentioned the Little Magician's votes on the free Negro suffrage question in the state constitutional convention. After discussing the work of the convention, the succeeding pages of the book described the Vice President's record on the national issues of the day. Holland presented Van Buren as a solid Jacksonian. He did include a reference to the current excitement over the abolition movement. He printed the Gwln and the Schley letters in order to demonstrate Van Buren's sentiments on the abolition crusade and the question of federal interference with

147Holland sent a copy to Van Buren on Nov. 13, 1835. There is no evidence as to the amount of help Van Buren gave the author. William Holland to Martin Van Buren, Nov. 13, 1835, Van Buren Papers.
148Holland, Martin Van Buren, 187.
slavery. The leading resolutions of the Albany rally were published as a companion document. 149

Both campaign biographies undoubtedly confirmed the prejudices of many in both parties. The organization, thoroughness, and documentation of the Democratic work made it the better book for the independent and undecided voter. On the slavery issue, Holland reaffirmed the orthodox Democratic position that minimized Van Buren's participation in the movement to restrict slavery in Missouri. Nevertheless, the sensitive Northern reader could see that the Little Magician committed himself with his section during that troublesome period. The publication of Crockett's version of the Noah letter, on the other hand, doubtless damaged the case for Van Buren with many Southerners who had reason to wonder about Van Buren's role in the Missouri crisis. Holland's book was forthright in discussing the facts on the Negro suffrage problem. As for the abolition excitement, Holland stole a march on Crockett when he printed his material on the subject. In this way he strengthened the New Yorker's standing with many voters in both sections of the country.

Van Buren's reputation was also affected at this time by another development which had no relation to the publication of these biographies. The organization of the New

149Ibid., 345-348.
York Anti-Slavery Society in the fall of 1835 was consequential for his campaign. From the abolitionist standpoint an active state society was highly desirable. Alvan Stewart, president of the Utica organization, headed the list of those who signed the call for the state meeting. The sessions were to be held in Utica, commencing on October 21. The political ramifications of such a meeting were immediately sensed by the Richmond Whig, which published the entire statement of the abolition leaders summoning the gathering. The Whig stated that the document gave direct evidence that the anti-slavery fire was spreading in New York. The ineffectiveness of the Albany rally, and others like it, was highlighted by this announcement from the abolitionists.

Croswell and his staff likewise saw the danger for Van Buren. The Argus denounced Stewart and his cohorts as incendiaries. It went further and assured the South that these troublemakers were Whigs; they were all opposed to Van Buren's candidacy. As for the Utica Standard and Democrat, Croswell said that it was softheaded like the Evening Post of New York in arguing that these fanatics be

150 Richmond Whig, Oct. 2, 1835.
151 Quoted in Globe, Oct. 8, 1835.
152 The Democratic effort to link the abolitionists and the Whigs was begun in the summer. See the Albany Argus, Aug. 3, 1835. The Utica Observer said that many but not all were Whigs. Quoted in Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 15, 1835; the strategy was spreading in the Van Buren press, said the National Gazette, Sept. 19, 1835.
permitted to discuss the issues.\textsuperscript{153} In Utica itself, Croswell's hostility was echoed by the leading citizens who assembled in a mass meeting on October 8. The mayor presided and Samuel Beardsley, a prominent member of the Regency, spoke as the townspeople resolved to stand aloof from this threatening movement.\textsuperscript{154} Their protests were not acknowledged by the city council, however, for the abolitionists were granted permission to meet in the city. Subsequent rallies both for and against the abolitionists only heightened the tension in the community.\textsuperscript{155} On the appointed day the anti-slavery men gathered to begin their work, but they were dispersed by an angry mob. Beardsley was active as one of the Utica agitators. The abolitionists retired to Peterboro and organized the new state society.\textsuperscript{156}

Commenting on the train of events, the \textit{Albany Argus} said that Gerrit Smith, the host for the routed delegates, was a man of talents. Nonetheless, the paper contended that freedom of speech was not the main issue at stake. It was instead the dangerous program of the abolitionists which jeopardized the peace and harmony of the union.\textsuperscript{157} Croswell asserted that the abolitionists knew that their

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{153}\textit{Globe}, Oct. 8, 1835.
\item \textsuperscript{154}\textit{The Utica Observer}, quoted in the \textit{Philanthropist} (Cincinnati, O.), Jan. 8, 1836.
\item \textsuperscript{155}See the account of these sessions in \textit{ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{156}\textit{ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{157}Quoted in \textit{Richmond Enquirer}, Nov. 20, 1835.
\end{itemize}
meeting would have political consequences. He said that it would exasperate the South and injure Van Buren throughout the country, because it pointed up the division of opinion in New York. It is impossible to surmise the influence which this incident had on public opinion. In a tense period, it was but another development which intertwined the delicate abolition problem in the campaign.

The fall months under discussion witnessed the culmination of an important change in the Whig camp. Harrison emerged as the standard bearer in the Ohio Valley and much of the North. His war record and availability, plus a certain popularity, kept his name before the party strategists during the spring and summer. When the Cincinnati Whig recommended that he join Webster's ticket, the old general refused. He intimated that he was seriously interested in the Presidency. This development encouraged his political friends but was a disappointment to the Eastern Whigs. Nevertheless, the New York American suggested that he undertake a serious campaign in Ohio. Sensing that McLean's candidacy had come to nothing, Pleasants observed that Harrison would be the best man for the Whigs in Ohio, Indiana, and possibly Pennsylvania. Succeeding weeks brought evidence that the movement

158 Boston Courier, July 25, 1835.
159 The reaction of the National Intelligencer and the New York American was cited in the Albany Argus, July 25, 1835.
160 Richmond Whig, July 24, 1835.
associated with his name was gaining support in the border South and mid-Atlantic areas.\textsuperscript{161} Although some White partisans remonstrated against the backing given Harrison, the contagion spread so that by fall he was the strongest Whig candidate in many sections of the North and border South.\textsuperscript{162} It is an interesting fact that some Webster men correctly gauged the efforts to make Harrison a great leader, and they threatened to shift their support to Van Buren if their man were pushed entirely out of the running.\textsuperscript{163}

Even before Harrison became a serious factor in the presidential race, the slavery issue was mentioned in connection with his candidacy. In the South, the \textit{Lynchburg Virginian} published an enthusiastic report on his speech delivered on July 4, 1835, at Vincennes, Indiana.\textsuperscript{164} The paper said that Harrison lambasted the abolitionists. In the words of the \textit{Richmond Whig}, Harrison thereby displayed his "fearlessness," because the people living in the vicinity were all abolitionists at heart.\textsuperscript{165} Despite the Pleasants' exaggeration, these journals recognized the

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{161}] See the comments from Albany, Wheeling, Harrisburg, and Cincinnati. \textit{Ibid.}, Aug. 18, 1835; also \textit{Richmond Enquirer}, Aug. 18, 1835.
\item[\textsuperscript{162}] Ritchie cited the objections of the \textit{Nashville Banner}, \textit{Ibid.}; see also \textit{Western Hemisphere}, Aug. 26, Sept. 2, 1835; \textit{Albany Argus}, Sept. 18, 1835; \textit{Charleston Courier}, Oct. 3, 1835; \textit{Richmond Whig}, Oct. 6, Nov. 13, 20, 1835; \textit{National Gazette}, Nov. 30, 1835.
\item[\textsuperscript{163}] \textit{Ibid.}, Oct. 23, 1835; \textit{Boston Atlas} quoted in \textit{ibid.}, Nov. 30, 1835.
\item[\textsuperscript{164}] Quoted in \textit{Richmond Whig}, July 24, 1835.
\item[\textsuperscript{165}] \textit{Ibid.}
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
political importance of the address which did contain passages condemning the reformers.

Several weeks later, as Harrison's campaign rolled along, a small but noisy crowd nominated him in Albany.166 The Daily Advertiser of that city led the way in the maneuvering which substituted Harrison for Webster as the hero of the Whigs.167 Croswell was naturally interested in this development. He called particular attention to the fact, however, that a resolution was proposed at the gathering which stated that Harrison was not the candidate of the abolitionists.168 The gentleman who offered the motion said that he did not wish to disturb the community, but that if Van Buren were elected, the abolitionists would get what was left of the Constitution.169 This incident, which was apparently not denied by the Whigs, illustrated the impact which the slavery-abolition question had made on Northern political thinking.

Another aspect of Harrison's relationship to the slavery issue was discussed a little later by the Charleston Courier. The paper took the position that he had been a good general but was hardly suited for the South because of his views on emancipation.170 It proceeded to say that he must recant

166Albany Argus, Sept. 18, 1835.
167Richmond Whig, Aug. 18, 1835.
168Albany Argus, Sept. 18, 1835.
169Ibid.
170Charleston Courier, Oct. 3, 1835.
on the sentiments expressed in a speech given at Cheviot, Ohio, on July 4, 1833. In this address, Harrison criticized the abolitionists severely but went on to explain that Congress, with the consent of the slave states, could appropriate the surplus revenue for the emancipation and colonization of the slaves.\textsuperscript{171} This proposal was of doubtful constitutionality, and the \textit{Courier} branded it "a dangerous doctrine."\textsuperscript{172} It concluded that the South would have nothing to do with such ideas. This thrust by the \textit{Courier} at Harrison does not seem to have been picked up by the Democrats. Indeed, the slavery question dropped from view in the fall rallies and the public letters which extolled the virtues of the hero of the Thames.\textsuperscript{173} The matter was not mentioned in the public reports which described the Harrison nominating conventions held in Harrisburg in December.\textsuperscript{174}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{171}Ibid.; Harrison actually said, "Should I be asked if there is no way by which the General Government can aid the cause of emancipation, I answer, that it has long been an object near my heart to see the whole of its surplus revenue appropriated to that object. With the sanction of the States holding the slaves, there appears to me to be no constitutional objection to its being thus applied; embracing not only the colonization of those that may be otherwise freed, but the purchase of freedom of others. By a zealous prosecution of a plan formed upon that basis, we might look forward to a day, not very distant, when a North American sun would not look down upon a slave." \textit{The Northern Man with Southern Principles, and the Southern Man with American Principles} (Washington, 1840), 15-16.
\item \textsuperscript{172}\textit{Charleston Courier}, Oct. 3, 1835.
\item \textsuperscript{173}\textit{Richmond Whig}, Oct. 6, Nov. 13, 20, 1835.
\item \textsuperscript{174}\textit{Niles' Register}, Dec. 26, 1835; \textit{Charleston Courier}, Dec. 28, 1835.
\end{itemize}
An examination of the Whig journals, however, reveals that the Southern party leaders did not stop their agitation against Van Buren's record on the issue. In October, *Niles' Register* said that a handbill was circulating in Baltimore which showed that Van Buren favored Negro suffrage, under certain conditions, in the Convention of 1821. Shortly thereafter, the print quoted from the record of the convention to demonstrate for its farflung audience that the New Yorker voted against an exclusive white suffrage for his state. At the same time that the attack was renewed on this question, Noah and the *Evening Star* hit the Little Magician's vote in the state Senate for the Missouri Resolution of 1820. Pleasants' gladly reprinted the article, coming as it did from a Northern source. He also referred to the Democratic strategy of publishing Van Buren's letters on various aspects of the slavery issue. The Democrats held that these letters and the proceedings of the Albany meeting proved that Van Buren was wholly with the Southern people. The Whig commented that the reader must consider Noah's evidence before accepting the Democratic propaganda.

In South Carolina, another facet of the attack was

175 *Niles' Register*, Oct. 10, 1835.
176 Quoted from the *Baltimore Chronicle*, *ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1835.
177 *Richmond Whig*, Oct. 26, 1835; also *Niles' Register*, Oct. 31, 1835.
mentioned by the Courier. A pamphlet entitled "The Crisis" was circulating in the area. It recommended that a convention of the states be held to meet the abolition threat. In the Courier's opinion, such action would be premature and dangerous. The paper also observed that the booklet was decidedly anti-Van Buren in tone. The Courier concluded that Van Buren and Webster were really all right on the slavery issue, although Harrison was not. This article was significant because it offered testimony that substantiated the Democratic claims that the ultra state righters were undermining Van Buren while they worked to promote an extreme Southern program.

One ultra who spoke out to defend slavery from an important official position was George McDuffie, Governor of South Carolina. His message to the legislature in 1835 pronounced slavery the finest possible foundation for a creative and harmonious society. He predicted that the slave system would be adopted by Northern capitalists. As might be expected, he lashed the abolitionists. The National Gazette commented that the South had a good case for an appeal to Northern generosity, but that such exhibitions of invective were to be deplored. The Argus

178 Charleston Courier, Nov. 17, 1835.
179 McDuffie and Van Buren's oldest son, Major Abraham Van Buren, curiously enough married sisters from the prominent Singleton family of South Carolina. Singleton Family Papers, Library of Congress.
181 Ibid.
labelled it "ultra and peculiar," a most "extraordinary message."182

A second message full of import was that delivered by Littleton Tazewell to the Virginia Legislature. He condemned the activities of the abolitionists and added that the South had the right to request the other states to suppress such associations. While the Governor expressed the opinion that the states would undoubtedly cooperate, he also recommended appropriate measures by the legislature to draw out the North. He said that punishing those who acted against the South would provide peace for the South.183

This renewal of the call for the North to take legislative action prompted Ritchie to say that it opened the ice for violent partisan debate in Virginia.184 The struggle that followed will be discussed in some detail later. As for the strategy of the Whigs, it was analyzed by Richard Parker. He wrote to Van Buren that the Whigs were impressing upon the people of the South the belief that they were the true friends of Southern interests.185 He stated that they were trying to bring the Democrats into conflict with their Northern friends. Parker explained the reasons for asking "for unconditional legislation" in concert with the

183 *Richmond Enquirer*, Dec. 8, 1835.
184 Ibid., Dec. 19, 1835.
Southern states. He wrote, "the sagacious anticipation that such measures may strengthen the abolitionists at home & still further irritate the feelings of the South, no doubt induces them to adopt this course...."187

One example of the response of Northern officials to the Southern demands is seen in the message of Robert Lucas, Democratic Governor of Ohio. He spoke of slavery, when viewed "abstractedly, as both a moral and political evil...."188 However, he said that Ohio public sentiment disapproved of the conduct of the anti-slavery men. He pledged that, as far as the "moral force and controlling influence" of public opinion extended, the people of the state would continue to allay the excitement on the slavery question.189 On the other hand, legislative acts such as those suggested in the South were impossible because of the free press clause in the Ohio Constitution.190 The Governor finished by reiterating his friendly assurances to the people of the south.

186Ibid.
187Ibid.; see also Dabney Carr to Martin Van Buren, Dec. 21, 1835, Van Buren Papers. It should be noted that Van Buren's friend Schley, as the new governor of Georgia, did not press for legislation. Niles' Register, Nov. 21, 1835. However, Gov. Thomas of Maryland repeated the demand for the North to take legal measures. National Gazette, Jan. 5, 1836.
188Western Hemisphere, Dec. 9, 1835.
189Ibid.
190The Governor also cited the section of the constitution which forbade taking anyone out of the state when the crime had been committed in the state. Ibid.
Another Northern governor who realized that he had to handle the problem was William L. Marcy. He certainly was cognizant of the importance of his position before the country when he wrote, "it is a very delicate matter to determine precisely what ought to be said in my message to the legislature on...the proceedings of the abolitionists." He asked Van Buren and Benjamin F. Butler to advise him on the matter. He was inclined toward silence on the question but wondered if such a course would satisfy "the reasonable men of the South." Van Buren had plenty of time to think about the situation because the legislature did not convene until January, 1836. Nonetheless, he secured the assistance of Butler and Silas Wright almost immediately and worked out a number of suggestions for Marcy. These were sent to Albany on November 28. The Marcy papers do not contain the sketch received by the Governor, but he told the Vice President that he was skeptical of recommending legislation. He said that the state might fall short of what was expected in the South. Therefore, Marcy was in favor of letting the "sound state of public opinion" rebuke the evil and "administer a sufficient remedy."  

192Ibid.  
194Ibid.
A short time thereafter, Wright wrote to Marcy and reviewed his feelings on the subject from the time it was first broached to him. He explained for Marcy a memorandum which Van Buren had asked him to send along with the notes referred to above. Recalling distinctly what his object had been, he said that the message should not request legislation for the present. Wright thought that the Governor ought to say that, if the disturbances continued, New York could and would resort to legislation. He went on to explain that he favored a general law rather "less specific and detailed than that made in the notes." He concluded with the following passage:

Mr. V. B. desires me particularly to say to you that you need not fear any desire on his part that you should go into this matter farther than the sound public opinion of our people will sustain you, but he thinks, as I do, that if you adopt substantially the suggestions of the notes you will be sustained, while we both suppose that a prompt and firm course taken now, when public opinion is right, will be most likely to keep it so and to check demands from the slave holding states which cannot be complied with.

This group of letters illustrated the close cooperation that prevailed between the leaders of the Regency and the Vice President. The episode was also the last important

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196 Wright indicated that the proposals were "drawn up by Mr. Butler" but that he offered some modifications. Van Buren, of course, worked on the document. Ibid.
197 Ibid.
development which involved Van Buren and the slavery controversy in 1835. It is obvious from the evidence that Van Buren and Butler wanted Marcy to denounce the abolitionists and to propose legislation which would deal specifically with the activities of the reformers. Marcy, for his part, was originally hesitant about saying very much respecting the abolitionists, and his reluctance to commit the state to a legislative program induced Van Buren to retreat. Wright's testimony indicated that Van Buren, who first planned to meet the Southern demands, allowed Marcy to decide on the proper course of action.
CHAPTER 5

THE ELECTION YEAR, 1836

As the year 1836 opened, Van Buren wrote a long letter to his youngest son, Smith Thompson Van Buren, advising him on his studies.\(^1\) In addition to the academic aspects of the letter, it is also interesting because of two other subjects discussed in it. The first of these concerns a business proposition. Van Buren had been advised to invest in Oswego county (N.Y.) lands as far back as 1811.\(^2\) In this letter, he reported that a prospective buyer had approached him about selling the property he owned in the county. He asked his sons, Smith and John, "whether it would be safe for me to take $80,000 or $75,000 for an individual half."\(^3\) Later in the campaign the Whigs exaggerated the size of the sale when they reported that he sold his Oswego lands for $250,000.\(^4\) Nevertheless, when one considers the purchasing power of the dollar, this letter to Smith reveals something of the Little Magician's business acumen and his financial independence.\(^5\)

\(^1\)Martin Van Buren to Smith T. Van Buren, Jan. 5, 1835 \(\{1836\}\), Van Buren Papers.


\(^3\)Martin Van Buren to Smith T. Van Buren, Jan. 5, 1835 \(\{1836\}\), Van Buren Papers.

\(^4\)Cincinnati Gazette, Sept. 26, 1836.

\(^5\)See also the list of his real estate holdings dated October, 1823, and the statement of his investments which totaled $89,000 in value in July, 1831. Van Buren Papers.
The other topic which worried Van Buren was Marcy's address to the Legislature. He wrote that he was waiting with impatience for the Governor's message. Significantly, he was especially concerned about the abolition question. He indicated that he hoped for a "full and strong" treatment of the problem. While the Vice President waited for the mails, political leaders in other sections of the land were likewise watching Albany with anticipation. They all knew that Marcy would consult Van Buren before penning anything on the abolition issue. It is apparent from the correspondence of the day, however, that the Governor was ultimately given more freedom in the writing of his address than most people suspected.

Marcy's annual message was surely a prolix document. The Argus commented that "the subject of the greatest magnitude..., which occupies...the largest space in the Message is that of slavery and the abolitionists." In Lincoln's edition of the message, this section ran to fourteen printed pages. The Governor began by saying that New York must do everything in its power to preserve the well-being of the Union. He noted, however, that a few individuals, from mistaken motives of moral and religious duty, or other less justifiable reasons, had undertaken a program for abolishing slavery in the South. Since their activities disturbed the

6Martin Van Buren to Smith T. Van Buren, Jan. 5, 1835
7Albany Argus, Jan. 5, 1836.
8Lincoln, ed., Messages from the Governors, III, 570-571.
political community, he was forced to take notice of them.

Marcy continued by reminding New Yorkers that the merchants of the state were in danger of losing much business from the South, because the abolitionists printed their principal papers in the state. In a rather disjointed fashion, he went on to say that the people of New York disliked slavery but did not complete the process of emancipation within their own borders until 1827.\textsuperscript{9} The difficulties connected with the abolition of slavery in the South would be manifestly much greater. Furthermore, he explained, "we ought not to...give countenance to any scheme for accomplishing this object, in violation of the solemn guarantees that we are under not to interfere with this institution as it exists in other States."\textsuperscript{10}

Turning to the work of the anti-slavery man, Marcy characterized their schemes as visionary and pernicious. He chided them for laboring in the North, where slavery was universally offensive, in order to end the system in the South. He opined that if they were trying to get Congress to act within the states, they were aiming at an usurpation of power. The emissaries of the anti-slavery societies could not go into the South to distribute their provocative literature. Therefore, the Governor said that the reformers wanted to arouse the people of New York into a crusade against

\textsuperscript{9}Ibid., 571-572.
\textsuperscript{10}Ibid., 572.
the South under the sanction of the state's civil authority.11 He warned that the first step toward forcing abolition upon the South would bring "the end of our Confederacy and the beginning of a civil war."12 In conclusion, he pointed out that the activities of the abolitionists had already increased the determination of the South to maintain slavery.13

Marcy next considered the question of what could be done to choke off the ill-effects flowing from the movement. He placed his primary emphasis on the recent public rallies of the people of New York. He said that they had expressed their enlightened and deliberate judgment on the abolitionists. The earnestness and unanimity of the people was beyond parallel, he maintained. Thus, the Governor indicated that he relied on the influence of public sentiment to induce the abolitionists to stop their exertions.14 He said that the signs were encouraging, and he did not ask for legislative action. Nevertheless, Marcy warned that, should the misguided fanatics continue their work, the state would have to pass laws designed to punish those who endeavored to incite insurrection in sister states. He argued that the power to establish such laws belonged to the states before

11Ibid., 573-574.
12Ibid., 574; Marcy added that the ravages of a civil and servile war would exceed the devastations which were pushed by God on populous cities from time to time.
13Ibid., 576.
14Ibid., 578-580.
the constitutional convention and had never been delegated to the general government.\textsuperscript{15}

Marcy's firm handling of the abolition question constituted a major campaign statement from the Van Buren forces. In many regards it repeated and elaborated upon the ideas expressed at the Albany rally of 1835. As in the case of the Lucas message, Marcy stressed the importance of a sound state of public opinion when he considered the means necessary to restrain and control the abolition movement. He believed that the overwhelming weight of popular disapproval would not go unheeded by the anti-slavery men.\textsuperscript{16} Yet for all of his optimism, he ended by brandishing the threat of legal action before the abolitionists.

Croswell printed the message and referred to this section "as speaking emphatically the voice of the vast majority of the people of this state."\textsuperscript{17} He editorialized, however, that legislative action would undoubtedly follow. In his words, legal restraints had to be erected to prevent men from hurling fiery missives into other states.\textsuperscript{18} It is impossible to tell whether Croswell really expected that a law would be enacted or was merely writing with one eye cocked toward the

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 581-582; Marcy closed the address by telling the legislature that he refused to turn a New Yorker named Robert Williams over to the Governor of Alabama so that he could be tried in that state for publishing incendiary material. Ibid., 584.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 579.

\textsuperscript{17}Albany Argus, Jan. 5, 1836.

\textsuperscript{18}Ibid.,
South. In either case the administration organ, the New York Times, also published the address, abstracted each section, and commented that Marcy's remarks on the abolitionists would be "approved by all except a few deluded fanatics...." 19 In Ohio, where the Democratic mouthpiece admitted that it was difficult to keep the paper vigorous in the midst of party apathy, the paragraphs dealing with the abolition issue were not carried along with the rest of the message. 20 Needless to add, the Globe, on the other hand, featured this section of the address. 21

In Charleston, the independent Courier pointed out that the Argus thought that legislation would be enacted to punish the incendiaries. It also spotlighted Marcy's refusal to send Williams to Alabama and let the reader ponder the implications of the news from Albany. 22 The National Gazette felt that few would read the document but said that the substance of it was "very good." 23 The paper did not have anything specific to print on the abolition section except that the matter was elaborately discussed. In the words of

19 New York Times, Jan. 8, 9, 1836.
20 Western Hemisphere, Dec. 30, 1835 and Jan. 27, 1836.
21 Globe, Jan. 11, 1836; Croswell later quoted favorable editorials from the Montreal Vindicator, Boston Post, Watertown Eagle, and Syracuse Standard which all dealt with the abolition section of the message. Albany Argus, Jan. 20, 1836.
22 Charleston Courier, Jan. 11, 1836.
23 National Gazette, Jan. 9, 1836.
the *Richmond Whig*, Marcy's message was about what had been anticipated.\(^4\) It hit the abolitionists hard and renewed the friendship of the North for the South but, according to Pleasants, made "no recommendation of penal laws". The *Whig* also observed that not a word was said on the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. It concluded that to speak of possible, future legislation was worse than worthless for the South.\(^5\)

Other indications of the reception given Marcy's message come from the correspondence of the period. Gorham Worth, an old friend of the Vice President and the Governor and a New York city banker of the Whig persuasion, congratulated Marcy for setting the public mind straight on the anti-slavery question.\(^6\) He said that public opinion might supersede the necessity for laws, a development which would be highly desirable. As he did with the resolutions of the Albany rally, Van Buren sent William C. Rives a personal copy of the message. He wrote, "You will see that we have taken the Bull by the horns."\(^7\) He continued in glowing optimism "that in a few days they \(\sqrt{\text{will}}\) lay down their arms."\(^8\) This letter of the Little Magician showed that he did not comprehend the intensity of feeling which motivated the abolitionists.

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\(^{24}\) *Richmond Whig*, Jan. 15, 1836.  
\(^{25}\) Ibid.  
\(^{26}\) Gorham A. Worth to William L. Marcy, Jan. 10, 1836, Marcy Papers.  
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
The Virginian answered Van Buren, "it is an admirable paper & by far the most complete demolition of abolition that the controversy has brought forth." Rives states that the document had counteracted the nullifiers, and he hoped that it would affect the fanatics. About this same time, Silas Wright reported on the situation in Washington. He declared to Azariah Flagg that the address was being "sought by the Union men of the South with wonderful avidity and even some of the Nullifiers have told me to send their thanks to our Governor...." Marcy's message appears to have been well received by the Democrats and quite a few Whigs. It surely enhanced Van Buren's reputation with many segments of the nation's population. The activity of the abolitionists in New York, nevertheless, threatened the good effect created by the document. Actually the protest rallies of the preceding summer and the riot at Utica deterred the reformers only slightly. With renewed vigor they resumed their propagandizing during the extremely cold and bitter winter of 1835-1836. The

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30 Silas Wright to Azariah Flagg, Jan. 17, 1836, Flagg Papers; see also the flattering letter of George Bancroft who wrote that the message was very popular in Mass. George Bancroft to William L. Marcy, Feb. 28, 1836, Marcy Papers.
31 In Cincinnati a great anti-abolitionist rally commended Marcy's recommendation that laws be enacted if the reformers did not stop their activities. Globe, Feb. 4, 1836.
32 The Charleston Courier regularly reported on the weather in the North during Jan.-Feb., 1836. The cold was severe enough to freeze the East River solid and close a good part of Boston harbor.
New York anti-slavery leaders doubtless agreed with James G. Birney when he observed, "McDuffy's Message is doing a great deal for the salvation of the Country. The debates in Congress are producing the same good effects." In Utica itself, a group of sixty determined young men organized an anti-slavery society in the Methodist church on January 4, 1836.

As the pendulum of public opinion swung back a little in New York, the abolitionists reaped a promising harvest of converts. The most influential figure in this drive was Theodore Weld. Continuing in the manner which had proved so successful in Ohio and Pennsylvania, he moved across New York in early 1836, silencing mobs and leaving friends. When he arrived in Utica, which was familiar territory to him, he drew great crowds. Speaking of his victorious trip, a Utica paper said, "Mr. Weld in point of talent...in point of zeal, in whatever he undertakes, is not excelled by any young man in the United States." The perspicacity of this judgment is a tribute to the editor.

While Weld and the other leaders of the crusade were strengthening the movement, the Argus continued to highlight
the anti-abolition spirit that was still vocal in many localities in New York. Despite the opposition they encountered, however, the abolitionists increased their numbers sufficiently to impress the political leaders of the state.

In Albany where the legislature was in session, the lawmakers manifested a variable attitude toward the reformers. The desire for a tough policy was evident when the lower house, without a dissenting vote, directed the committee on literature to withhold funds from the Oneida Institute. It was charged with being a nursery of abolition. Blair worked on the political angle of this vote when he reported that the Assembly was nearly all Democratic.

Both houses of the legislature also considered the question of repressive laws. Although the very vitality of the abolition movement would seem to call for action, the problem of constitutional rights and the growing power of the abolitionists forced the legislators to pause before undertaking a specific program. These facts were revealed in a letter sent from Albany to a Virginia legislator in February. It came from a well-placed individual who went

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37 For representative articles see Albany Argus, Jan. 26, March 2, 18, 1836; it is interesting that the strongest opposition Weld faced was in Troy, N.Y., Marcy's hometown. Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 85-86.

38 Gerrit Smith wrote to William Naylor of Virginia that the abolitionists were gaining 500 adherents a week. He said that Marcy was trying to help Van Buren in the South. He added that no gag laws would be passed in the North. Richmond Whig, Jan. 26, 1836.

39 Globe, March 17, 1836; this development was mentioned by the Louisiana Courier, March 31, 1836.

40 Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 27, 1836.
to great pains to deny that the abolitionists were a formidable group in the North. However, the letter served as a warning to the Democrats of the South regarding the situation in New York. It explained that there was a strong possibility that no restrictive laws would be passed during that session of the legislature. This prediction was borne out as the lawmakers later resolved that when the people of New York demonstrated their disapproval of the agitation of the slavery issue, they rendered legislation on the subject unnecessary. Such flimsy logic rather obviously indicated that the politicians gathered in Albany were afraid to take the "Bull by the horns." The Regency could not, as it promised, muster the courage to begin a legislative program. The effect of this development on Van Buren's campaign and his standing as the Northern man with Southern policies was certainly unfavorable.

Turning from the New York scene, one finds that a brief survey of the other states reveals that the legislatures in

41 The pressure on the New York Democrats was further illustrated by a letter sent from Oneida County (Utica) to Virginia at this same time. It enclosed a copy of Marcy's message, disputed Gerrit Smith's letter, and concluded that a few Whig fanatics, officeseekers and the like constituted the abolitionist ranks. Ibid., Feb. 25, 1836.

42 Ibid., Feb. 27, 1836.

43 The legislature also resolved that it concurred with the Governor in recognizing the right of the states to regulate slavery as they saw fit. Lincoln, ed., Messages from the Governors, III, note on 582.

44 By mid-summer, the Philanthropist taunted Marcy and the other officials who professed to see public opinion destroying the anti-slavery movement in New York. Philanthropist, July 15, 1836.
many instances adopted resolutions in the winter of 1835-1836 which touched on the slavery controversy. Those from Maine and the Territory of Michigan were critical of the abolitionists. North Carolina's lawmakers thanked the citizens of the North for maintaining the rights of the South but asked for penal laws against the printing of incendiary materials. Although they recognized that Congress had the power to deal with slavery in the District of Columbia, the gentlemen assembled at Raleigh went on record as opposed to any interference with the institution there. The Kentucky resolutions were similar to those from North Carolina. South Carolina's legislature asked for laws in the Northern States which would limit the activities of the abolitionists. It also warned against any interference with slavery in the Southern States and the District of Columbia.

Among the Southern States, the Old Dominion was watched very closely. It commanded the largest block of electoral votes in the section and was at the fulcrum of Southern politics. In view of these circumstances, both parties struggled to control the public declarations of the legislature. Following the receipt of Tazewell's strongly worded message in December, 1835, Thomas Gilmer introduced a resolution in the lower house. It requested the Governor

46 Niles' Register, Jan. 2, 1836.
47 Ibid.
to investigate the plans of the Northern States as regards legal enactments for controlling the activities of the abolitionists. It also suggested that the Governor might correspond with the authorities in the Southern States in order to ascertain what steps could be taken to counteract the fanatics. Gilmer, a prominent Whig, admitted the partisan orientation of his propositions, for he said that the issue must be met by the North and particularly New York.

In the ensuing debates, the Whigs claimed that the property and the well-being of the South were in danger, because, the Postmaster General's ruling notwithstanding, the literature of the abolitionists still flooded into the section. The Democrats, led by Hugh Garland, fought the resolution at every turn. They argued that the people of the North had taken some steps to curb the abolitionists. Moreover, they said that the South could not demand anything from the Northern States, because there was no evidence that they proposed to interfere with the rights of the South. The Democrats added that Tazewell lacked the discretion necessary to handle so important an assignment.

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49 *Richmond Whig*, Dec. 18, 1835.
52 Ibid.
After the arguments had been heard, the resolution was
defeated by a party line vote. The Lynchburg Virginian
lamented the outcome of the fight, declaring that Gilmer's
proposals contained the spirit of the resolutions adopted at
the Southern public meetings in the preceding summer.54
The paper said, furthermore, that the North could now see
that the South was divided on the question of penal laws.
This factor would prevent decisive action in the North.
Finally the Virginian claimed that the Democrats turned
against this effort to protect Southern rights, because
they preferred to help Van Buren and their party.

For its part, the Richmond Enquirer readily agreed that
the episode had been overshadowed by political considera-
tions. Ritchie wrote, "The debate was protracted...Van
Buren was attacked in every mood and tense. A desperate
attempt was made to identify him with abolitionism."55
The Democratic editor later commented that it was evident
the Whigs wanted to embarrass the North.56 It is interest-
ing to note that in February the house passed resolutions,
which were supported by some Democrats, that were considered
stronger than those originally offered.57

54 Quoted in Richmond Whig, Jan. 5, 1836.
55 Quoted in Albany Argus, Jan. 8, 1836.
56 Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 19, 1836.
57 Simms, Rise of the Whigs, 104-105.
During the early weeks of 1836, when the public forums were concerned almost exclusively with the abolition problem, the Southern Whigs renewed their discussion of Van Buren's record on the slavery issue. Pleasants remarked in January that the mass of the citizenry had no desire for a government office. Therefore, they were not committed to support the Administration and could think for themselves. He asserted that in the South such individuals could not go for a Missouri restrictionist and a friend of Negro suffrage.

With Van Buren's record on the tariff and internal improvements working against him, the Whig concluded that the Democratic candidate really had no chance to win the election.

A month later the paper printed an article from the Charleston Mercury. It was a copy of the journal of the New York Senate which showed Van Buren's vote for the resolution on Missouri in 1820. Pleasants joined the Mercury in asking the Richmond Enquirer why it did not carry the item. For those who missed the point, the Whig hastened to add that Ritchie was afraid to publish this material, because it damaged Van Buren's prospects in the presidential race. It is evident that the Southern Whigs were determined to hammer

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58 Richmond Whig, Jan. 5, 1836.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., Feb. 4, 1836.
away on these episodes which hurt Van Buren's standing with many in the South.

The *Enquirer* did not rise to the Vice President's defense and appeared to capitulate before Pleasants' assertions. Van Buren received a consoling letter at this time, however, which dealt with the strategy of the Whigs. Gideon Pillow told the New Yorker that he had been traduced and villified more than any man since Jefferson's day. With regard to the charges of the Whigs that Van Buren had abolitionist tendencies, Pillow wrote, "It is a matter of deep regret, that there are...men base enough in principle...to fabricate & circulate against the purest patriot of the age, the most slanderous imputations." He finished his analysis with the observation that the Whigs were clearly trying to make political capital in the South.

Regardless of the Democratic protestations, the Southern Whigs probed into another angle of the slavery controversy which involved Van Buren. Pleasants asked his crosstown rival where the Democratic standard bearer stood on the question of abolition for the District of Columbia. He particularly wanted to know if the Vice President would veto a measure designed to accomplish that purpose. This issue was not a new one for Van Buren, but it was probably

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6²Ibid.
6³Richmond Whig, Feb. 4, 1836.
the most important one currently being discussed in the
nation.

It is apparent that Pleasants chose to overlook the
letter Wright sent to Ritchie in early 1835. That letter
said that the New Yorker considered it impolitic to abolish
slavery in the District; it also revealed that Van Buren and
the Virginia Democratic leadership did not question the power
of Congress to act on the matter at that time. Wright's
letter was later republished by the Democrats on several
occasions. Nevertheless, it will be recalled that Pleasants'
major comment on the Schley letter was to ask if the Vice
President believed that Congress had the power to control
slavery in the District. The Democrats did not see fit to
answer Pleasants directly, resting their case on the letter
already printed.

The important question concerning a presidential veto
had also been discussed in 1835. Late in the summer, the
Fredericksburg Arena inquired if Van Buren would veto a law
which freed the slaves in the District of Columbia. The
Democratic candidate did not reply to the Virginia newspaper,
but the Cayuga Patriot of Auburn, New York, supplied a partial
answer. It maintained that Congress possessed the power to
deal with slavery in the District in an abstract sense.64

64 See page 162.
65 Quoted in Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 4, 1835.
As for the possibility that emancipation would be undertaken, the paper argued at great length that there were compelling reasons for continuing the status quo.\textsuperscript{66} The \textit{Patriot} did not venture an opinion on the arena's question, but the \textit{Enquirer} boldly responded with an affirmative answer. Ritchie wrote that as a statesman Van Buren would certainly veto the measure suggested by the arena.\textsuperscript{67}

As was inferred above, Pleasants was too keen a man to have forgotten the viewpoints expressed in the letters and articles that appeared in 1835. It was a good political tactic, however, to restate the questions that the South wanted answered respecting the status of slavery in the District. The proceedings in Congress had focused the attention of the country on the problem. Furthermore, Van Buren's lieutenants had spoken for him in the main in 1835, and the country had a right to a full statement from the candidate himself. It need scarcely be added that the Southern Whigs did not believe that Van Buren would commit himself against the supposed interests of the free states.\textsuperscript{68}

Despite the pressure that mounted for the Vice President to speak out, he waited until March to issue his public letter. He directed his reply to a group of North Carolina

\begin{footnotes}
\item[Ibid.\textsuperscript{66}]
\item[Ibid.\textsuperscript{67}]
\item[An analysis of the Northern pressure on the Van Buren party is found in the letter of Thomas Cooper to J.H. Hammond, Dec. 30, 1835, Hammond Papers.\textsuperscript{68}]
\end{footnotes}
men who had questioned him on the power of Congress "to interfere with or abolish slavery in the District of Columbia." The Little Magician began his letter by referring to the opinions expressed in Silas Wright's letter to Ritchie. He listed the important resolutions of the Albany rally which he approved in his note to Schley. After thus reminding the public of his record on the slavery issue, he dealt with the constitutional aspect of the subject at hand. The Vice President wrote that the grant in the Constitution of exclusive legislative power over the federal district conferred on Congress the authority formerly held by Maryland and Virginia.

Having candidly expressed his "present impressions upon ...the legal power of Congress," he said that it was his deliberate opinion that there were transcendent reasons for not exercising the power against the wishes of the slave states. Van Buren believed that these objections were, "as imperative in their nature..., in regulating the conduct of public men, as the most palpable want of constitutional power would be." He met the question of a presidential veto head on. He stated, "I must go into the presidential chair, the...

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69 Junius Amis and others to Martin Van Buren, Feb. 23, 1836, Van Buren Papers.
70 Martin Van Buren to Junius Amis and others, March 6, 1836. [Martin Van Buren], Opinions of Martin Van Buren... Upon the Powers and Duties of Congress... (n.p., March 6, 1836).
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
uncompromising opponent of any attempt on the part of Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, against the wishes of the slaveholding States." 73

The Democratic candidate explained that his views were founded on the conviction that Congress would not have been given the power to control slavery in the District if the founding fathers had foreseen the present agitation to free the slaves in the area. Furthermore, Maryland and Virginia would probably not have ceded their soil to Congress without some limitation on Congressional power had the present "state of things" been apprehended. Van Buren wrote that to move on slavery in the District would violate the spirit of compromise which underlay the federal compact and put the Union in grave danger. 74

The Vice President went on to say that he was sure that his views coincided with those held by the vast majority of the people of the free states. He made a plea for "confidence on the part of the south in their brethren of the north" and asked that the people of both sections resist all efforts to associate party politics with the delicate problem under discussion. 75

In this long campaign letter the Democratic candidate answered the question of the North Carolina men while dealing with other related facets of the problem. Although he upheld

73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
the power of Congress to regulate slavery in the District, the remainder of the document pledged Van Buren to the support of the *status quo* there. He obviously reasoned that the vital interests of the North could best be served by giving these reassurances to the South. In so doing, he also advanced his standing as the Northern candidate with Southern policies.

Just as Van Buren mailed this important letter, he received another inquiry touching on the "District question." As might be expected, the Little Magician sent Mallory a copy of the letter to Junius Amis; since Mallory lived in Virginia, Van Buren indicated that he could pass all of the letters on to Ritchie. This was immediately done, and the *Enquirer* at once published all four letters. In giving the correspondence to its readers, the paper said, with light sarcasm, that it had reason to suspect that the North Carolina men endeavored to embarrass the Vice President. However, Ritchie wrote that Van Buren met the question fairly and that he vigorously protested against the use of the power that he admitted Congress had over the District. Ritchie was pleased with the strong language of the document and

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76 His correspondent said that his opinion on the slavery question in relation to the states was well understood. James B. Mallory to Martin Van Buren, March 5, 1836, Van Buren Papers.

77 Martin Van Buren to James B. Mallory, March 11, 1836, quoted in Richmond *Enquirer*, March 15, 1836.


particularly the lines which pledged a veto. He summarized his reaction by asserting that Van Buren was all right on abolitionism; with his solemn and deliberate discussion of the problem in print, the South could support him as safely as it could Calhoun.

In view of the great public concern which had developed on the subject of slavery in the District of Columbia, the leaders of both parties undoubtedly recognized the significance of Van Buren's letter, once the Enquirer published it. The Globe copied the correspondence from the Richmond paper at once, and the Western Hemisphere carried Ritchie's entire article as soon as it could. The Democrats also printed a campaign pamphlet which featured the letter. It seems safe to assume that they distributed it as widely as possible.

Ritchie immediately followed his first account with another article for his farflung audience. He stressed Van Buren's inflexible opposition to any law that would alter the status of slavery in the District. This stand, he maintained, was in agreement with a number of the Southern state resolutions which had recently been passed. In Ritchie's mind, no Whig could truthfully say that a statesman so

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80 Globe, March 19, 1836; Western Hemisphere, March 30, 1836.
81 Van Buren, Opinions Upon the Powers of Congress.
82 Richmond Enquirer, March 17, 1836.
83 He cited the resolutions of N.C., Ala., S.C., and Ga. Ibid.
honorable and sagacious would ever be tempted by the abolitionists. The Democratic editor called on the South to elect Van Buren, a Northerner who would stand before the fanatics and protect the South.

Although the New Yorker's letter was seemingly well received by the Democrats, both North and South, the Whigs singled out one sentence as the basis for their attack on Van Buren. It was the one which stated that Congress had the legal authority to regulate slavery in the District. The Richmond Whig explained to its readers that Van Buren had been forced out on the question. He had avowed abolitionist doctrine. The paper concluded that it was impossible to think of Virginia going for a "District abolitionist." While this reading of the letter circulated in the South, the Cincinnati Gazette gave its constituency a very brief report entitled, "Mr. Van Buren." It said, "This gentleman has been drawn to a committal on the abolition question. He asserts his belief that Congress has power to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia." Thus the Whig editors of both sections, who saw an opportunity to hurt Van Buren, linked this sentence with the program of the abolitionists while

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84 Richmond Whig, March 17, 1836; Ritchie retorted that Pleasants was a "slangwanger" who tore one sentence out of context. He asserted that the people of Virginia were fools if they were misled by the Whig. Richmond Enquirer, March 17, 1836.

85 See the article from the Louisville Journal, quoted in Philanthropist, April 29, 1836; Cincinnati Gazette, March 28, 1836.

86 Ibid.
ignoring the remainder of the letter.

The Whig press was not in agreement, however, in its treatment of the Amis letter. In some Northern papers, where the slavery controversy had not been given wide coverage, the letter was not printed. The National Gazette and the Boston Courier illustrate this policy. In the South, Niles' Register printed the entire document without any comment.\(^{87}\) The National Intelligencer did not carry the letter as it pursued a policy of toning down the slavery issue.

Farther to the South, the Charleston Courier, which had earlier said that Van Buren and Webster were acceptable on the slavery question, refused to publish the letter. It did, nonetheless, reiterate a position assumed in 1835 that Congress had the authority to manage slavery in the District of Columbia.\(^{88}\) In the same state, E. W. Johnston penned an interesting letter to the staunch defender of slavery, J. H. Hammond. "As to Van Buren's letter," he explained, "I entirely differ from you."\(^{89}\) Johnston wrote that the first part of it added to the abolitionist claims of constitutional power to interfere with slavery. He deprecated the argument against the use of that power as a mere shadow.\(^{90}\) This letter

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\(^{87}\) Niles' Register, April 16, 1836.

\(^{88}\) The paper said that the only restriction on Congress was the 5th Amendment. It added that swords would fly if the power were used. Charleston Courier, March 4, 1836.

\(^{89}\) E. W. Johnston to J. H. Hammond, March 24, 1836, Hammond Papers.

\(^{90}\) Ibid.
is mentioned because it showed that the fiery Hammond thought rather well of Van Buren's exposition. In the Crescent city, the Louisiana Courier editorialized, "The letter, taken as a whole, is a real clincher, and leaves his enemies no ground whereon to rest the sole [sic] of their feet."\footnote{The Montgomery Advertiser was also quoted as saying that the Vice President was now the "anti-abolition candidate for the Presidency." Louisiana Courier, April 8, 1836.}

One of the last papers to comment on the Amis letter was the Philanthropist. James G. Birney printed it in full along with Hugh White's letter to John B. Smith which dealt with the same problem.\footnote{White denied that Congress had the power to abolish slavery in the District in this letter dated March 17, 1836. Philanthropist, April 22, 1836.} He also recognized Harrison as a factor in the campaign by pointing to a speech in Indiana "last fall" in which the Old Hero spoke harshly of the abolitionists.\footnote{This speech was the Vincennes address of July 4, 1835. Ibid.} After bringing the three major candidates into the picture, he commented that no one thought of denying Congressional power over slavery in the District until very recently. He said that this line of thinking would pass in the South. While Van Buren's letter must have satisfied Birney on this count, the abolitionist was forced to remark that the New Yorker promised to act on a policy of expediency. He was willing to let the slave states decide on emancipation in the District. The Philanthropist added...
that Van Buren undervalued the free states and presented "himself in no very dignified attitude..."94

The Democrats had reason to be pleased with the strong tone of the Amis letter.95 Ritchie was possibly not exaggerating when he said that the Southern Whigs were astounded by the dignity and force of the document.96 The Richmond Whig, after its initial attack on the letter, fired off a volley against Van Buren in what seemed to be a diversionary maneuver. The paper drew attention to the much discussed New York Constitutional Convention of 1821. It published part of a document from John M. Botts and a group of associates which quoted from the proceedings of the convention and demonstrated that Van Buren voted for Negro suffrage.97 This attack on Van Buren was also available in pamphlet form, and it provoked Ritchie to a heated defense of the Democratic candidate.

Ritchie knew that the record sustained the Whigs. For nearly a year he answered their references to this episode with a reference to the Gwin letter or total silence. Now he endeavored to "correct" the Whig account with a more accurate presentation of the facts.98 On March 17 he cited

94 Ibid.
95 Van Buren was informed that his letter, Marcy's message, and the account of the Albany anti-abolitionist rally refuted the charges made against him by the Calhoun men. Byrd Brandon to Martin Van Buren, Marcy 14, 1836, Van Buren Papers.
96 Richmond Enquirer, March 17, 1836.
97 Richmond Whig, March 17, 1836.
98 He had used this approach to the problem in early 1835.
the differences between the 1777 and the 1821 documents. He contended that it was far more difficult for Negroes to vote under the later constitution. When the Whigs charged that Van Buren once voted for equal suffrage provisions for whites and Negroes, the Enquirer rather shakily denied it. Five days later Ritchie completed his rebuttal with a four column article. It again examined the 1777 document and then followed the 1821 proceedings in a step by step account. Ritchie did not delete any pertinent material. He commented that it was harder for Negroes to vote than whites, but the convention wanted to reward industry and thrift among the blacks. Thus, they were not divested of all rights, although in actual practice only 80-100 voted out of a population of 20,000. He finished his article by remarking that Tennessee and North Carolina had just recently discriminated against free Negro suffrage rights. As for the situation in New York, Ritchie's presentation was an appeal for a sensible Southern attitude toward the markedly different problems that existed in the Empire state.

Since the Whigs had forced the Enquirer into a defensive posture, the paper fired back in an effort to gain the offensive. It did so with several columns of material from

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99 Richmond Enquirer, March 17, 1836.
100 Ibid., March 19, 1836.
101 Ibid., March 24, 1836.
102 Ritchie cited James K. Paulding as the authority for his figures. Ibid.
Holland's biography. The selections that were carried included the discussion of Van Buren's course during the Missouri crisis, the Swin letter, and the Schley letter.\textsuperscript{103} Ritchie evidently thought that another reprinting of these items would put Van Buren's record in a better light and offset the efforts of the opposition to undermine his cause.

The \textit{Whig} returned to its interpretation of the Amis letter when it printed White's opinions on the District question.\textsuperscript{104} It contrasted White's Southern position with Van Buren's essential abolitionism. The idea that Van Buren was at heart an abolitionist was attempted to be substantiated at this time, however, by other evidence. On March 29 Pleasants renewed the long ignored charge that the Little Magician was a partisan supporter of Rufus King in 1820.\textsuperscript{105} He was particularly delighted to publish in the same issue new material which bore on Van Buren's abolitionist propensities. He cited the vote in Congress on March 6, 1822, when Senator Van Buren joined his Northern colleagues in attempting to limit the slave trade in Florida Territory.\textsuperscript{106} In Pleasants' words, this disclosure added to the chain of evidence that verified the New Yorker's hostility to the vital concerns of the Southern states.

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., March 22, 24, 1836.
\textsuperscript{104}Richmond \textit{Whig}, March 26, 1836; Ritchie printed White's letter and asked if it were a fanciful or faithful one. Richmond \textit{Enquirer}, March 24, 1836.
\textsuperscript{105}Richmond \textit{Whig}, March 29, 1936.
\textsuperscript{106}Ibid.
The Virginia Whigs continued their assault against the Vice President as they sent speakers from county to county to carry the party's message to the people. The Democrats said that they were trying to panic the population. The *Enquirer* described the work of the Whigs and followed their agents in its pages. Ritchie asserted that the Whig strategy entailed a misrepresentation of the sentiments of the Northern population. He maintained that they were again picturing the North as a section overrun with abolitionists. Since Van Buren was a Northern man, the Whig speakers attempted to frighten the people away from the Democratic ticket. The *Enquirer* stated that the opposition was making heavy use of Van Buren's record on Negro suffrage in its efforts to panic the voters.

The Whigs knew that the Negro suffrage question and the charge that Van Buren was a Missouri restrictionist were effective campaign issues in the South. During the spring, Pleasants regularly reprinted these charges. He often included short excerpts from the proper documents to buttress his editorials. He commented after one article, which also referred to Van Buren's affirmation of Congressional power over slavery in the District, that his readers ought

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107 *Richmond Enquirer*, April 1, 12, 1836.
109 *Ibid.*, April 1, 12, 1836.
110 *Richmond Whig*, April 5, 8, May 3, 1836; an example of the *Enquirer's* endeavors to defend Van Buren from this "humbug" attack is seen in the detailed letter from Charles Goodall, Hanover County. *Richmond Enquirer*, April 12, 1836.
to consider these "notorious facts" very carefully.\textsuperscript{111} Two Ohio Valley papers that also joined the hue and cry reworked the same material in their pages.\textsuperscript{112}

In the deep South, the Alexander Banner (Ga.) answered the local Whigs on the Negro voting issue with the Democratic arguments that Ritchie made popular.\textsuperscript{113} The Banner laid heavy stress, however, on the tardiness of North Carolina and Tennessee in rectifying the liberal provisions of their first constitutions. It was the opinion of the paper that White probably received the support of many Negroes in previous elections.\textsuperscript{114} The Banner pointed out that while the Southern Whig candidate had been called a great Southerner, he never publicly objected to Negroes voting. In view of the lack of evidence that Van Buren was dangerous to the section on the slavery issue, the paper concluded that he must be supported.\textsuperscript{115}

One interesting reaction to the campaign of the Whigs is found in the Philanthropist. It printed a passionate article from the Louisville Journal which listed Van Buren's hostile record on slavery. Sargeant Prentice, the Journal

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{111} Richmond Whig, May 3, 1836.
\item \textsuperscript{112} The New York resolution of 1820 was discussed in the Cincinnati Gazette, April 28, 1836; both events were handled by the Louisville Journal, article quoted in Philanthropist, April 29, 1836.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Athens Banner, April 7, 1836, quoted in Louisiana Courier, May 6, 1836.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
editor, said that Van Buren was unsatisfactory to the South as a candidate. This judgment forced Birney to remark rather naively that the time was evidently fast approaching when a candidate had to be for slavery and against the abolitionists. He obviously resented the aggressive tone of the Journal. In reading Birney's catalogue of the New Yorker's record, which was so objectionable to some in the South, one senses a feeling of admiration for the Democratic standard bearer.

In early May there was something of a lull in the attack against Van Buren. There was also evidence that the slavery controversy, as important as it had become to the nation, was not emphasized by every political gathering of consequence. The Louisiana Democratic Convention backed Van Buren and Johnson; it completed its business without referring to the fight that had developed over its candidate and the abolition issue. In a similar way the Georgia State Rights Whig Convention met in Milledgeville and named White and Tyler. Although the newspaper account stressed the anti-

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116 *Philanthropist*, April 29, 1836.


118 *Louisiana Courier*, May 5, 1836.
Van Buren sentiments of the participants, it did not mention any resolutions that touched on the slavery issue.115

In this comparatively quiet atmosphere, the United States House of Representatives received the report of the Pinckney committee. It was presented to that body on May 18, and the resolutions which accompanied it were adopted eight days later.120 The United States Telegraph condemned the resolutions, but Ritchie felt that they were strong and able.121 Two of these controversial resolutions dealt with the question of Congressional interference with slavery in the States and the District of Columbia. One was directed toward the problem created by the abolitionist petitions which had flooded into Congress.

The increase in the number of committed abolitionists enabled them to dispatch a greater number of petitions to the first session of the Twenty-Fourth Congress. The vast majority of these petitions were concerned with slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia.122 Hundreds of Northern men and women with a reforming spirit obviously cooperated with the abolitionists in this endeavor.

119 Richmond Whig, May 20, 1836; the Ohio Democratic gathering held much earlier in the year likewise did not recognize the slavery controversy. Western Hemisphere, Jan. 13, 1836; the same can be said of the Virginia Whig convention which met in Feb. Richmond Whig, Feb. 13, 1836.

120 Congressional Globe. Containing the Debates and Proceedings, 24 Congress, 1 session, 469, 499, 505-506.

121 Richmond Enquirer, May 24, 1836.

122 Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse, 109.
Thinking Southerners, who had watched the course of events during the summer of 1835 with growing anxiety, had every reason to be most apprehensive as the petitions were collected. If Congress could be influenced to undertake any interference with slavery in the District, they knew that the abolitionists would expand upon their demands. This situation convinced many Southern Whigs that they must make an effort to discredit and stop the abolitionists when the new Congress convened.

The first abolition petitions were presented to the House the day after it had completed its organization. John Fairfield (Me.) offered a petition on December 16, 1835; it was immediately tabled on a motion by Representative Cramer (N.Y.). Fairfield presented a second petition a moment later and moved that it also be tabled. The House concurred with his motion a few minutes later.123 On December 18 William Jackson (Mass.) offered another document which asked for the abolition of slavery in the District. James H. Hammond, a close associate of Calhoun, moved that the petition be not received. He said he could not "sit there and see the rights of the southern people assaulted... by the ignorant fanatics from whom these memorials proceed."124

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123 Congressional Debates, Register of Debates in Congress, XII, 24 Congress, 1 session, 1961.
After a sharp debate, the House voted to lay the petition on the table.\textsuperscript{125}

Other petitions were presented soon thereafter, and the angry struggle was resumed. As the documents poured into the House, the extremists on both sides continued the fighting. For nearly six weeks an inordinate amount of time was devoted to this question. The debates, though protracted and repetitive, were not, however, inconsequential. Northern speakers emphasized the right of the citizens of the North to have a fair hearing for their petitions.\textsuperscript{126} The Southern spokesmen contended that it was unconstitutional to interfere with the peculiar institution in the District.\textsuperscript{127} They also asserted that the House was not obligated to receive abolition petitions.\textsuperscript{128}

It is significant that the ill-tempered debates largely involved Northern and Southern Whigs. While these men were sincere in their arguments, there were political implications in the agitation. The Democrats pointed to the political

\textsuperscript{125}Ibid., 1996.

\textsuperscript{126}Examples are found in the speeches of Samuel Beardsley (N.Y.), Aaron Vanderpoel (N.Y.), Francis Granger (N.Y.), and John Q. Adams (Mass.). \textit{Congressional Globe}, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 30, 31-32, 43-44, 39-40; William Slade (Vt.) was the sole advocate of abolition in the District of Columbia. \textit{Barnes, Anti-Slavery Impulse}, 117.

\textsuperscript{127}See Henry A. Wise (Va.) and John M. Patton (Va.), \textit{Congressional Globe}, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 31, 127, 39; Thomas Cooper advised Hammond that if the North insisted on its right to interfere with slavery the two sections of the union ought to separate as soon as possible. Thomas Cooper to J. H. Hammond, Dec. 30, 1835, Hammond Papers.

\textsuperscript{128}See Francis Pickens (S.C.) and Hammond, \textit{Congressional Globe}, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 127-128, 157-158.
cooperation between the two Whig groups.\textsuperscript{129} Blair thought that both expected to rally votes at home with the excitement over abolition petitions.\textsuperscript{130} He suggested that in their drive to elect their candidate, the Southern Whigs used the turmoil to keep a Southern issue before that section.\textsuperscript{131} The \textit{Albany Argus} said that the petition controversy was well calculated to divide the people on the question of slavery in the District of Columbia.\textsuperscript{132} Southern Democrats were undoubtedly pleased to see the \textit{Athens Banner} dwell upon the political friendship that existed between White and William Slade.\textsuperscript{133} James K. Polk showed how the extremists helped each other in the debates when he wrote,

\begin{quote}
It is amusing to witness the operation, and see how they play into each other's hands. An opposition man from the North presents a petition, whereupon a nullifier or Whitite from the South, springs upon it, and makes an inflammatory speech, into which he incorporates the most inflammatory portions of the publications of Tappan...and Company these he distributes under his frank, and yet cries out lustily against the dissemination of incendiary publications.\textsuperscript{134}
\end{quote}

Writing about another aspect of the debates, a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{129}Globe, Jan. 2, 1836.
\item \textsuperscript{130}Ibid., March 3, April 4, 1836.
\item \textsuperscript{131}Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{132}Albany Argus, March 11, 1836; the paper said that the abolitionist-nullifier combination was well illustrated when the Charleston Mercury presented Gerrit Smith to its readers as an authority on the contemporary scene. Ibid., April 4, 1836.
\item \textsuperscript{133}Quoted in \textit{Louisiana Courier}, May 6, 1836.
\item \textsuperscript{134}J. K. Polk to W. R. Rucker, Feb. 22, 1836, quoted in Sellers, \textit{Folk}, 314.
\end{itemize}
correspondent of the Cincinnati Gazette reported from Washington that the fiery spirits of Virginia and South Carolina were trying "to make the 'tail' of the Magician shew [sic] its true complexion." Henry A. Wise, Baylie Peyton (Tenn.), Francis Pickens, Waddy Thompson (S.C.), and Hammond, to mention some of the Whig leaders, wanted to force a vote in the House on the question of whether Congress had the power to control slavery in the District. The greater portion of the membership, however, was opposed to any discussion of the problem. Van Buren was not personally involved in the struggle, but his followers were anxious to avoid a showdown on the issue, lest they damage the party.

As for the dispute over receiving petitions, Blair exposed the cunning of Slade and Wise who both desired a decisive vote on the point. The Globe stated that each expected to gather strength at home, regardless of the outcome of such a vote. Blair suggested that the Northern friends of the Administration were hesitant about going along with the Southern extremists. The paper said that they were willing to back a proposal to reject the applications of the anti-slavery petitioners. It concluded that the right of

\[^{135}\textit{Cincinnati Gazette, Jan. 1, 1836.}\]
\[^{136}\textit{Ibid.}\]
\[^{137}\textit{Ibid.}; see also Thomas Cooper to J. H. Hammond, Dec. 30, 1835, Hammond Papers.}\]
\[^{138}\textit{Globe, Jan. 2, 1836.}\]
\[^{139}\textit{Ibid.}\]
petition was guaranteed in the Constitution and helped protect both sections of the country.

Blair's comments indicated the moderate solution that the Democratic high command was attempting to devise for these issues. As the rancorous quarrelling dragged on and emotions became aroused, the national scope and cohesiveness of the party were endangered. Finally on February 8, 1836, Henry Pinckney (S.C.) presented a resolution to the House which offered a solution. It declared that all of the petitions and resolutions bearing on the abolition of slavery in the District were to be sent to a special committee. It also provided that the committee be instructed to report that Congress had no authority to interfere with slavery in the states. Furthermore, the above committee was instructed to report that Congress "ought not to interfere in any way with slavery in the District of Columbia." Although Hammond and Wise indicated that they opposed the resolution, it was divided into sections and each was approved by the House. The select committee was accepted by a 174-48 count; the declaration regarding Congressional authority to interfere with slavery in the states was adopted by a vote of 201-7; that dealing with slavery in the federal District

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140 Pinckney made an unsuccessful attempt to introduce his resolution on Feb. 4. Debates in Congress, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 2482-2483 and 2491.
141 Ibid., 2491.
was approved by a margin of 163-47. Needless to add, Pinckney was made chairman of the select committee.

Pinckney was roundly condemned by the Southern extremists who had earlier counted on his support. The Richmond Whig declared that his resolution betrayed the South. It was alleged that the House avoided a showdown vote on the question of whether Congress had the power to interfere with slavery in the District of Columbia. As the Southern Democrats voted for the resolution, which offered a promise of stability for the party, Hammond must have recalled a letter from the fiery intellectual, Thomas Cooper. Cooper had warned, "Even on the Slave question you cannot depend on the Southern Van Buren members."

The Independent Charleston Courier joined the Democrats in backing the resolution. It held that the overwhelming vote in the House would blunt the ambition of those who "desire to urge this harassing...subject on the attention of Congress...." As for the abolitionists, the Courier felt

142 Ibid., 2495-2500; James K. Polk wrote, "The unanimous vote of the friends of Mr. Van Buren (with less than half a dozen exceptions) on Pinckney's resolutions, must satisfy the country that they are sound upon that subject." J. K. Polk to W. R. Rucker, Feb. 22, 1836, quoted in Sellers, Polk, 314.

143 He was called a traitor by the United States Telegraph, quoted in Charleston Courier, Feb. 19, 1836; the Charleston Mercury used vigorous language against him, quoted in Richmond Whig, Feb. 18, 1836.

144 Ibid., Feb. 16, 1836.

145 Ibid., Feb. 18, 1836.

146 Thomas Cooper to J. H. Hammond, Jan. 8, 1836, Hammond Papers.

147 Charleston Courier, Feb. 16, 1836.
that they would be induced to suppress their petition gathering activities. 148

In the North the abolitionists obviously gained nothing from the Pinckney proposals. 149 The administration paper, the New York Times, printed the resolution but had no comment to make. 150 Croswell, however, spoke out for the Northern Van Burenites. He praised Pinckney's measure and asserted that the abolition question had been put to rest. 151 The Argus pointedly remarked that all friends of the Union would be encouraged by this action. Since the Democrats equated the Pinckney resolution with the best interests of the country, they spotlighted the White men and Calhoun's coterie who opposed it. 152

It is evident that the resolution did not depart from the campaign statements that had been issued by Van Buren and his lieutenants with regard to the status of slavery in the states and the District of Columbia. Since it was in a great degree a party project, it confirmed those opinions and compromised the petition question for both sections of the Union. While Pinckney and his committee were working on their report, the Little Magician wrote his

148 The paper later said that it was still politically opposed to Pinckney but backed his resolution because it was the right means to the right end. Ibid., Feb. 19, 1836.
149 Reference has been made to James G. Birney's exuberance over the tone of the rancorous House debates.
151 Albany Argus, Feb. 13, 1836.
152 Globe, quoted in Western Hemisphere, Feb. 27, 1836.
very important letter to Junius Amis. The Pinckney report, as has been mentioned, was presented in May. The first two resolutions that accompanied it reiterated the Democratic position, pioneered by Van Buren, that Congress could not interfere with slavery in the states, and that it would be impolitic to do so in the District. The third resolution was the so-called gag respecting the abolition petitions. It reads as follows:

Resolved, That all petitions, memorials, resolutions, propositions, or papers, relating in any way, or to any extent whatsoever, to the subject of slavery, or the abolition of slavery, shall, without being either printed or referred, be laid upon the table, and that no further action whatever shall be had thereon.

The reaction to the Pinckney report and the resolutions followed the line that was expected. The intransigents and extremists were loud in their criticism. After hours of bombast and vituperation, the House accepted all three resolutions by substantial majorities. The Van Buren men from both sections refused to abandon the work of the committee. Thus the controversy was halted for the time being.

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153 May 18, 1836, Congressional Globe, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 469.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid., 469-471, 473-475, 483-484, 494-495, 498.
156 The first two resolutions were passed by a vote of 182-9, and 132-45. The gag was adopted by a vote of 117-68. Ibid., 499, 505-506.
Along with Green's paper, the Richmond Whig condemned the report and chalked out its comments for its wide audience. Pleasants wrote that the second resolution followed the path laid down by Van Buren's letter to Amis. He felt that the tacit admission of Congressional authority over the District abandoned the debate to the reformers. He warned that the Northern people were really District abolitionists and would encourage the fanatics to try to free the slaves in that area. Concerning the third resolution, the Whig asked what would happen during the next session of Congress.

Ritchie indicated that he was on the defensive when he pronounced the report a strong one. The Enquirer wished that the power of Congress over the District had been forgotten in the report. However, the paper said in a breezy way that the second resolution really was neutral; it stated merely that Congress ought not to act on the matter. While Ritchie showed evidence of wilting before the Whig arguments, the Charleston Courier asserted that the total document was moderate, rational, and harmonious for both sections. It is interesting that the third resolution

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157 Richmond Whig, May 24, 1836.
158 Ibid.
159 Richmond Enquirer, May 24, 1836.
160 Ibid.; this article was reprinted in the Western Hemisphere, June 8, 1836.
161 Charleston Courier, May 28, 1836; the National Gazette and National Intelligencer, to mention two important papers, did not attempt to influence the thinking of their readers on these developments.
was seemingly not highlighted in the contemporary prints as might be expected. The gag rule, nevertheless, enabled the abolitionists to appeal for public support in defense of the right of petition, and this development brought them the help of many who were not committed to abolitionism itself.

Over in the Senate the first abolition petition was not presented until January 5, 1836. It was laid on the table without debate.\(^{1}\) On January 7 Senator Morris (Ohio) offered several petitions; Calhoun immediately echoed the sentiments of his cohorts in the House and asked that the Senate not receive the papers.\(^{2}\) After the petitions and Calhoun's motion had been debated for several days, Morris withdrew his petitions. He did so in order to permit the Senate to consider a similar motion that Calhoun had made following the presentation of an abolition petition by James Buchanan.\(^{3}\) The Pennsylvania Senator had offered a Quaker petition on January 11 which urged the abolition of slavery in the federal District. The tone of the Quaker document was not so offensive to the Southern Senators, and Morris said that it was his desire that "The great question, as to the right of the people of this Union to petition Congress, might come up

\(^{1}\) Cong. Globe, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 68.

\(^{2}\) Ibid., 75; he said furthermore that Congress had no "power, under the Constitution, to interfere with the subject of slavery." Ibid.

\(^{3}\) Ibid., 122.
unembarrassed..." by the objections to the language of his petitions.165

Although the South Carolinian protested against some of the phrases employed in the Quaker document, he agreed that the Constitutional issue could be decided with reference to it. He argued that the Senate could and must refuse to receive this type of petition because such action would be the first step toward stopping the abolitionists.166 Buchanan and Morris sounded the basic Democratic position when they stated that the Senate must receive the abolition petitions.167 Buchanan urged that the prayer of his memorialists be rejected so that the agitation of the matter could be promptly laid to rest. He and other Democratic speakers maintained the position previously assumed by Van Buren, that Congress could not touch slavery in the States.168 They also declared that it was inexpedient to move against slavery in the District of Columbia.

The debate that was provoked by Calhoun's motion was renewed at intervals until March 9. On that date a crucial vote was taken on the problem of receiving the Quaker petition. When the count was completed Calhoun had suffered a decisive

165Ibid.
166Ibid., 75, 122; see Senator Preston's (S.C.) remarks, ibid., 76.
167Ibid., 75, 77, 83; for Silas Wright see ibid., 120-121; see the speech of Feb. 12, 1836, Buchanan, Works of Buchanan, III, 1.
168Congressional Globe, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 77, 75, 120.
setback, for not even half of the South voted with him.\textsuperscript{169} The vote on rejecting the prayer of the petition was an overwhelmingly affirmative one.\textsuperscript{170} In both cases New York's Senators voted "aye".

During the two month struggle over this important test case, Van Buren was not involved except as he performed his duties as president of the Senate. In commenting on the outcome of the whole affair, Blair expressed his approbation of the course of the Senate. He felt that the South Carolina leader was falsely identifying the right of petition with the abolitionists.\textsuperscript{171} In the editor's mind this meant giving the reformers a sacred right possessed by all of the people. In the Palmetto state itself the Charleston Courier for one voiced its approval of the action of the Senate.\textsuperscript{172} In Richmond, the Enquirer again displayed an affinity for the Whig argument when it announced that it preferred to reject (to not receive) the petitions at the outset.\textsuperscript{173} Ritchie reluctantly went along with the party because the Northern men felt that the fanatics would be helped if the petitions were not received.\textsuperscript{174} In bowing to his friends, Ritchie

\textsuperscript{169}The vote was 36-10. \textit{Ibid.}, 239; according to one report the South Carolinian was not so bitter as might be expected. \textit{Charleston Courier}, March 16, 1836.
\textsuperscript{170}\textit{Congressional Globe}, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 248.
\textsuperscript{171}\textit{Globe}, March 12, 1836.
\textsuperscript{172}\textit{Charleston Courier}, March 16, 1836.
\textsuperscript{173}\textit{Richmond Enquirer}, March 12, 1836.
\textsuperscript{174}\textit{Ibid.}. 
acknowledged the fact that the Northern Democrats in both the House and the Senate went as far as was prudent in compromising these volatile issues. With Van Buren's campaign statements showing the way, both sections of the party compromised and this facet of the abolition-slavery controversy was quieted for the moment.

III

Meanwhile another phase of the slavery controversy that involved Van Buren was coming to a showdown. This concerned the use of the federal mails by the abolitionists to disseminate their papers and pamphlets. Kendall's letters of August, 1835, permitting the Southern postmasters to withhold the anti-slavery propaganda, were admittedly temporary in their nature. As was observed at the time, nothing in the statutes seemed to cover the situation that confronted the Post Office Department and the country in general. Jackson was in touch with the problem, however, and he addressed himself to the matter in his message of December 7, 1835. He called the attention of Congress to the excitement which pervaded the South during the preceding summer. In his words the respectable portion of the populace deplored the conduct of those who sought to disrupt the harmony of the country. Jackson wrote that it was fortunate that people of the North expressed their strong disapproval of "the proceedings of the misguided persons who have engaged in
these unconstitutional and wicked endeavors..." He hoped that the anti-slavery men would stop their work, but he said that the non-slave holding states should be ready to suppress the evildoers if they did not desist in their activities. The President continued by recommending a federal law which would place severe penalties on the circulation of incendiary publications.

In the House this section of the message was referred to the Post Office and Post Roads committee. It became engaged in a general revision of the postal laws and did not report on Jackson's suggestions. The Senate sent this passage to a select committee whose chairman was Calhoun. On February 4, 1836, Calhoun presented a report which was signed by two of the five members of the committee. It opposed any law which would permit federal officials to exercise a direct censorship over the mails. Instead Calhoun offered a bill which would make it illegal for a deputy postmaster knowingly to put into the mail any pamphlet or printed material, touching on the subject of slavery, which was

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175 James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents (Washington, 1896), III, 175.
176 Ibid., 176.
177 Dec. 17, 1835, Congressional Globe, 24 Cong., 1 sess. 27.
178 Dec. 21, 1835, Ibid., 36-37.
179 Eaton, 'Censorship of the Mails,' 270-271; Congressional Globe, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 165.
destined for a state where such material was outlawed. The proposed act obviously brought the federal government into a position where it would cooperate with the Southern States in enforcing their laws against the abolitionists' publications.

In urging the adoption of his bill, Calhoun reiterated the plea he made during the first debates on the petition question. He stressed the need to stop the agitation of the anti-slavery men before the slaveholding society of the South was endangered. He warned the capitalists of the North that it was to their advantage to preserve the status quo in the South. While he was sincerely concerned about the situation, Calhoun's thinking was in large part guided by political motives. His plan would thwart Jackson, and his agitation of the issues would further rally the South around the slavery question. Van Buren's prospects certainly were not advanced in the process.

A number of loyal Jackson men, notably Senators Grundy (Tenn.), King (Ala.), Cuthbert (Ga.) and Benton (Mo.), protested against Calhoun's account of the state of Northern opinion. On April 30 Grundy submitted a substitute for

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180 Ibid.
the South Carolinian's bill. It prohibited any deputy postmaster, who received incendiary publications, from delivering them in states or territories where the circulation of such material was forbidden.

This proposition was not debated until June 2. After some discussion, Grundy's motion was accepted as a substitute for Calhoun's bill without a division of the Committee of the Whole. The full Senate concurred in the committee's action. A vote was then taken on the question of engrossing the bill for its third reading. Benton later charged that a tie vote was arranged by Van Buren's enemies in order to test him on the measure. In any event only thirty-six Senators participated in the voting and a deadlock resulted. Senator Hubbard was presiding, and Calhoun immediately demanded, in a challenging voice, "Where is the Vice President?" Van Buren was sitting in a side part of the chamber at the time. Without any noticeable hesitation, he advanced to the chair and gave an affirmative vote. The Little Magician, master stratagist that he was,

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184 Congressional Globe, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 412.
185 Ibid., 522.
186 Thomas H. Benton, Thirty Years' View:...from 1820 to 1850 (N.Y., 1854), I, 587.
187 Congressional Globe, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 522; Wright and Tallmadge of New York were among four Northerners who voted for the engrossment.
188 The correspondents of two major papers reported the incident in very similar terms and agreed upon Calhoun's triumphant question. Charleston Courier, June 9, 1836; Louisiana Courier, July 6, 1836.
189 Ibid.
very likely was prepared for just such a contingency. Although the effect was probably not as electrifying as some Democrats described, Calhoun and his friends were undeniably surprised.

The final reading of the measure did not occur until June 8. Blair was incensed that Clay, Webster and Calhoun attacked the Vice President's vote. He observed that the sniping at Van Buren came from men who were already looking at every angle of the political scene with an eye to the next presidential heat in 1840. Regardless of the merit of this charge, the final vote on the mails bill resulted in a 19-25 defeat for the measure. The Cleveland Herald pointed out that party politics did not influence the outcome to any great degree. The vote of the New York Senators, nevertheless, was watched very closely. They both voted for the bill, realizing that their actions would renew the feeling in much of the South that the Van Burenites could stand up to the abolitionists.

In the days following this vote, the Senate took up and gradually acquiesced in a House program to overhaul the

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190 Globe, June 10, 1836.
191 Debates in Congress, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 1737; only four Northern men voted for the act.
192 Quoted in Western Hemisphere, June 22, 1836.
193 Benton, Thirty Years' View, I, 587-588.
194 Mention must be made, however, of the fact that they voted as they did in the secure knowledge that insiders rather expected the bill to be defeated. Whether this factor had any influence on them is a moot question. See the Boston Courier, June 9, 1836.
activities of the Post Office Department. The new statute said that all mail must be delivered at the proper destination.\textsuperscript{195} The fact remained, however, that the Southern postmasters continued their informal censorship of the anti-slavery literature.\textsuperscript{196}

While Congress was occupied with the legislation described above, the Democratic chieftains were busy telling the South about Van Buren's vote of June 2. Ritchie wrote with his old verve when he exclaimed that the casting vote of the Vice President was worth all of the pamphlets printed by the party in opening the eyes of the South.\textsuperscript{197} In Washington, Blair thought that the legislation was most desirable, and he assigned the eventual loss of the bill to the Southern Whigs.\textsuperscript{198} In Louisiana, the principal Democratic organ described in glowing terms the drama surrounding Van Buren's vote.\textsuperscript{199} Naturally the paper emphasized the gratitude of the party's Southern Senators. It continued to say that those who found fault with the Vice President did so in defiance of the evidence. That Van Buren's partisans were active in the cause was apparent from the Richmond Whig. Pleasants stated that the Democrats were "sleepless" in

\textsuperscript{195}Eaton, "Censorship of the Mails," 275-276.
\textsuperscript{197}Richmond Enquirer, June 7, 1836.
\textsuperscript{198}Globe, June 20, 1836.
\textsuperscript{199}Louisiana Courier, July 6, 1836.
praising the Vice President. He admitted that the comparison of Van Buren's vote and that of Senator Leigh (Va.), who opposed the bill, was damaging to the Whig party.

The Democratic candidate received assurances from his old adviser, Richard Parker, that "after your vote in the Senate & the other indications you have given of impartiality between the North & South...we ought not to expect stronger proofs of your favourable disposition towards this section of the country, or wish you to do anything that may hazard your popularity in the North." Another friend, Peter V. Daniel, was in a fine humor when he wrote that the Whigs "cherished and calculated upon" the abolition excitement in the campaign. They were always saying that Van Buren, although no abolitionist, could not resist the demands of the agitators if he were elected. In view of the furor that was raised with the issue, Daniel concluded. "Unquestionably you will have to bear the sin of driving Calhoun stark mad, if you continue to disappoint him of all the fruits of his most sanguine schemes."

In South Carolina, the Courier also spoke of "the efforts and anxiety of the Anti-Van Buren men" to get him

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200 Richmond Whig, June 21, 1836.
201 R. E. Parker to Martin Van Buren, June 29, 1836, Van Buren Papers.
202 P. V. Daniel to Martin Van Buren, June 7, 1836, Van Buren Papers.
203 Ibid.
"to commit himself on some great principle...." It said, however, that after Van Buren's vote there were conflicting comments heard in the Senate. The paper was rather certain that the South would react favorably to the news, but it held that the North and West would see the matter in a different light. Contrary to the expectations of the Courier, the prominent Whig organ, the Boston Courier, did not attack Van Buren's action as it reported the news from the capitol. A similar policy was pursued by the National Gazette. On the other hand, a number of Northern Whig editors did criticize the Vice President for "selling out" the free states. The Cleveland Herald, a Whig journal, censured the Whig papers that attacked Van Buren because so many Whigs voted for the bill that it could not justify the propriety of their course.

As might be imagined, the Philanthropist deprecated Van Buren's decision. Birney wrote that he would not be surprised to hear of Van Buren owning a cotton plantation with one hundred slaves. He stated that many abolitionists believed that the Democratic candidate would offer no barrier to legislation on the District of Columbia, once public

204 Charleston Courier, June 9, 1836.
205 Boston Courier, June 9, 13, 1836.
206 Globe, June 20, 1836.
207 Quoted in Western Hemisphere, June 22, 1836; also Globe, July 9, 1836.
208 Philanthropist, June 24, 1836.
sentiment became purified. Birney seemed to be describing his own feelings when he added, however,

The abjectness of Mr. V. E.'s servility to the South would, it seems to us, so obliterate every particle of personal respect..., that the very thought of using such an instrument even for the accomplishment of a good purpose, must be revolting to their feelings. We now incline strongly to the opinion that the...rights of our countrymen would be but little more secure in the hands of this gentleman, than in those of a de facto slaveholder.209

Over in the Democratic ranks, the New York Times was so engrossed in a scandalous murder trial that it gave but routine coverage to the Congressional news for this entire period.210 The Ohio party mouthpiece castigated both Slade and the Nullifiers for trying to inflame public opinion.211 It approved of the purpose of the Grundy bill and rejoiced at Van Buren's vote when the newsarrived.212 A week later the paper was forced to say that it still respected Senator Morris who opposed the measure; two weeks later the Hemisphere defended Van Buren with the article from the Cleveland Herald cited above.213 Although not a Northern paper, the Globe assured its Northern readers that Van Buren did not vote for the third reading of Calhoun's original bill. The Whigs

209Ibid.; the Western Hemisphere charged earlier that Burney was partial to Harrison and out "for Van Buren." June 15, 1836.
211Western Hemisphere, June 8, 1836.
212Ibid.
213Ibid., June 15, 22, 1836.
were falsifying the record, and Blair attempted to palliate the sting of their attacks by drawing attention to Grundy's amendment which confined the operation of the objectionable censorship to the slaveholding states.214

Van Buren's vote was obviously interpreted by both parties as signifying his position on the mails bill. No one seemed to mention the possibility that it could have been a courtesy vote designed to send the measure on to its third reading so that the Senate would have to decide the matter. If the Democrats of the South scored propaganda victories for their candidate with his action, the Southern whigs were in a large way responsible because of their determination to draw him out on some crucial aspect of the slavery issue. In the North, where the attitude toward the South had hardened since August, 1835, the Democrats did not find such widespread approval of a policy of withholding abolitionist material from delivery as had been the case less than a year before. Likewise, Birney's testimony revealed that Van Buren's vote drove scores of wait-and-see abolitionists away from his camp. All things considered, the Vice President's casting vote was a major event in the campaign and, while popular in the South, would appear to have hazarded his standing in the North.

214Globe, June 20, 1836; the New York Times did carry this article, June 22, 1836.
During the following weeks, the presidential contestants raced to the finish line. The slavery controversy continued to be an important factor in the strategy of the opposing parties. Most of the issues that were discussed in the later stages of the campaign had been aired before, but the political leaders did not hesitate to repeat their arguments as they strove to influence public opinion. A typical maneuver by the Richmond Whig involved the printing of a series of articles by "Northampton" designed to discredit Van Buren. This writer termed Van Buren's pledge to perpetuate the Jackson policies a most serious objection to the Democratic candidate, for it would mean the eventual end of the nation's cherished institutions. He went on to say, "He is an abolitionist, or must in time, become one." In "Northampton's" mind, the abolition question was the most important problem facing the South. Therefore, he told his readers that the Vice President, a friend of Negro suffrage and a Missouri restrictionist, could not be supported. As for the letter to Junius Amis, "Northampton" alleged that admitting Congressional authority over the District strengthened the fanatics in their drive to free the area.

The Democrats met the midsummer charges of the Southern

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215 Richmond Whig, May 27, 1836.
216 Ibid.
217 Ibid., June 3, 1836.
218 Ibid.
Whigs that their candidate had abolitionist propensities.\(^{219}\)
The Negro suffrage question was discussed, along the lines that Ritchie traced out in March, 1835, and March, 1836, in the proceedings of the Virginia Democratic convention.\(^{220}\)
An Ohio campaign paper corrected the erroneous opinion that Van Buren approved of property qualifications for white voters in 1821. It also showed that the Bucktail leader favored voting privileges for the colored population only after its members were prosperous enough to pay moderate taxes.\(^{221}\)
This account did not estimate the number of Negroes who actually voted in the Empire state; it was an appeal to the electorate to see Van Buren's sense of fair play.

On July 30, Blair criticized the reckless and persevering effort of the Southern Whigs to prejudice the people of the South against Van Buren on the Slavery issue. He said that their exertions were without equal in the annals of party warfare.\(^{222}\) As the Negro voting issue had become an integral part of the attack, he included the nearly standard Democratic arguments in his long defense of the Vice

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\(^{219}\)The party organ in Louisiana disposed of the matter by simply quoting the Salem Gazette (Mass.) to the effect that the abolitionists in that town abhorred Van Buren. Louisiana Courier, June 15, 1836.

\(^{220}\)Proceedings of a Convention of Republican Delegates... held in Fredericksburg... (n.p., [1836]).

\(^{221}\)The Magician (Columbus, O.), July 18, 1836; reprinted in the Western Hemisphere, July 13, 27, 1836; see also ibid., Aug. 17, 1836.

\(^{222}\)Globe, July 30, 1836.
President. Blair's article went on to spotlight the charge, first made by the Richmond Whig in March, that Van Buren was dangerous for the South, because he voted to limit the slave trade in Florida Territory. The Globe quoted the Senate proceedings and verified the facts. It contended, however, that this clause was taken out of the Orleans Territorial Act of 1804. Not only was there a history to the clause Van Buren approved, but every Southern state had laws which restricted the slave trade under certain conditions at one time. Blair cited a convincing list of state laws to sustain his point. He concluded from this evidence that Van Buren's action was surely not hostile to the South.

Other aspects of the slavery controversy were touched on by the appeal to the voters of the Virginia Democrats. This campaign statement mentioned the vigorous stand taken by the citizens of Albany against the abolitionists in 1835. The Vice President's approval of the rally was stressed for the reader, as was the strong message of Governor Marcy in 1836. The greater part of Van Buren's letter to Junius Amis was quoted, and the casting vote of the candidate on the incendiary mails bill was discussed, as the document was presented in slightly different form in the Address to the People of the Virginia Democratic party. Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 2, 1836.

Globe, July 30, 1836.
Ibid.
Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 2, 1836.
drove home the theme that Van Buren was a Northern man who would protect the vital interests of the South.227

The Whigs did not lay down their arms, however, for they continued to fire away at the New Yorker. Pleasants repeated the sentiments of the "Northampton" articles and added that in the South no man could get elected to any legislature with the views Van Buren professed.228 He complained that the Democrats were trying to put such a man into the Presidency where he would hold the future of the entire South in his hands. From New York, Pleasants copied a note to the effect that the Little Magician wrote the Amis letter to gain the support of the reformers; he then atoned for this move by voting for the mails bill.229 In the eyes of the Whigs, it was impossible to tell where he stood.

While this debate continued, Harrison's record on the slavery question became a topic of interest to the rival parties. He had definitely supplanted Webster as the candidate of the Whigs in the Northern states, with the exception of Massachusetts.230 He was well thought of in the Upper

227Ibid.
228Richmond Whig, Aug. 12, 1836.
229New York Courier and Enquirer, quoted in ibid., Aug. 16, 1836; the New York Evening Star made a similar charge regarding the Amis letter. See the rebuttal in New York Times, Aug. 16, 1836.
230"The 'Available' is found," said the New York Times. All sections of the party seemed to join in the campaign for Harrison. Ibid., March 3, 1836; see the notice that Webster was to be abandoned for the good of the party. National Gazette, Aug. 12, 1836.
South, and the Charleston Mercury predicted that he would carry the area. In order to strengthen his candidacy in the critical states of Virginia and Pennsylvania, he toured extensively in them in the summer weeks. The Richmond Whig followed his itinerary and said that he definitely was entitled to Southern support. It published a letter from Ohio which cited evidence that he was defeated for Congress in 1822, because he had opposed the restriction of slavery in Missouri. While the Times in New York city twitted the Whigs about their plain "Farmer Candidates" - Harrison and White - Ritchie answered his rival and stated that Harrison had a Federalist record on the economic issues of the day. He also reminded Virginians that Harrison approved of the use of federal money to free the slaves, if the Southern States agreed.

As the Harrison entourage rolled along, he was presented to the public in the Whig journals as a military chieftain and an unassuming public servant who had been called from the quiet of his home to rout the "Vandals...horse, foot, and dragoons." The Southern Democrats, however, did not let

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231 Globe, July 19, 1836.
232 Richmond Whig, July 22, 1836.
234 Cincinnati Gazette, Nov. 2, 1836; see the different lives of Harrison printed in the National Intelligencer, Aug. 17, 20, 1836; also the comparison between the career of Van Buren and Harrison, Cincinnati Gazette, Aug. 24, Sept. 26, 1836; the Ohio Democrats answered the references to Johnson's personal life with a reference to Harrison's seduction of a young lady years before, Western Hemisphere, Aug. 10, 1836.
the voters forget his Cheviot, Ohio speech. In rebutting the *Alexandria Gazette* which had called attention to the anti-abolitionist sentiments expounded by the Whig leader at Vincennes in 1835, Ritchie contrasted Van Buren's letter to Samuel Gwin, which he quoted, with Harrison's address at Cheviot.\(^\text{235}\) He said that the readers could judge which man offered the greater threat to Southern institutions. This material was reprinted in a public letter from "Southron" to the people of Charleston.\(^\text{236}\) In Louisiana, the Van Bureniltes recognized the popularity of Harrison among the Whigs by citing an open letter of a Georgia man who urged the Whigs of that state to desert White for the Ohioan.\(^\text{237}\) The *Courier* observed that the opposition was desperate since it was well known that Harrison was unsound on abolitionism and the economic issues of the period.

The Harrison men endeavored to counteract the Democratic charges with testimony that would put their standard bearer in a favorable light on the slavery issue. In Cincinnati, Charles Hammond drew attention to his advocacy of admitting Missouri into the union without restrictions in the earlier crisis.\(^\text{238}\) The *Richmond Whig* spoke of the sacrifices that Harrison made on the Missouri question.\(^\text{239}\) It also quoted

\(^{235}\) *Richmond Enquirer*, Sept. 9, 1836.

\(^{236}\) *Charleston Courier*, Sept. 27, 1836.

\(^{237}\) *Louisiana Courier*, Oct. 8, 1836.

\(^{238}\) *Cincinnati Gazette*, Aug. 24, 1836.

\(^{239}\) *Richmond Whig*, Sept. 30, 1836.
that part of the Cheviot speech which asserted that the abolitionists did not have the right to discuss the slavery problem.240 The paper concluded that this record stood up well beside Van Buren's course as a friend of a free Missouri and a District abolitionist. A few days later, the Whig returned to the Democrat charge that Harrison was an abolitionist in his thinking. Despite the evidence of his exemplary conduct during the Missouri controversy, Pleasants complained that the enemy was repeatedly attacking one section of his Indiana speech.241 Although Pleasants temporarily confused the Vincennes address with the Ohio speech, he carried the obnoxious passages in his paper. He said that the slave states would never sanction the freeing of the bondsmen, and hence it was a humbug to label Harrison an abolitionist.

During the period under discussion, the Van Buren forces received help from the New York Evening Post. Once branded a maverick by the party, its support was welcomed.242 The Post decided to back the Vice President after seeing his letter to Sherrod Williams.243 This long campaign letter was a supplement to Butler's letter to Garland. It explained in Van Buren's own words his orthodox Jacksonian views on the bank, internal improvements, the distribution of the surplus revenue and related questions.244 Although Van Buren

240Lynchburg Virginian, quoted in ibid.
241Ibid., Oct. 4, 1836.
243Ibid.
244Globe, Aug. 20, 1836.
had not completely satisfied the Loco-Focos when he earlier wrote to them respecting their program, the Times opined that the Post carried enough weight with the group to bring them behind the Magician.245 In a similar way the Democratic editors of the nation closed ranks around Van Buren on his Williams letter.246 On the other side of the fence, the replies of Harrison and White to Williams were applauded by their partisans, regardless of any personal disagreement with some of the answers on the part of the Whig faithful.247

In returning to a consideration of the slavery controversy as a factor in Van Buren's campaign, one finds that his supporters pointed up the sectional nature of the attacks on the Democratic candidate. Croswell's paper said, "The nullifying papers of the South labor industriously to prove Mr. Van Buren an abolitionist..., whilst the northern federal journals...insist that he is wedded to the South and to Southern interests."248 The Evening Post echoed these sentiments when it noted that the New York American called Van Buren a Negro driver at the same time that he was listed in the South as a privy counsellor to the American Anti-Slavery

245Van Buren's letter to the Equal Rights men is in Niles' Register, Aug. 6, 1836; New York Times, Aug. 16, 19, 1836.
246See the comments of the Richmond Enquirer, quoted in Globe, Aug. 25, 1836; the Pennsylvania Reporter in ibid., Aug. 30, 1836; Western Hemisphere, Sept. 7, 21, 1836.
247National Intelligencer, June 4, 1836; Richmond Whig, Sept. 16, 1836.
248Albany Argus, Aug. 27, 1836.
Society. 249 Ritchie picked up the theme when he wrote that the Whigs were playing a double game that was appropriate for a party that had a two slotted ticket in the Old Dominion. 250 He mentioned the treatment accorded the New Yorker by the Southern Whigs and contrasted it with the abuse heaped on him by the Salem Gazette (Mass.) for his casting vote on the mails bill. In an important campaign speech delivered in the fall, Senator Bedford Brown (N.C.), likewise, discussed this aspect of the strategy of the opposition. 251

It is rather apparent that the Northern Whigs became more conscious of Van Buren's relationship to the slavery issue in the last weeks of the campaign. The attack on his tie-breaking vote of June 2, the evidence presented above, and the testimony of the Boston Courier that it was alarmed at the efforts of the local Democrats to secure the antislavery vote for Van Buren, support the conclusion. 252 In the Bay State, the Whig convention resolved that the Vice President's casting vote against the Incendiary Pamphlet Bill "would alone disqualify him from becoming the Representative of a Free People." 253 The election appeal of the Massachusetts Whigs decried Van Buren's vote to fetter the

249 Quoted in Globe, Aug. 30, 1836.
250 The Whigs in Virginia had decided to run Harrison and White. See the comments in the Richmond Whig, Sept. 2, 1836. Ritchie's remarks are in the Richmond Enquirer, Sept. 16, 1836.
251 Albany Argus, Oct. 14, 1836.
252 Boston Courier, Sept. 8, 1836.
253 Ibid., Sept. 19, 1836.
On the other hand, the powerful National Gazette continued to couch its attack against the Democratic candidate in terms of radicalism and the dangers to the republican form of government.255

While observing the strategy of the Massachusetts Democrats, the Richmond Whig bemoaned the insinuations that Van Buren was safer for the land than White, or Virginia-born Harrison.256 As he played part of the double game, Pleasants was very critical of the opposition for using the same tactic. He lashed out at the Southern Democrats who maintained that their man was a foe of the fanatics. Pleasants wrote that he was really an avowed District abolitionist.257 A month later, the print said that the Quakers of Pennsylvania were turning to Van Buren. It cited three distinctive events in his life that presumably appealed to the group.258 In a similar spirit the fall address of the Virginia Whigs, after speaking of Van Buren's duplicity and non-committalism, took him to task on the same three aspects of his record.259 In their efforts to dissuade the voters from supporting the New Yorker, the Southern Whigs obviously felt that these particular episodes carried the greatest impact.

254Ibid., Sept. 22, 1836.
256Richmond Whig, Sept. 16, 1836.
257Ibid.
258The vote for Negro suffrage, the vote for the New York Senate resolution on Missouri, and the Amis letter were listed. Ibid., Oct. 21, 1836.
Over in the Democratic camp, a confident tone prevailed. Nevertheless, the party chieftains continued the vigorous defense of Van Buren. The Louisiana Courier denied that he was unsympathetic to slavery and the South. The paper said that he was of the Jeffersonian Southern school of thought. It reminded its readers that Slade, Adams, and other dangerous Northern Whigs sided with the White men on a number of important Congressional votes. The young men of the party in Ohio did not attempt any lengthy discussion of the slavery issue in their public address, but they did show in their resolutions their indignation over the false interpretations placed on Van Buren's conduct in the constitutional convention of 1821. In Alabama, the Massachusetts Whig resolution was quoted by the Mobile Commercial Register. The paper did so in order to demonstrate its contention that when the Vice President voted for the mails bill, he brought the wrath of the abolitionists and the Whigs down on his head. The Democratic address in Virginia was a rather mild document, however, which stressed the Whig aim of throwing the election into the House.

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261 *Louisiana Courier*, Sept. 13, 1836; an important Van Buren rally in New Orleans resolved that Harrison was the friend of the Northern emancipators. *Ibid.*, Oct. 24, 1836.
262 A full report on the convention of the young men is in the *Western Hemisphere Extra*, Sept. 19, 1836; Hammond later concluded that Van Buren's vote for qualified Negro suffrage was all right. *Cincinnati Gazette*, Sept. 30, 1836.
263 Quoted in *Globe*, Oct. 20, 1836.
Harrison's Cheviot speech was mentioned, but Van Buren was merely offered as a friend of the Virginia State Rights Doctrines.\textsuperscript{265} The principal North Carolina organ warned its readers that the nullifiers and abolitionists were working together to defeat Van Buren.\textsuperscript{266} It also introduced testimony that White had taken a Negro to the polls in an earlier Tennessee election.\textsuperscript{267} John Forsyth, the prominent Georgia leader, wrote a letter late in the campaign and explained that the New Yorker had Southern views regarding the abolitionists.\textsuperscript{268}

A word must be said concerning the abolitionists who saw their ranks swell during the hectic year.\textsuperscript{269} As for the presidential race, the splintering New England Anti-Slavery Society did not take any stand on the candidates at its annual meeting.\textsuperscript{270} The same policy was pursued by the national organization at its anniversary.\textsuperscript{271} Later in the summer, however, the executive committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society issued a statement for its members.

\textsuperscript{265} In the same issue Ritchie said that Van Buren was in the open on the questions regarding slavery and the District. He quoted a great part of the Amis letter. \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{266} \textit{North Carolina Standard}, Nov. 3, 1836.
\textsuperscript{267} \textit{Ibid.}, Nov. 10, 1836.
\textsuperscript{268} The letter was sent to a group of Georgia leaders and was dated Oct. 28, 1836. The comment was made by the editors that it was too late to offset the letter in other regions. \textit{National Intelligencer}, Nov. 9, 1836.
\textsuperscript{269} Barnes, \textit{Anti-Slavery Impulse}, 106.
\textsuperscript{270} It did resolve that the members should vote for the right candidates for Congress. \textit{Philanthropist}, June 24, 1836.
\textsuperscript{271} \textit{Ibid.}
It emphasized the fact that the reformers had no political party and no candidates.\(^{272}\) The leaders of the Society appealed for votes for men who would not sacrifice the rights of the members and the commands of God to "an iniquitous and mercenary compact."\(^{273}\) They said that if no true Northern men could be found, the national offices ought to revert to the South. Blair was led to comment that the abolitionists clearly could see nothing in Van Buren and were thus inviting their members to vote for White.\(^{274}\) Although Blair used the statement to harass the Southern Whigs, he did not know what to do with Harrison who had a Southern following but probably fell under the same stigma as Van Buren.

In Cincinnati, Birney, a disappointed Van Buren man, spoke out on the situation. He wrote that the abolitionists owed little to either party.\(^{275}\) It was his considered opinion that the country would not be affected by the election of any of the men. He definitely labelled White an impossible candidate for the reformers and said that Webster was out of the question.\(^{276}\) Between Van Buren and Harrison, Birney stated that he had no choice. In his mind both would act for freedom only when the populace changed its attitude.

\(^{272}\)Globe, Aug. 25, 1836. \\
\(^{273}\)Ibid. \\
\(^{274}\) Ibid.; the Louisiana Courier happily called the attention of the Whigs to this manifesto from Tappan and his crew. Louisiana Courier, Sept. 13, 1836. \\
\(^{275}\)Philanthropist, Sept. 27, 1836. \\
\(^{276}\)Ibid.
He counselled his friends and readers to vote for good, honest men and not to unite with any party.

A month later, Birney revealed that he did not vote for either candidate in the Congressional elections. His abstention was probably in line with the thinking of many abolitionists with regard to the presidential contest. In their quandary, those who voted were most likely influenced by personality factors, established habits, or local conditions. In a bit of hindsight, Gamaliel Bailey wrote in 1840, "The last presidential canvass occupied only a small share of the attention of anti-slavery editors. Mr. Van Buren was severely censured for his subserviency to the South, but the political duties of abolitionists in reference to the rival candidates were scarcely noticed."276

The actual balloting in the presidential election of 1836 took place between November 4 and 23. Every state but South Carolina permitted the people to choose the Presidential Electors. The Louisiana Courier had predicted that Van Buren would get more votes than all of the Whig candidates taken together despite the hard work of the

277Birney reported that in the Cincinnati area the Whigs were more violent in their criticism of the abolitionists than the Van Burenites during the summer. Ibid., Oct. 28, 1836; see the revealing letter that Birney sent to Lewis Tappan, Dec. 7, 1836. Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, I, 371.
278Philanthropist, Feb. 4, 1840.
279Calhoun, who probably could have secured a change in the South Carolina law, once strongly favored the popular election of Electors. J. C. Calhoun to S. L. Gouverneur, June 10, 1825, Jameson, ed., "Calhoun Correspondence," 229-230.
opposition. When the results were tabulated this prognostication was borne out. Van Buren's margin of victory, however, was a narrow 26,728 majority out of 1,499,228 votes cast, despite the fact that he garnered 75,476 more votes than Jackson received in 1832. The Whig coalition showed surprising strength in capturing the support it did. The closeness of the race is illustrated by the fact that six states were decided by 1,000 votes or less and ten states by 5,000 votes or less. The Democrats were naturally grieved by the loss of Tennessee and the four other states that slipped out of their control. Nevertheless, Van Buren was only the third Northern man chosen for the Presidency in thirteen elections. It must have been gratifying to him to take seven Southern and eight Northern states as he polled 170 electoral votes.

As for the slavery controversy, it was manifestly an important element in the campaign. The evidence presented on the foregoing pages indicates something of the verbiage that was expended on the question. It is interesting to note that three of Van Buren's four important public letters published during the campaign dealt with the slavery

280 *Louisiana Courier*, Aug. 20, 1836.
282 In contrast with the Adamses, Van Buren received wide support in both sections. He carried the Northern popular and electoral vote and won a majority of the states. In the South he had a majority of the states but lost the popular count by less than 300 votes. He took 61 of the South's 126 electoral votes. *Ibid.*, 185-188.
question. It is true that he carried Jackson's blessing
and had the Democratic organization behind him. As an orthodox
Jacksonian, he also inherited the ill-will that had built
up against the Old Hero's policies since the last election.
It would seem, however, that the slavery question was far
more significant for Van Buren in this long contest than
has usually been considered.283

In view of the emotional impact of the slavery contro-
versy, it is an obvious fact that no person really suspect-
ed of abolitionism could hold any following in the slave
states.284 Any appraisal of the results of the 1836 election
reveals that the Southern Whigs failed to convince the area
that Van Buren had abolitionist tendencies. It may be said
that Van Buren's record on the slavery issue was susceptible
of different interpretations. Despite his course during the
Missouri controversy, his vote for limited Negro suffrage
and his affirmation of Federal power over slavery in the
District of Columbia, the Southern Whigs could not dispel

283Ibid., chapter 15; Roseboom, Presidential Elections,
108-113; William MacDonald, Jacksonian Democracy, 1829-1837
(N.Y., 1906), chapter 17; A. M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of
Jackson (Boston, 1945), 210-216; Sydnor, Southern Sectional-
ism, 316-318; Sellers, Polk, 297-303; Channing, History, V,
458; Bassett, Jackson, II, 717-718; Wiltse, Calhoun, II,
294-295; J. B. McMaster, A History of the People of the United
States (N.Y., 1914), VI, 359-371; the fullest discussion of
the question is in Simms, Rise of the Whigs, 77, 94-95, 100-
116; Lynch, Van Buren, 381-396; von Holst, History, II, 147-
174; Claude Bowers, The Party Battles of the Jackson Period
(Boston, 1922), chapter 15; Glyndon G. VanDeusen, The
Jacksonian Era, 1828-1848 (N.Y., 1959), 100-112.

284See the North Carolina Standard, March 22, 1837.
the favorable impressions made by his other pronouncements and actions on the abolition-slavery issue. Thousands of voters in the South undoubtedly believed that he was indeed a Northern man with Southern policies.

The Northern Whigs, on the whole, did not appear to utilize the issue extensively in striking against Van Buren. It is interesting that they did not agree on how to treat his record; some insisted with the Southern Whigs that he was a friend of the reformers, while others argued that he was a tool of the slavocracy. The hardening attitude of the North toward the South during 1836, surely made the last argument more appealing to many voters.

The Northern Democrats, on the other hand, did not deny Van Buren's early anti-slavery record. They minimized it, but seemed to realize that those who were looking for an anti-slavery record could find satisfaction in those episodes. They followed his campaign pronouncements very closely because Van Buren took great pains to outline a position that protected Southern constitutional rights while not surrendering any Northern prerogatives. As for the abolitionists, the Northern Van Burenites clearly felt safe in denouncing them. Both sections of the Democratic party cooperated to quell the agitation which the Whigs developed over the petitions of the abolitionists.

\textsuperscript{285} The advice that he, Butler and Wright gave Marcy in Nov., 1835, undoubtedly remained confidential.
All things considered, the slavery issue was one of the important factors bearing on the election. It would seem that Van Buren's campaign letters, his actions and the compromising strategy that he laid down on this issue were of prime importance in preserving the national scope of the party and in leading it to victory.
As the year 1837 opened, Van Buren undoubtedly took time to think about his approaching inauguration and the heavy responsibilities that would soon be his. In plotting out his Inaugural Address, he determined to give serious attention to the abolitionist agitation. A similar decision had also been reached by Governor Marcy who was beginning his third term as the chief executive of the Empire state. In preparing his 1837 message, Marcy apparently did not seek the advice of the Regency leaders in Washington. He told the legislature that it was rather evident that "many of the agitators were prosecuting political designs under the mask of pretended philanthropy." It was his opinion that the fanatics, reprobated as they were by their fellow citizens, did not attract much attention anymore. He congratulated the state and added, "there is no longer any cause for disquietude on this account."

The special relationship that Marcy bore to Van Buren and the Democratic party led Blair to print this section of the message, along with other paragraphs dealing with

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1 Lincoln, ed., Messages from the Governors, III, 605.
2 Ibid., 606.
Jackson's retirement and Van Buren's victorious campaign.\footnote{Globe, Jan. 10, 1837; when newsman William Leggett publicly criticized Marcy for eulogizing Van Buren, the Governor revealed the coolness that had developed between himself and the President-elect. He explained, "All the attention given him is that the public voice has designated as a successor to Genl. J. the candidate who was supported on...his fitness to sustain the principles and carry forward the leading measures of the Presid. Adn. This remark is no great incumbrance, not very high eulogism". W.L. Marcy to Prosper M. Wetmore, Jan. 16, 1837, Marcy Papers.}

Blair indicated rather mechanically that the Governor treated the abolition question a second time, despite the angry protests of the anti-slavery men against his strong pronouncements in 1836. He continued by naming the Whigs and the abolitionists, who opposed Marcy's reelection, as the same factions who worked against the election of the Little Magician. He concluded that they did not like Van Buren's vote on the incendiary mails bill.\footnote{Globe, Jan. 10, 1837.}

In Cincinnati, the Philanthropist dryly remarked that this important portion of the message was not so long as it was the year before.\footnote{Philanthropist, Jan. 27, 1837.} It agreed that public opinion had been at work -- desecrating churches and mobbing citizens. But that was last year, said the paper; public sentiment had changed in the meantime, and the anti-slavery men were now meeting in peace where they had once been disturbed. The executive committee of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society also took note of Marcy's address. It pointed out that the
abolitionists had grown so strong during the last year that the New York leaders did not attempt any legislation as they had promised. With the Regency in a jam, the Governor's 1837 message was patently a weak effort designed to explain away the course of the state.

Considering the total situation in New York, Marcy probably said all that could have been expected of him. Nevertheless, his address did not help Van Buren and the party with the thinking citizen in either section of the country. On the other hand, the abolitionists obviously took advantage of their position and flailed Van Buren's organization as strongly as possible.

With the country preparing for a new administration, Francis Pickens of South Carolina surveyed the political landscape and reported to James Hammond that there would be bitter fighting in the new Congress. He wrote, "V. B. comes into power and it is said throws himself upon Southern principles & Southern men for support." Another impression of the political scene came from Calhoun. He told Hammond that the presidential race ended just about as Hammond had.

7Ibid.
8F.W. Pickens to J.H. Hammond, Feb. 16, 1837, Hammond Papers.
9Ibid.
foreseen when he left for Europe.\footnote{J.C. Calhoun to J.H. Hammond, Feb. 18, 1837, Hammond Papers.} Calhoun sniffed that Van Buren did not get a majority of the votes and added, "the general impression is, that he cannot maintain himself."\footnote{Ibid.} As the South Carolina Senator analyzed the situation, the country would, however, get through twelve years of very dangerous history. He concluded, "I, at present, see...no problem to disturb us...but the abolition question, which,...I fear is destined to shake the country to its center."\footnote{Ibid.} From an entirely different source, James G. Birney, came the opinion that the abolition cause had made great strides in the past three months.\footnote{James G. Birney to Lewis Tappan, Feb. 25, 1837, Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, I, 374.} Birney said that a victory on the question of eradicating slavery from the District of Columbia could be easily accomplished, if the President-elect were not so concerned about party unity. The anti-slavery editor feared that Van Buren would side with the South.

These private comments, while representative of the thinking of the leaders of two important groups in the nation, constituted but a fraction of the rumors and ideas that circulated in the land as Jackson approached the end of his second term. Before he left office the old Tennessean prepared a farewell address for his countrymen. In
one section he followed Washington's example and warned against an excess of party strife. He particularly stressed the dangers inherent in a sectional party alignment.\(^{14}\) Jackson also reminded the country that each state had the right to regulate its internal concerns. Although he did not name the abolitionists, he said that those who sought to disturb the rights of property of citizens of other states were sowing discord and ought to be strongly reprobated.\(^{15}\)

Shortly after he gave these admonitions to the public, Jackson watched Van Buren take the oath of office. The New Yorker proceeded to read his Inaugural Address which was not heard beyond the front rows of the assembled throng.\(^{16}\) The speech, which most of the citizenry later read, defined "the sole legitimate end of political institutions" as "doing the greatest good to the greatest number."\(^{17}\) The new President declared that abroad the country enjoyed the friendship of nearly every nation, while at home it "presented an aggregate of human prosperity surely not elsewhere to be found."\(^{18}\) Van Buren, who was the first President born after British rule had been extinguished, attributed the progress of the nation to the republican system of government and the freedom

\(^{14}\) Richardson, ed., *Messages of the Presidents*, III, 294-296.

\(^{15}\) *Ibid.*, 298.

\(^{16}\) Charleston Courier, March 10, 1837.

\(^{17}\) Richardson, ed., *Messages of the Presidents*, III, 314.

which the people enjoyed.19

By way of illustrating the achievements of the country, the Inaugural discussed several of the problems that menaced the success of the American experiment in 1787. Van Buren mentioned the fear that the people would not bear the taxation necessary to maintain the federal government and the fear that the nation could not defend itself.20 Those who predicted the quick collapse of the Republic for the above reasons were proved wrong, as were the men who thought that party strife would paralyze the system. The President went on to describe the success of the people in regulating their local affairs, in absorbing new territory, and in balancing the relationships between the states and the central government.21 Van Buren then turned to the greatest threat to the harmony of the Union -- the slavery issue.

In view of his concern for the problem, it was appropriate for the new chief executive to devote more space to the slavery question than any other in the address. Van Buren began his remarks by saying that the nation's founding fathers were aware of the delicate nature of the subject. They treated it with forebearance, in his opinion, and the

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19 It is an interesting sidelight that Van Buren was the direct descendant of a Dutch farmer who landed in New Amsterdam on March 4, 1637.
20 Richardson, ed., Messages of the Presidents, III, 315-316.
21 Ibid., 316-317.
citizens of the country, in a similar spirit, did not agitate the issue until the recent period.22 With the current excitement in mind, Van Buren advised the people to be generous in their outlook and to return to the spirit of the Republic’s forefathers. He also alluded to his pledge to veto any bill designed to free the slaves in the District of Columbia against the wishes of the slaveholding states. He reaffirmed his pledge and said that he felt he was acting in accord with spirit of the founders of the Republic.

The President continued his discussion by pointing out that, despite the current turmoil, the government was as strong as ever. He admitted there had been some local violence connected with the anti-slavery movement, but he expressed the hope that an enlightened public opinion would "resist and control every effort, foreign or domestic, which aims or would lead to overthrow our institutions."23

In his concluding sentences, the new head of state declared that he would be governed in his high duty by a strict adherence to the "letter and spirit of the Constitution as it was designed by those who framed it."24 Aside from his promise on the District slavery question, however, Van Buren did not spell out a program that he thought would meet the spirit of the founding fathers. He assumed that

\[\text{Ibid.}, 317-318.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}, 319.\]
\[\text{Ibid.}\]
his campaign letters were so well known that he did not have to lay down a program. Taken as a whole Van Buren's address was well written, but not too lengthy, notably strong on the abolition question, and more than adequate for the situation that he faced.

The Democrats, as might be supposed, extolled the President's message. The North Carolina Standard came right to the point and triumphantly informed its readers that the speech corresponded with the New Yorker's "former avowals, on the subject of slavery." Ritchie, who went to Washington to join the party leaders for the festivities, was not quite so brief when he appraised the new state of affairs. He was eminently pleased with the entire Inaugural Address and especially singled out Van Buren's veto pledge for the public. He expressed his high confidence in the principles of the new administration and called the cabinet a strong one. In the Crescent city, the party mouthpiece declared that Van Buren was a Jeffersonian of the '98 school whose principles were printed in his campaign letters and his Inaugural message.

Since White had carried Georgia, Blair was happy to copy the editorials of two papers from that state that were

26 Richmond Enquirer, March 9, 1837.
27 Ritchie named Joel R. Poinsett as a strong, new figure in the cabinet. Ibid., Feb. 28, March 9, 1837.
28 Louisiana Courier, March 22, 1837.
satisfied with the address.29 One of them, the Georgia Constitutionalist, stressed the President's pledge on the slavery issue and said that with the promise of a strict construction of the Constitution nothing more was needed.30 Blair himself wrote for his wide audience that the Farewell and the Inaugural embrace the great considerations before the people.31 The New Haven Register did not mention the veto pledge as it praised the speech.32 In Boston, the Post warned that some Massachusetts legislative members were pushing too fast for a solution to the problem of slavery in the District. It advised Democrats to work with the party along the lines laid down by Van Buren.33

The Philadelphia Whig organ, the National Gazette, praised the balance in the Inaugural and felt that the President's views of our past and future were well "set down."34 It complained, nevertheless, that it was in the dark on most of his principles. The paper did admit that it understood his views on slavery and the District of Columbia, and it linked the President with the Southern ultras on this item. It stated in a final summation that, if the new administration followed the Constitution, the

29 Savannah Georgian, quoted in Globe, March 20, 1837 and Georgia Constitutionalist, quoted in Ibid., March 15, 1837.
30 Ibid. 
31 Ibid., March 6, 1837; also Western Hemisphere, March 15, 1837.
32 New Haven Register, quoted in Globe, March 16, 1837.
33 Boston Post, quoted in Boston Investigator, April 14, 1837.
34 National Gazette, March 7, 1837.
Gazette would be with it. At the same time an interesting group of observations was recorded by that charming diarist, Philip Hone. He labelled the Jackson administration a disastrous one and thought that it would "excite the special wonder" of posterity. As for Van Buren's speech, he wrote that it was "very good"; the principles enunciated he pronounced "unexceptionable," and if the President "had not committed himself unnecessarily... on the subject of slavery," Hone would have shouted a hurrah for Martin the First. In another passage the Whig leader said that Van Buren would be a party President, but he also stated, "he is too much of a gentleman to be governed by the rabble..., as a gentleman, and a friend I have great respect for Mr. Van Buren."

The Richmond Whig had earlier stated that Van Buren was better qualified for the Presidency than Jackson. Although it would not surrender any of its principles, the paper declared that it would give the Dutchman a chance. These post-election thoughts were repeated in the main on the eve of the inauguration. After the ceremonies were over,

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35 Ibid.
36 March 4, 1837, Philip Hone, The Diary of Philip Hone, Allan Nevins, ed. (N.Y., 1927), I, 244.
37 March 6, 1837, ibid., 245.
38 March 4, 1837, ibid., 244.
39 Richmond Whig, Nov. 25, 1836.
40 Ibid., March 3, 1837.
Pleasant's wrote that the President might become popular, but the public most remember that he was a pet, a sycophant who reached power by foul and indirect means. The South was asked to recall his record as a friend of a free Missouri and Negro suffrage. The Whig obviously had the Inaugural speech in view when it cautioned that one must be slow in accepting Van Buren's professions which were grounded in interested motives. The Commonwealth of Kentucky declared that Jacksonism was on the wane and predicted a troubled future for the President. It did avow that Van Buren came out frankly "in relation to the slave question". A similar approbation was voiced by the Virginia Advocate.

In Charleston the Courier's Washington correspondent said that nothing in the address lent itself to captious criticism. The editors of the print went further and were exuberant over the document. They saw it as a good start for the administration and admitted that they experienced unmingled satisfaction with Van Buren's solemn rebuke of the fanatics. Since the abolition question was the only one, in their opinion, that could splinter the nation on sectional grounds, they expressed their approval of the President's

41 Ibid., March 14, 1837.
42 Ibid.
43 The Commonwealth (Frankfort, Ky.), March 15, 1837.
44 Virginia Advocate, quoted in National Intelligencer, March 15, 1837.
45 Charleston Courier, March 10, 1837.
46 Ibid., March 11, 1837.
firm stand by aligning themselves with the Democratic idea that a good Northern man was better than a Southerner backed by a Southern minority.47

Naturally the abolitionists were disconcerted by the speech. Birney's personal fears were confirmed by the news from Washington. His paper editorialized that the message boded no good for the land, although some parts of it were acceptable.48 Van Buren was clearly in favor of Southern slavery, exclaimed the Philanthropist, and the anti-slavery men now knew where he stood. Birney, who believed that a bill freeing the slaves in the District of Columbia could rather easily be passed, wrote that the President was pledged to resist the will of the majority.49 The New England Anti-Slavery Society in its spring resolutions condemned the New Yorker's veto pledge. It also contended that majority rule was being violated; this fact was deplored since he had a good record in the Missouri Crisis and on Negro suffrage.50

The Emancipator felt that Van Buren was finally unmasked. It said that he stood forth, in the face of heaven, as an enemy of equal rights; he had a tyrant's heart and a face of brass. The paper concluded that not much more had

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47 Ibid.; this article was quoted by the Democrats. See Globe, March 20, 1837, and North Carolina Standard, March 22, 1837.
48 Philanthropist, March 17, 1837.
49 The paper asked if the Calhoun men had gained an ascendancy over Van Buren. Ibid.
50 Ibid., June 30, 1837.
been expected from the man. As for the future, however, it put the country on guard that the abolitionists would keep the slavery issue alive even if bloodshed ensued. The executive committee of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society said that the President's course "ought not to create surprise." It was of the opinion that the republic was infested with the spirit of slavery; nevertheless, Van Buren's words were not considered a serious obstacle to the growth of the abolition movement.

Thus, Van Buren was both praised and maligned for his Inaugural Address. The people understood that he meant to carry on Jackson's controversial policies, and post-inaugural comment seemed to center on the abolition-slavery question that he had highlighted in his speech. Undoubtedly it was the most volatile and dangerous issue facing the Union at the time. Within a few weeks, nonetheless, the collapse of the Nation's banking system engulfed the new administration in an economic depression.

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51Emancipator, quoted in North Carolina Standard, March 22, 1837; Croswell wrote that the Emancipator assailed Van Buren because he put the District slave question to rest. Albany Argus, quoted in Globe, March 22, 1837.

52The last statement brought a rejoinder from a Baltimore paper that Garrison hid when real violence developed. Baltimore American, quoted in Globe, March 15, 1837.


54Samuel J. Hays spoke for thousands when he predicted in late 1836 that "Mr. Van Buren has a smooth sea ahead, and ...with judicious piloting the vessel of state can be safely moored at the end of his first term, in condition for many successful voyages." Samuel J. Hays to Andrew Jackson, Dec. 28, 1836, Jackson Papers.
A discussion of the panic of 1837 does not come within the scope of this paper. It should be noted, however, that the leading measures of the Van Buren Administration produced a break within the Democratic party which resulted in the opposition of the "Conservative" Democrats to the Independent Treasury. On the other hand, Calhoun and a small group of his followers swung over behind the President. These developments were important, but they did not greatly modify the nature of the two opposing parties.

During the first tumultuous months of the new administration, Van Buren's course toward the abolition-slavery controversy continued to be watched and discussed. In April the President's close friend, Silas Wright, reviewed his attitude toward the abolition movement in a letter sent to the party leaders in Burlington, Vermont. Wright was undoubtedly interested in keeping the Green Mountain men lined up behind the President's program. That he was only partially successful is evident from the Address to the People issued later by the Democratic convention of the

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55 In the Senate, Tallmadge (N.Y.) and Rives (Va.) were the leading Conservatives. Simms, Rise of the Whigs, 118-126; William Trimble, "Diverging Tendencies in New York Democracy in the Period of the Locofocons," American Historical Review, XXIV (1918-1919), 405-412.

56 John Tyler wrote that no real union could be made between the State Rights Whigs and the latitudinarians of the North. Yet he did not desert the Whig party. John Tyler to Henry Wise, Jan. 23, 1837, Tyler, Letters of the Tylers, III, 70-71; Charles Sellers, Jr., "Who Were the Southern Whigs?" American Historical Review, LIX (1953-1954), 335-346.

57 Globe, June 6, 1837.
state. It spoke out against slavery and defended the right of petition. It did not criticize the gag rule, but it implied that receiving and tabling petitions did not fulfill the constitutional obligations of Congress. The Vermont declaration indicated that the party was infected with the anti-slavery virus.

In this connection mention has been made of the plea of the Boston Post that the Massachusetts Democrats work with the rest of the party on the question of slavery in the federal District. It would seem that the New England Democrats were moving toward an anti-slavery position that might embarrass the President if it became widely known.

At this same time, the Secretary of the Treasury, Levi Woodbury, received a letter from an old Boston friend which analyzed the situation. This letter spoke of the efforts, during the last campaign, by "the violent Whig press" to make the Democrats, with "Mr. Van Buren as their head, appear as abolitionists." The writer went on to say, however,

Public opinion in this quarter, without distinction of political party or religious sect, is undoubtedly opposed to the discussion of the subject [Abolition]; -- although there is a considerable...and, I fear, growing corps of professed abolitionists.

58 Philanthropist, July 21, 1837.
59 Boston Investigator, April 14, 1837.
61 Ibid.
In the Northwest, the Philanthropist pointed to Van Buren's election and warned that, so long as efforts were made to keep the parties strong and the sections united, the influence of the South would be powerful in national affairs. This penetrating observation was linked to the paper's attack on the President who had been able to keep his party from splintering over the slavery issue. The Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, chagrined at the treatment that its program had received from the leaders of both parties, resolved that its members ought to relinquish all party ties. It also recommended that abolitionists aid no party unless the anti-slavery cause were advanced in the process.

In the South, the United States Telegraph ceased publication during the early weeks of the year. The Detroit Advertiser, a Whig paper, commented that the Telegraph had been a leader in the drive of the nullifiers to rally the South around the slavery issue. The Telegraph wanted to quarrel with the North and even went so far, in printing abolition material, as to include discourses on the cruelty of slavery. It would seem natural to assume that the demise of Duff Green's print was not mourned by Van Buren and his chief lieutenants.

The President received an interesting note from

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62Philanthropist, June 9, 1837; see also ibid., March 10, 1837.
64Detroit Advertiser, quoted in Globe, March 14, 1837.
Thomas Cooper, the ardent champion of Southern rights, about this same time. Cooper informed the President, "Your pledges on the abolition question are felt and approved; they will tell greatly in your favor in the South."65 In his mind, nevertheless, measures had to be undertaken in the North to counteract the effect of the abolition movement. Writing as if he were a Van Buren partisan, he concluded, "I think the difficulties are gradually clearing away from your path."66

One wonders what Cooper thought about the Texas annexation question which involved the expansion of slavery. It was certainly a knotty problem facing the Van Buren Administration. In order to put the matter into focus, a brief review of the developments that involved Texas after Van Buren left the State Department is in order. As was noted earlier, Anthony Butler, who was sent as the American minister to Mexico in the autumn of 1829, waited until the summer of 1831 before he approached the Mexican officials about the purchase of Texas. When the negotiations proved fruitless, Butler unfolded a plan to bribe a treaty from the Mexican government. Jackson firmly resisted these schemes; Butler's mission ultimately ended when the Mexican government requested his recall in October, 1835.67 His replace-

65Thomas Cooper to Martin Van Buren, March 27, 1837, Van Buren Papers.
66Ibid.
ment was a prominent Mississippi Democrat, Powhatan Ellis.

By the time Ellis was appointed, the Texans were in open revolt against the government of Santa Anna. The first small rebellion of Americans in the area occurred in 1826. During the succeeding years, there was constant turmoil between the Texans and the Mexican authorities. The desire of the Texans to import slaves was one cause of the friction. The vast majority of the Texans, while "they formed...no real ties with Mexico and broke none with the United States," appear to have been hopeful, however, that stability could be achieved within the framework of the federal system created by the Mexican Constitution of 1824. The revolt that broke out in the fall of 1835 was not triggered by the slavery issue but developed out of the resistance that the Texans offered to Santa Anna's centralized dictatorship.

The rebels were not prepared for a contest with the Mexican government and immediately turned to the United States for help. They appealed for armed volunteers, and the provisional government passed liberal land laws in a move designed to attract Americans to Texas. Three commissioners were subsequently appointed to raise loans and

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get men and supplies in the United States.\textsuperscript{72} In the meantime, Jackson had ordered the federal district attorneys to uphold the 1818 neutrality law. The statute was loosely worded, however, and "emigration" to Texas was a subterfuge that could not be stopped. The temper of the American people at the time was such that it seemed impossible to secure a grand jury indictment. In this situation, violations of the law were overlooked as "the administration tried in a lukewarm manner to meet the spirit as well as the letter of its neutral obligations."\textsuperscript{73} All things considered, the Texas Revolution could not have succeeded without the aid that came from the United States.\textsuperscript{74}

It is important to note that the original Texas commissioners thought that they were also paving the way for the annexation of Texas to the United States.\textsuperscript{75} It was common knowledge that Jackson wanted to acquire the territory. Thus it was a surprise for Stephen F. Austin to learn in April, 1836, that the President would not sanction government grants for the struggling republic. Indeed a second commissioner, W.H. Wharton, had to wait until late May

\textsuperscript{72} Barker, "United States and Mexico," 3-5.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 30, 5-15.
\textsuperscript{74} For the pro-Texas spirit see, Louisiana Courier, April 5, 1836; Richmond Enquirer, April 15-June, 1836, passim; Western Hemisphere, May 11, 1836.
\textsuperscript{75} Garrison, "Annexation," 73-74.
until he could secure talks with Jackson and Van Buren. Jackson offered little encouragement even for immediate recognition; he wanted positive evidence that Texas was a de facto government. The President's caution, which dampened the hopes of the Texans, was seemingly dictated by a concern for the sectional animosities that might grow out of a vigorous pro-Texas stand.

The abolitionists had been alerted by Benjamin Lundy to the "plot" of the slavocracy to annex Texas. He had previously denounced the plans to purchase the area. Early in 1836 he published a pamphlet which was entitled "The War in Texas." Lundy declared that it was clear that the revolution was part of a plan to wrest the territory from Mexico, after it had been settled by slaveholders, with a view to eventual annexation to the United States. This tract circulated widely in the North and undoubtedly influenced thousands of persons. Lundy carried on his fight against Texas in a paper, the National Enquirer, which he established in Philadelphia. He urged Birney, for one, to work on the Texas question, and the Cincinnati editor responded by printing some of his material on the slave plot to penetrate the territory.

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76 Stanley Siegel, A Political History of the Texas Republic, 1836-1845 (Austin, 1956), 43.
79 B. Lundy to J.G. Birney, March 27, 1836, Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, I, 315; Philanthropist, April 15, 1836.
Anti-Slavery Society resolved in May that sympathy for Texas was pro-slavery and ought to be reprobated. The hostility to Texas was also reflected in the editorial policy of the prominent Whig journal, the National Gazette.

The opponents of any plan to recognize and annex Texas were exceedingly vocal, and Webster concluded "This whole subject appears to me to be likely to bring into our politics new causes of embarrassment and new tendencies to dismemberment." The leaders of the administration obviously agreed with the New Englander. In addition to Jackson's caution, evidence is found in the course of Senator King (Ala.) who led a move in April to table a memorial from a group of Ohioans which called for the recognition of Texas. Other resolutions and petitions of a similar nature were presented in May, however, and referred to the foreign relations committee. Clay reported for the committee in mid-June; he said that if the Texans were capable of maintaining a government, they ought to be recognized. In early July, 1836, just before the session ended, both houses of Congress passed a resolution to that effect. Congress asked for an

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80 Ibid., June 24, 1836.
81 National Gazette, April 25-26, May, 1836, passim.
82 Daniel Webster to Edward Everett, May 7, 1836, Fletcher Webster, ed., The Private Correspondence of Daniel Webster (Boston, 1857), II, 19.
83 Barker, "United States and Mexico," 27.
84 Congressional Globe, 24 Cong., 1 sess., 604, 616.
agent to investigate the total situation in Texas, but Jackson indicated that he had already named Henry Morfit for the task.

During the summer two new representatives from Texas arrived in Washington. They were Tennesseans and old friends of Jackson. After two interviews with John Forsyth, the Secretary of State, they appraised their government of Forsyth's uncommunicative attitude. They did learn that while Jackson favored annexation, it would be delayed until it could be consummated with propriety. This report further demonstrated the President's hesitancy with respect to the Texas question. It would seem that Jackson was fearful of bringing the issue to the forefront, because it would push another controversy that involved slavery into the presidential campaign. Of course, he was also concerned about the country's relations with Mexico.

Morfit reported to Forsyth in the fall of 1836 and wrote that the government and the people of Texas wanted annexation. Jackson, in his message of December 21, 1836, nonetheless, advised against a quick recognition of the Lone Star Republic. He pointed out that recognition would also

86 Ritchie reminded Van Buren of his desire to get Texas in 1829. He said the South counted on him to aid in the project; when Texas would be taken was for Van Buren to decide. Thomas Ritchie to Martin Van Buren, June 9, 1836, Van Buren Papers; R.E. Parker wrote that someone would want some statement on Texas in order to agitate a new question in the campaign. R.E. Parker to Martin Van Buren, June 29, 1836,
involve annexation. The United States might well be cautious for her reputation in world opinion could be damaged. 87

John Q. Adams admitted that the tone of the message was quite unexpected. 88 The Richmond Whig observed that the message was "all the topic" in political circles. 89 The Whig said that Jackson in reality threw his weight against the future annexation of the country. Pleasants approved of his policy and warned that the abolition movement would derive strength from the annexation question. He went so far as to say that the question could unite the free states. With respect to Jackson's caution he wrote, "The voice of the charmer Van Buren has been listened to." 90

The Texas agent in Washington, who was once again W.H. Wharton, told his superiors that recognition would be given the republic. Annexation, however, was another matter, for this question would agitate the Union more than Missouri restriction and abolitionism combined. 91 Several Southern papers, he continued, had threatened the North on the issue, and it was his opinion that such denunciations would goad

87 Richardson, ed., Messages of the Presidents, III, 265-269; Van Buren may well have advised Jackson on his message. See the memorandum from Jackson in the Van Buren Papers.

88 Dec. 21, 1836, Adams, Diary, 474.

89 Richmond Whig, Dec. 27, 1836.

90 Ibid.

91 This letter was dated Dec. 11, 1836, Siegel, Texas Republic, 73.
the North into determined opposition. He wrote that if Texas were annexed, it would not be until the problem had convulsed the United States for several years.

In line with this remarkable prediction, the friends of Texas pushed for a Congressional resolution recognizing the republic, but it was delayed by the opposition of many Administration men. Commenting on the reluctance of these men to support recognition, Wharton reported that some openly told him they wished to postpone the subject until the next Congress. As members of the Van Buren party, they were afraid that the annexation issue might be made a test in the spring Congressional elections. Van Buren would have to take a stand, and the party would be hurt in one section or the other.92 Despite the temporizing which presumably was well analyzed by Wharton, a resolution did pass both houses of Congress late in the session.93

Although there is no evidence that the annexation question became an important issue in the Congressional elections, the Van Buren Administration had to face the problem. The Texans now had a minister in Washington in the person of Memucan Hunt, who had earlier been sent as a special agent to help the ailing Wharton. Hunt talked with Forsyth shortly after the new American government was installed. He told his superiors that so long as Mexico

92 Ibid., 76.
93 Congressional Globe, Containing the Debates and Proceedings, 24 Congress, 2 session, 268-269, 270.
was active in her efforts to reconquer Texas, the United States would not move toward an annexation treaty. If she did, there was a very real possibility that a war would result between Mexico and the United States. Hunt concluded that Texas would have to force Mexico to recognize her independence before the Americans would act.

Hunt did not press the matter in the early summer and went to Mississippi to secure a loan for his government. Upon his return to Washington in July, he took the initiative and, in various conversations around the city, played upon the fear that the British might recognize and protect the young republic. He did secure an interview with Van Buren; he reported that the President was cordial and talked of closer ties between the governments but used only "glittering...generalities." In August he sent a note to the Texas State Department which mentioned the neutrality of the Globe on the Texas question. Through a relative who knew Blair, he learned that Van Buren had instructed the editor to pursue that course.

As the President and his advisers watched the currents of public opinion, they were undoubtedly aware of the growing hostility of the North to the idea of annexation. On the other hand, important Southerners, such as Wise, Calhoun, and Preston, spoke out for Texas. The future and the

95 Ibid.
96 Ibid., 90.
security of the South made it imperative, they said, that the area be absorbed by the United States. With a number of Southern newspapers calling for Texas, whatever the cost might be, Hunt decided that the time was right to force Van Buren's hand.

On August 4, 1837, he sent a long document to Forsyth which proposed that Texas be annexed by the United States. He presented a brief history of the territory from the time of the American Colonization movement. He asked for annexation because of the ties of blood, and the respect for constitutional democracy which linked the two nations. Hunt also stressed the wealth of Texas and pointed out that possession of the territory would protect the frontier and give the United States control of the Gulf. He went on to argue that Texas could become a rival of the United States and collisions might occur along the border.

Forsyth delayed three weeks before sending a reply to the Texan. He indicated that the President had read Hunt's paper. In this connection there is a draft in the Van Buren papers which reveals that the President noted the main points in Hunt's application. In Forsyth's reply, he said that the United States recognized the independence of nations on the basis of the facts in the case, not on the basis of any

97 Philanthropist, July 7, 1836; also ibid., July 14, 1836.
98 Siegel, Texas Republic, 85.
99 Smith, Annexation of Texas, 64.
100 Notes on Texas headed "Amalgamation...," Van Buren Papers.
rights in a particular situation. With regard to the
annexation of Texas, Forsyth wrote that the President pre-
ferred not to raise questions about the constitutionality
of taking in a foreign state. Furthermore, the United
States was tied by a treaty with Mexico and could not move
toward annexation without the obvious threat of trouble
with Mexico.101

Although there is no draft for this note in the Van
Buren papers, it would appear that he directed Forsyth in
the construction of it. Before the correspondence between
Forsyth and Hunt was made public, a number of observers
knew that the annexation question was being discussed in
Washington. The prominent abolitionist, Elizur Wright,
thought in mid-August that "the probability seems...to
strengthen that Texas will be admitted."102 He predicted a
tornado of anti-slavery feeling and the possible end of the
Union if the territory were absorbed. The Evening Post
opposed the annexation and said, "The nation is on the
brink of a precipice and with Martin Van Buren it rests
whether it shall pass over and be broken into pieces."103

The policy of the Post prompted Van Buren to send J.K.
Paulding to see William C. Bryant, the editor of the paper.

101 Smith, Annexation of Texas, 64-65.
102 Elizur Wright to J.G. Birney, Aug. 14, 1837,
103 Evening Post, quoted in Philanthropist,
Sept. 8, 1837.
Paulding reported, "I endeavored to impress upon him the extreme delicacy of this question; its aptitude to produce not only disunion...but the overthrow of the Party...dear to us both." Paulding wrote that the question involved fanaticism, religion, politics, and personal interests and "The difficulty of...balancing these, amounts almost to an impossibility." The course of the administration indicated that Van Buren was determined to delay annexation in the interests of national and party harmony.

The policy of the government was made clear to the public when the President transmitted the documents to the House near the end of the special September session. The North Carolina Standard printed the Forsyth letter and editorialized that the reasons for not entering any negotiations at that time were "Conclusive and unanswerable." Blair merely declared that one could see the "posture in which the question of annexation" rested as a result of the conditions that existed between the United States, Mexico and Texas. He spent a good deal more time lashing out at the inconsistency of John Q. Adams who had come to oppose the acquisition of the area. Croswell felt that the large

105 Ibid.
106 North Carolina Standard, Oct. 18, 1837; the Whig National Gazette said that it agreed with some administration prints that Van Buren's policy was a credit to the nation. National Gazette, Oct. 19, 1837.
majority of the people would approve the administration's course. He thought that a proper time might arrive for the annexation but he could not say when.\textsuperscript{108} Ritchie, who wanted Texas badly, refused to comment on the Forsyth note. The Charleston Courier followed the same policy.

The Richmond Whig remained silent on the correspondence, as did the National Intelligencer. In Cincinnati, Hammond of the Gazette maintained that the subject was not debatable and would be quietly disposed of by Congress.\textsuperscript{109} He also stated that it would be "political annihilation" for anyone north of the Mason-Dixon line to advocate the annexation of Texas. A Philadelphia paper termed the issue the most inflammatory topic of the day and refused to take any notice of the Forsyth letter.\textsuperscript{110} The Philanthropist carried the favorable comments of the Washington correspondent of the New York Courier and Enquirer. As for its own position, Gamaliel Bailey, the new editor, was clearly pleased but could not praise the Van Buren administration.\textsuperscript{111}

In the next session of Congress, Senator Preston introduced a resolution on January 4, 1838, which called for the "re-annexation" of Texas. He spoke in support of his resolutions in March, but the Senate was not disposed to act

\textsuperscript{108}Albany Argus, quoted without comment but seeming approval by the Louisiana Courier, Oct. 13, 1837.
\textsuperscript{109}Cincinnati Gazette, Sept. 6, Oct. 19, 1837.
\textsuperscript{110}American Weekly Messenger (Philadelphia, Pa.), Sept. 20, 1837, and the fall of 1837, \textit{passim}.
\textsuperscript{111}Philanthropist, Oct. 17, 1837.
on the matter. Finally, on June 14, a vote was taken, and it was defeated 24-14. In the meantime, Hunt told R.A. Irion, the Texas Secretary of State, in January that it was useless to pursue the question further. Nevertheless, a month later Hunt was buoyed up by the news that Van Buren and the cabinet were planning to send a man to Mexico City to secure Mexican approval of the annexation. The hopes of the Texans soon faded, however, as it became apparent that the administration was not disposed to abandon its policy. By the summer of 1836 the Texas government instructed its minister to show no more interest in the project. In the fall of the year, the application for admission was withdrawn, and the problem was resolved, as far as both countries were concerned, for the next several years.

It is difficult to assess Van Buren's role with regard to the annexation of Texas. His papers contain few items that bear on the subject. Hunt thought in January, 1838, that Van Buren and Forsyth both wanted to receive Texas but were hampered by party obligations, the hostility of the free states to the idea, and the fear of a war with Mexico which would not be popular at home and would damage America's reputation abroad. Hunt said that many friends of annexation dreaded to raise the issue, for it might precipitate

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the dissolution of the Union. These comments would seem to be in line with the testimony of earlier observers. On the other hand, one wonders if Van Buren really had a strong desire to acquire Texas and expand the slave system to the Southwest. His record during the Missouri Controversy and on the Florida Territory Act indicate his aversion to the spread of the institution. He later wrote in 1856 that his record on the advance of slavery into the territories was a consistent one and that he was willing to be judged by it. Except for his work as Secretary of State, his course toward Texas shows the same reluctance to cooperate with the expansion of slavery. During these years his fear for the stability of the Union was genuine, and it may have been the chief reason for holding back on Texas. Unfortunately one cannot follow his patterns of thought on this momentous question.

Another facet of the slavery controversy that continued to come before Congress and the nation was the problem presented by the petitions of the abolitionists. During the short session of Jackson's last Congress, petitions were sent to Washington in increasing numbers. The House

115 Martin Van Buren, Letter of Ex-President Van Buren.
116 The preparation of the abolitionists is illustrated by Birney's exhortation to get ten names for every one obtained on petitions for the previous session. Philanthropist, Sept. 27, 1836.
ultimately repassed the gag rule.\textsuperscript{117} This second rebuke of the anti-slavery men led them to redouble their effort and literally flood Congress with the documents. The national office of the American Anti-Slavery Society directed the campaign. Henry B. Stanton, one of the Lane rebels, urged the abolitionists to focus the attention of the North on this violation of their civil rights. Anti-slavery newspapers printed sample documents and whipped up enthusiasm for the crusade.\textsuperscript{118} From the spring of 1837 to the spring of 1838, 412,000 petitions reached the House and two-thirds that many were presented to the Senate. The Society reported that 130,200 of these dealt with slavery in the federal District. The Texas question which reached a climax during these months was the subject of 182,400 petitions; slavery in the territories, the interstate slave trade, the gag rule and the fear that new slave states would be admitted were mentioned in thousands of petitions.\textsuperscript{119} The number of signers ran into the hundreds of thousands.

During the 1837-1838 session of the Twenty-Fifth Congress, abolition petitions were presented to the House from the first possible moment.\textsuperscript{120} The struggle that ensued over the question of receiving them reopened old wounds.

\textsuperscript{117}\textit{Congressional Globe}, 24 Cong., 2 sess., 106.
\textsuperscript{118}\textit{Russel Nye, Fettered Freedom} (East Lansing, 1949), 36-37.
\textsuperscript{119}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{120}\textit{Congressional Globe}, 25 Cong., 2 sess., 19.
Furthermore, it was soon apparent that the House would have to take some action or it would find its machinery clogged for the duration of the session. In this atmosphere the Southern members of the chamber walked out on December 20, shortly before three in the afternoon. The meeting which followed was held in the District of Columbia Committee room and lasted until after midnight. It was finally agreed that Representative Patton (Va.) would reintroduce the gag rule. The next day the rules were suspended and the motion, which was very similar to the Pinckney Resolution, passed by a 122-74 count. Once again Blair pointed to the Northern Whigs, led by Slade and Adams, as the group that had pushed the petition question. He said that the approval of the Patton resolution was most gratifying. In his editorial he undoubtedly spoke for the administration. The vote revealed that 87 of 102 Democrats supported the resolution.

Over in the upper house, an important test case, as the Charleston Courier labelled it, had been fought out a few days earlier. Senators Wall (N.J.) and Clay wanted a petition, which objected to the continuance of slavery in the District, referred to the committee on the District of Columbia. Calhoun and Preston maintained that the Senate

121 Charleston Courier, Dec. 27, 1837; Congressional Globe, 25 Cong., 2 sess., 41.
122 Globe, Dec. 21, 1837.
123 The Southern Democrats later reminded the nation of the count on the Patton Resolution. Ibid., Aug. 25, 1840.
124 Charleston Courier, Dec. 23, 1837.
could not receive the document. After a lengthy debate, the question of receiving the petition was tabled. The Courier later noted that Silas Wright was absent; Blair reported that he voted "nay," but Wright corrected him in a letter which explained his absence and stated that he would have voted "aye" on the motion. Wright obviously knew that his stand was being watched and corrected Blair's mistake. In the subsequent weeks of the session, the upper chamber followed its established precedent of laying the question of reception on the table.

The Patton resolution was in harmony with the two rules previously adopted by the House on the petition question. The Democrats, by and large, supported the gag as they had in the earlier instances. This resolution, which compromised the issue for both sections of the country, certainly had the President's approval. It is impossible to say exactly how active he was in lining up votes for the resolution. In this connection a letter written in 1848 by a New York Democrat, who had become a Hunker and an enemy of Van Buren, is interesting. While it must be read with

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126 *Charleston Courier*, Dec. 23, 1837; *Globe*, Dec. 18, 19, 1837.
127 It was in this session of Congress that Calhoun introduced his famous resolutions which reaffirmed the right of the states to control their own domestic institutions and warned of the dangers inherent in the abolition movement. *Congressional Globe*, 25 Cong., 2 sess., 55; as ultimately amended, they may be seen in ibid., 98.
a certain caution, it maintained that in the 1830's Van Buren and Wright insisted that all Democrats must support the policy of receiving and laying abolition petitions on the table without a reading.\textsuperscript{128} Suffice it to say, Van Buren did not speak out officially on the matter. He must have felt that it would be dangerous to become openly involved in the struggle. It seems safe to assume that Wright mirrored his wishes in the Senate.

The prickly petition question arose again, as everyone undoubtedly expected, in the next session of Congress. The Senate resumed the standard procedure of laying the question of receiving the documents on the table. In the House the gag rule was introduced for the fourth time by a Northern Democrat, Charles G. Atherton (N.H.). It was passed by a count of 126-78.\textsuperscript{129} A regular pattern for handling the petitions was clearly being established. The abolitionists continued to send the documents into Washington, however, and the general public in the North viewed the restrictions on the anti-slavery petitions with increasing hostility. The course of the Northern Democrats was jeopardized by this growing tide of opinion. The petition problem was destined

\textsuperscript{128}Albert Gallup to W. L. Marcy, May 11, 1848, Marcy Papers.

\textsuperscript{129}Congressional Globe, Containing the Debates and Proceedings, 25 Congress, 3 session, 26.
to return during the next meeting of Congress, and since the presidential election was approaching, the Whigs were certain to work on this issue along with other aspects of the slavery controversy.
CHAPTER 7

THE ELECTION YEAR, 1840

The campaign of 1840 opened in November, 1836, when the Philadelphia Inquirer announced that it was going to "keep the flag flying" for the Hero of the Thames.\(^1\) Shortly thereafter a Somerset county, Pennsylvania meeting formally nominated Harrison for the 1840 election.\(^2\) Although a number of Whig papers declined to commit themselves before Van Buren was even inaugurated, some of the ardent Harrison men evidently believed that there was no harm done in beginning the campaign so early.\(^3\) The idea soon spread to North Carolina where the chief Democratic organ said that it was all "fudge."\(^4\) In the thinking of the Standard, no group of Southerners would vote for an abolitionist. While hurling one of the party's favorite charges against Harrison, the paper clearly overlooked his victories in the Border South in the 1836 election.

During the next two and a half years, Harrison's managers kept his name before the public so that he had considerable support when the Whig convention assembled in

\(^1\)Philadelphia Inquirer, quoted in Boston Courier, Dec. 1, 1836.
\(^2\)Cincinnati Gazette, Dec. 31, 1836.
\(^3\)Among those refusing to take a stand were the Richmond Whig, Nov. 25, 1836, Boston Courier, Dec. 1, 1836, and Cincinnati Gazette, Dec. 31, 1836.
\(^4\)North Carolina Standard, March 22, 1837.
Harrisburg in December, 1839. The convention adopted the unit rule, and on the first count Henry Clay had a narrow lead over the Ohioan. In subsequent ballots Harrison picked up strength from the delegates who originally favored General Winfield Scott, and he was finally declared the nominee. No platform was adopted by the convention.\(^5\)

In the Democratic camp, it was a foregone conclusion that Van Buren would run for a second term. The movements for Benton and Calhoun had never really gathered any strength.\(^6\) In fact Calhoun made a point of attending the White House reception on New Year’s day in 1840 where he greeted Blair with a vigorous, double hand clasp.\(^7\) A few weeks later he had a personal conversation with the President. Van Buren hastened to explain to Jackson that "Mr. Calhoun...after the message was sent in...called upon me in company with Mr. Roane of Va. & said that being sincerely with me in politics & having outlived his personal prejudices agt. me, he took pleasure in thus putting an end

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\(^5\)Roseboom, Presidential Elections, 119-120.


\(^7\)Richmond Whig, Jan. 14, 1840; the Albany Evening Journal said that Calhoun and Van Buren were uniting because of the strength of the Harrison movement. Quoted in Cleveland Herald and Gazette (Cleveland, O.), Jan. 15, 1840.
to the non-intercourse which had so long prevailed between us."8

In view of the temper of the times, the slavery controversy was certain to become a factor in the race between Van Buren and Harrison. Many of the charges and counter-charges that had been aired in the previous campaign were used again in 1840. Indeed, immediately after the Whig convention had adjourned, the *Globe* said that Harrison would go down to defeat in the South, where there was no sympathy for his views.9 A short time thereafter Blair quoted from an article in the *Emancipator* which asserted that the anti-slavery element in the Whig party secured the defeat of Henry Clay at Harrisburg.10 Blair did carry that part of the article which expressed reservations with regard to Harrison.11 His wide audience saw the connection between Harrison and the abolitionists, however.

The Democrats were naturally pleased that they could resume their assault against Harrison with the fanatics of the North listed as his particular friends.12 In Ohio

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9Globe, Dec. 9, 1839; see also the opinion from Georgia that Arthur Tappan would be as well received as Harrison. This state rights paper named a local favorite, George M. Troup, for the Presidency. *Georgia Journal*, Dec. 17, 1839.


11See the full article in *The Pennsylvania Freeman* (Philadelphia, Pa.), Dec. 19, 1839.

12*Louisiana Courier*, Jan. 16, 1840.
Samuel Medary accused the Whig candidate of joining an abolition society in 1839 in order to secure the help of this group in the convention. He also called the attention of the reader to the 1833 Cheviot speech and quoted that part of the address which read "it has long been an object near my heart to see the whole of...[the government's] surplus revenue appropriated to that object [emancipation]."

Medary closed his article by declaring that if Harrison were elected the $26,000,000 deposited with states would be used to purchase Negroes who would then overrun the country. He asked the people of the South and the people of Ohio if they were prepared for this eventuality at the hands of the Whig party.

The Cheviot address was frequently mentioned by the Van Burenites as they worked for their candidate by disparaging Harrison. The Louisiana Courier thought it rather grotesque for the Mobile Chronicle, a Whig paper, to print the essence of the speech and then deny that its man had abolitionist propensities. The New Orleans journal hammered away on this theme by reprinting Van Buren's letter to Samuel Gwin of July 11, 1834, and contrasting its declaration, that the federal government could not interfere

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13Cincinnati Advertiser, quoted in Ohio Statesman (Columbus, O.), Jan. 6, 1840. Repeated in Ibid., Jan. 7, 1840.
14Ibid.
15One Alabama rally in Dallas county interestingly enough did not allude to the slavery issue, even though William L. Yancey figured prominently in its proceedings. Tuscaloosa Flag, quoted in Globe, Jan. 1, 1840.
16Louisiana Courier, Jan. 25, 1840.
with slavery in the states, with the sentiments expressed by the Ohioan. 17 In Charleston, the Courrier, which had slowly come to a Democratic position in the last campaign, tried to be fair regarding the two men. It admitted that Van Buren had favored the restriction of slavery in Missouri while Harrison had voted the opposite way. 18 Nevertheless, it contended that the New Yorker's letter to Amis and his Inaugural veto pledge made him safe for the South. On the other hand, the Whig standard-bearer had uttered words at Cheviot which were dangerous for the area. 19

Ritchie added his voice to the chorus by publishing an article by a "State Rights Republican." It said that since the Whigs had reopened their efforts to brand Van Buren an abolitionist, the Cheviot speech must be compared with the Gwin letter. 20 It is evident that the Democrats hoped to influence public opinion by contrasting Van Buren's strict constitutional views with Harrison's desire for federal action. Concerning Harrison's vague qualification that the states must approve a federal program, the party leaders obviously felt that scores of readers would ignore the point as they got an overall view of the position of the two men.

17 Ibid., Jan. 28, 1840.
18 Charleston Courier, Jan. 6, 1840.
19 Ibid.; Ritchie gladly quoted this article for the benefit of his crosstown rival. Richmond Enquirer, Jan. 18, 1840.
20 Ibid., Feb. 8, 1840.
During the early weeks of the canvass, Ritchie also referred to the President's promise to veto any act which sought to alter the status of slavery in the District of Columbia. He exclaimed that the salvation of the South lay in this pledge to block the schemes of the reformers. He also wrote that Harrison was not the man to whom the South could look for this type of defense.

As might be expected, the Richmond Whig directed an answer to this article and levelled a volley at Van Buren. "Powhatan" charged that it smacked of Federalism to rest the safety of the South on a veto. He then went on to argue that Harrison was really a better man for the section than the New Yorker. In his words, Ritchie forgot about the Missouri controversy. By way of refreshing his memory, "Powhatan" printed Van Buren's vote for the New York Senate Resolution of 1820. He followed this item with the letter that Van Buren wrote to Noah in December, 1819, wherein he urged the Tammany leaders to support King for the Senate seat. Turning from the President's record on the Missouri question, "Powhatan" listed the other standard charges against him. These involved the vote for limited Negro suffrage in New York in 1821, the vote to restrict the slave trade in Florida Territory in 1822, and the affirmation of Congressional power over slavery in the District

\[\text{Ibid., Jan. 7, 1840.}\]
\[\text{Richmond Whig, Jan. 14, 1840.}\]
\[\text{This letter was taken from Holland's biography. Ibid.}\]
found in the Amis letter of 1836.

While Pleasants poured this heavy fire on the President, a new development in the campaign came from the abolitionists. In a lengthy editorial, the *Emancipator* admitted that it rejoiced over Clay's defeat in the Whig convention. The paper continued by saying that, although Van Buren and Harrison were not slaveholders, no one wanted to interrogate Van Buren about his views, because he was known to favor the "slave power." Harrison, then, was the object of the *Emancipator*’s inquiry. As regards the Ohioan's stand, the anti-slavery organ noted that he was a party man who accepted a slaveholder as his running mate. A number of his deeds, which the paper said were well known, were also submitted. These included his efforts, as Governor of Indiana Territory, to make slavery lawful in the territory, and his vote with the South in 1819 on the Missouri question. Harrison's loss of a Congressional seat in 1822 because of his pro-slavery sentiments, and the testimony of the Virginia Whigs in 1836 that he was strong on the slavery issue were also discussed. In the opinion of the paper the two candidates were much the same. Nevertheless, it added that Harrison's actions were "stronger" demonstrations of his

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25 Ibid.
26 Strangely enough the Vincennes speech of 1835 was ignored. Ibid.
hostility to the cause of freedom than Van Buren's more recent speeches.\footnote{The paper said that if Harrison were going to repent, he should make his views known. \textit{Ibid.}} The \textit{Emancipator} closed by reminding its audience that Van Buren had helped to elect Rufus King to the Senate in 1820 and that "he has never attempted to extend slavery to regions where it was already abolished."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}

After this article had appeared, another abolitionist mouthpiece, the \textit{Pennsylvania Freeman}, discoursed on the same subject. With respect to the views of Harrison, it stated that the papers of Blair and Medary called him the favorite of the abolitionists.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Jan. 16, 1840.} In answer to this proposition, the \textit{Freeman} published sections of Harrison's Vincennes speech which illustrated his antipathy to the anti-slavery men. The paper declared that if he had changed any of his ideas, it wanted the information. As for the Democratic candidate, it simply said, "There seems to be no doubt as to Martin Van Buren's opinions.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}}" One week later, however, it argued that Van Buren could be redeemed.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, Jan. 23, 1840.} The \textit{Freeman} insisted that the President defended the South because that area was united on the slavery issue and commanded a large block of votes. It added that should the North, or even Pennsylvania, unite behind the cause of liberty, Van Buren would stand erect and breath the free air as he did when...
he voted for the Senate resolution on Missouri in New York. If Pennsylvania would take the lead, it asserted that the Chief Executive would be freed from his vassalage to the slavocracy.

In Cincinnati, the Philanthropist commented on the Democrats in general and the Ohio party in particular and complained that their leadership "is distinguished by intolerance...and vulgar profligacy." It deprecated "their base devotion to the slaveholder, and their abuse of abolitionists...under the mask of a democracy that is forever blustering about equal rights..." 

The following week it remarked that the anti-slavery editors paid little attention to the last presidential race. "The political duties of abolitionists in reference to the rival candidates were scarcely noticed," lamented the paper. The Philanthropist said, however, that in the current campaign the abolitionist newspapers were actively discussing the candidates. It also observed that the leading non-Garrisonian organs had become critical of Harrison's record. Despite the anti-Democratic tone of Bailey's editorials, the paper printed a long article concerning Harrison's activities that included the Vincennes address and other incidents that demonstrated his pro-slavery

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32 Philanthropist, Jan. 28, 1840.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., Feb. 4, 1840.
feelings. In order to get the facts before its readers, it then published Van Buren's record, which was very acceptable in the early years, but was not so favorable when the Amis letter and the Inaugural pledge were considered. Bailey wrote that the paper had no definite opinions on the man, although it was watching the situation closely.

The foregoing comments indicated the real dissatisfaction of the abolitionists with both candidates. It is worthy of note that, just as Birney admired Van Buren's early record on slavery in 1836 and hoped that he would yield to the rising anti-slavery tide, these editors had a good word for the President. Yet it is apparent that they could not back him. In reality, with Harrison similarly disqualified, they were working their way along to a third party.

The remarks of the Emancipator were not missed by the Southern Whigs. Pleasants reminded his readers that the Democrats were constantly trying to prejudice the South.

35Ibid.

36In writing to Birney, Bailey said that he was more of a Democrat than a Whig. Nevertheless, he stated that Harrison had refused to pledge anything to the South, and hence it was his belief that the only way to beat Van Buren was to vote for Harrison. Such a course of events would be a blow to slavery. Gamaliel Bailey to J. G. Birney, Feb. 21, 1840, Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, I, 531-532.

37Elisha Whittlesy, an important Ohio Whig, thought, "The abolition leaders nowhere will support Gen. Harrison. The nomination is popular with the Whigs generally." Elisha Whittlesy to Joshua Giddings, Jan. 10, 1840, Giddings-Julian Papers, Library of Congress.
Thus Ritchie had published the article from the *Emancipator* which discussed Clay's defeat in 1839. Pleasants continued, however, that no word had come from his neighbor respecting Garrison's *sic* most recent editorial in the *Emancipator*, which denounced the Whig candidate rather severely. Calling Harrison the "Southern man with Southern feelings," Pleasants added that Van Buren voted against the South in the Missouri crisis; moreover, the recent anti-slavery article had some favorable words for the New Yorker. In Kentucky, the *Commonwealth* utilized the entire article of the anti-slavery organ to prove that the Whig leader was more hated by the fanatics than Van Buren.39

Ritchie's silence on the reference of the *Emancipator* to the President's early record was seemingly duplicated by other Democratic editors. Two powerful papers, the *Albany Argus* and the *New York Evening Post*, were, in fact, so engrossed with local and state politics at this time, that they did not discuss the slavery issue as a factor in the campaign.40

38*Richmond Whig*, Jan. 17, 1840.
39*Commonwealth*, Jan. 28, 1840; the main sections of the editorial were also printed by the *Charleston Courier* in an effort to be fair to Harrison. *Charleston Courier*, Jan. 8, 1840.
40The *Argus* asserted that Van Buren's principles were well known from his various public letters and that he would stand by his views as he faced the Aristocracy, Bank candidate. *Albany Argus*, Jan. 10, 1840.
In the Northwest, Medary sought to counteract the impression that the anti-slavery men were somewhat favorably disposed to Van Buren by copying the fourteenth resolution adopted by the 1839 Ohio Abolition Convention. This resolution condemned the casting vote "in favor of Mr. Calhoun's bill" and the pledge given at the Inauguration on slavery in the District of Columbia. It went on to say that, as a "Northern President with Southern principles," Van Buren was undeserving of support as a candidate for reelection. The Statesman commented that the abolitionists were the allies of the Whigs and hostile to Democratic principles at every turn.

As these charges and countercharges were published, the attention of the country was also focused on the struggle in the House of Representatives over the petitions of the abolitionists. Indeed, it had been a stormy session as far as the House was concerned from the first. The two parties were so evenly matched in numbers that it took eleven ballots to choose a Speaker. The Representative ultimately selected was Robert M. T. Hunter, a comparative newcomer from Virginia. At the time of his election, he was known as a "sub-Treasury, anti-Clay, state rights Whig."

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41 The convention was held in May, 1839. Zanesville Aurora, July 19, 1839, quoted in Ohio Statesman, Jan. 28, 1840.
42 Congressional Globe, Containing the Debates and Proceedings, 26 Congress, 1 session, 56.
In addition to the fight over the Speakership, the House got embroiled in a struggle concerning two rival New Jersey delegations. After hours were spent in arguing the case, the issue was referred to the Committee on Elections. These episodes made for short tempers among the members and probably increased the disposition to haggle over the petition question.

The strategy of the Administration men on this issue was to renew the Atherton resolution of 1839. Blair declared that it was a good one, and all friends of "The Cause" were asked to rally around it. The Northern Whigs, on the other hand, were determined to fight the gag. The Southern branch of the party, led by Wise and Thompson, began a concerted effort on December 30 to get a resolution before the lower chamber which would rule out the reception of the petitions. The House would not agree, however, to entertain such a resolution. Finally on January 15, Thompson moved an amendment to a report of the Rules Committee and in this way got a motion before the House. It stated that the question of receiving abolition petitions

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44 The Democratic members from New Jersey were seated March 10, 1840. Congressional Globe, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 257.
45 Globe, Jan. 1, 1840.
46 Congressional Globe, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 89, 93, 121; Blair wrote that the anti-slavery men disliked Atherton's resolution more than the exclusion that the Southern Whigs sought. Globe, Jan. 1, 1840.
should be laid on the table whenever a petition was pre-
sented.47

During the debate on this motion, Van Buren's record
with respect to the slavery question was alluded to. In
one exchange Biddle (Pa.) remarked that the President ad-
mitted that Congress had the power to control slavery in
the federal District. Vanderpoel (N.Y.), a close friend of
the President, interrupted to remind the speaker of the veto
pledge. Biddle replied that every member of the House said
the same thing, but there was a question "as to the sincer-
ity of the profession."48 Several days later Butler (S.C.)
in a long speech declared that, despite Van Buren's course
"on the Missouri and other questions," his policy toward
slavery in the states and the District was very acceptable
to the state rights men.49 Harrison's Cheviot speech was
cited by Butler, and he asked how any Southern man could
support the Whig nominee.50 On January 24, Bynum (N.C.)
referred to Van Buren's casting vote on the mails bill and
contrasted it with the delight of the Emancipator at the
defeat of Clay in the Whig convention.51

The discussion had obviously ranged far afield, al-
though Thompson's amendment had been amended by Adams.

47 Congressional Globe, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 123.
48 Ibid., 125.
49 Ibid., 132.
50 Alford (Ga.) attacked Vanderpoel and defended
Harrison's record. Ibid., Appendix, 853-856.
51 Ibid., 144.
The debate was finally closed when W. C. Johnson (Md.) held the floor for the greater part of three days and offered a further amendment which would make it a standing rule of the House not to entertain any abolition petition in any way. This motion was accepted on January 28, by a vote of 114-108. It was manifestly a stronger step than had ever been taken by that body, and John G. Whittier at once predicted that it would help the abolitionist's cause.

The vote on Johnson's rule was analyzed by Blair. He showed the sectional splintering in the parties on the petition question. The Southern Democrats and the Southern Whigs were nearly unanimous in their support of the proposal. The Northern Whigs were against it with the exception of one man. The Northern Democrats divided on the issue, but in the final tabulation stood 39-27 against the rule. If four more Northern Van Burenites had lined up against the measure, it would have been defeated. In this connection the course of Vanderpoel was watched very closely. He told the House on January 28, 1840, that he was no abolitionist and did not want their help. He said that he fought the anti-slavery men because he was an American sustaining the

52 Johnson eulogized Harrison and said the South could support him. Ibid., 150.
53 Ibid., 151.
54 Jan. 29, 1840, Adams, Diary, 504.
55 Globe, March 5, 1840.
56 Congressional Globe, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 150.
compromises of 1787. While he disclaimed being a "Northern man" or a "Southern man," and thus incidentally revealed the distaste that had developed toward that sobriquet in the North, he went on to assure the South that the masses in the North would sustain the Union. As for the petition question, he favored receiving them and immediately tabling them. In the voting he led the thirty-nine Northern Democrats in their stand against the Johnson rule.

The Globe, of course, recognized the importance of Vanderpoel's remarks and featured them as it reported the adoption of the new rule. In his article, Blair stated that Vanderpoel preferred the milder but very effective resolution of 1839; he also expressed the opinion that the Northern party men would have been nearly unanimous in their support of it. As for Johnson's rule, Blair asserted that the Southern Whigs wanted to help Harrison's cause with it. They figured that it would be defeated by the votes of Northern Whigs and Democrats and thereby give them the chance to point to a strong, Southern measure that had been killed by Van Buren's political friends. Blair wrote that the House had lost eight weeks in fighting, however, and rather than waste the session, a few Northern Democrats, who ought to be excused by the party, backed the exceptional proposal.

57 Globe, Jan. 28, 1840.
58 Although Blair did not mention the Southern Democrats specifically, he said that the party would have supported Atherton's resolution. Furthermore, everyone understood that the Southerners had to vote for Johnson's motion. Ibid.
Croswell echoed these sentiments in noting that the new rule even denied the receiving of petitions. He charged that, while Harrison was secretly pledged to the abolitionists, this rule was designed to help him in the South.\(^{59}\) It was a maneuver worthy of the "Ebony and Topaz" party, but one that went further than the Administration men "generally preferred to go, under other circumstances."\(^{60}\) Croswell concluded, "the positions assumed by Mr. Vanderpoel...may be regarded as those of the northern friends of the Administration."\(^{61}\)

The Washington correspondent of the *Ohio Statesman* agreed that the measure was more stringent than was desired and that it was adopted because the House wanted to terminate the discussion.\(^{62}\) His views undoubtedly reflected Democratic opinion in the capital. In Columbus, nevertheless, Medary wrote that the Johnson rule put the Federalist firebrand to rest. He added, "very few democrats voted with the abolition whigs, and they certainly mistook public opinion."\(^{63}\) It must be said that Medary treated the thirty-nine Northern Democratic votes rather casually. The

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59 *Albany Argus*, Feb. 4, 1840.
60 Ibid.
61 *The New York Democrats* split 7-for and 12-against the rule. Two of the strongest men in the delegation voted for it. There is no evidence as to how much pressure Van Buren put on the men. Quotation in Ibid.
63 Ibid.
Charleston Courier, on the other hand, did not hesitate to spread the figures before its readers. It reported that since far more Democrats voted for the rule than Whigs, the Administration men were the true friends of the South.64

A glance at the Whig press indicates that the moderate National Intelligencer merely explained the significance of the twenty-first rule.65 The Gazette of Cincinnati at first thought the news unbelievable.66 It then held that the rule was in direct conflict with the Constitution.67 The same conclusion was reached by the Cleveland Herald and Gazette, which had a record for being critical of the anti-slavery men.68 In the Empire State the Albany Evening Journal admitted that the Van Burenites had not denied the right of petition in the past. It conceded that the Southern Whigs determined to see how far the Democrats would go in their hostility to the abolitionists.69 The Journal argued that the Southern Whigs did not believe that enough Northern votes could be obtained to pass the measure. But, said the paper, they underrated the baseness and servility of the Northern Democrats. In the deep South, the state rights Georgia Journal gave the question very brief coverage. It showed the meaning of the rule to its subscribers and then

64Charleston Courier, Feb. 19, 1840.
65National Intelligencer, Jan. 30, 1840.
66Cincinnati Gazette, Feb. 6, 1840.
67Ibid., Feb. 13, 1840.
68Cleveland Herald and Gazette, Feb. 19, 1840.
69Albany Evening Journal, quoted in ibid.
congratulated the whole South on this important development. Huzza for the South, it exclaimed in full capitals.

In the Senate the petitions of the abolitionists or the question of reception were laid on the table for the most part. One notable exception occurred when Senator Tappan (Ohio), a brother of the famed anti-slavery leaders, described certain anti-slavery petitions that had been submitted to him but declined to present them to the body. Following his remarks, Senator Preston arose and thanked him in the name of the South. This incident, involving as it did a Northern Van Buren man who had family connections with the inner leadership of the abolitionists, demonstrated a more effective method of cutting off the anti-slavery petitions than the Johnson rule. In view of the stand of the administration on the Atherton resolution, the episode was obviously aimed at Southern opinion, with the certain knowledge that it would harm the party with thousands in the North.

As was expected, the Southerners in Washington were impressed. Calhoun told his son that Tappan's action indicated that the Administration men were all right on the abolition

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70 Georgia Journal, Feb. 4, 1840.
71 Congressional Globe, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 130, 155, 158.
72 Feb. 4, 1840, ibid., 160-161; Vice President Johnson also refused to present petitions and wrote a letter to Lewis Tappan explaining his action. See National Intelligencer, April 7, 1840.
question. In Richmond Ritchie, assuming that his readers followed the Congressional debates in the *Enquirer*, did not discuss the event but gave his approval.

Blair wrote that Tappan pursued the right course with regard to petitions that involved a basic constitutional right. Since the petitions dealt with slavery in the District of Columbia, Blair was hedging on the position of the administration that Congress had the authority to control slavery in the area. In Ohio Medary, who was strongly opposed to the anti-slavery men, praised Tappan's noble work. Other Northern editors, however, do not appear to have drawn attention to the incident.

All the same, the adoption of the Johnson rule and Tappan's speech soon affected the Van Buren men in the President's home state. The Whigs were in control of the legislature and their leaders introduced a resolution in the Assembly that declared that the right to petition the government was the cornerstone of liberty. When a Democratic legislator offered an amendment which expressed criticism of the work of the abolitionists for meddling with a Southern problem, the Whigs used a call for the previous question to bring their motion to a vote. Most of the Democrats in the

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74 *Richmond Enquirer*, Feb. 15, 1840.
75 *Globe*, Feb. 13, 1840.
76 *Ohio Statesman*, quoted, along with the Baltimore Republican which expressed similar views, in *ibid.*, Feb. 15, 1840.
chamber joined the Whigs in upholding the resolution. In so voting, they were forced by this Whig maneuver into a position that repudiated Tappan's course and the stand taken by the twenty-seven Northern Democrats who supported Johnson's rule and insured its passage. Of course the ten men who voted "nay" on the proposition could be accused of a gross disregard for fundamental American rights. The Van Bureniltes shouted that the policy of the New York Whigs showed that they were courting the abolitionists. Astute observers saw, however, that all of these developments hurt the Democrats with the Northerner who was genuinely concerned about the right of petition.

II

During the late winter and early spring, the Democrats, and particularly the Southern members of the party, continued to remind the public that Van Buren, as a Northern man with Southern policies, would protect the best interests of the country on the slavery issue. Thus, the Globe featured the entire correspondence between the New Yorker and Junius Amis and the Inaugural veto pledge, as it devoted nearly a full issue to a catalogue of the President's opinions on a number of vital topics. When the article was completed

77 The vote was 85-10. Albany Argus, Feb. 14, 1840.
78 Ibid., Feb. 28, 1840; Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 20, 25, 1840.
79 Globe, Feb. 29, 1840.
two days later, the old Whig charge that Van Buren showed abolitionist tendencies when he voted for Negro suffrage in 1821 was answered along lines that reworked the party's defense of his action.80 The Ohio Statesman was one paper that carried the slavery sections of this campaign article.81 A wider audience was undoubtedly reached, however, when the entire document was printed in pamphlet form and offered to interested party leaders at the nominal price of three dollars per hundred copies.82

The importance of keeping Virginia public opinion loyal to Van Buren was recognized in the Democratic Address to the People, issued after the state convention had been held on February 20. This paper praised the President as a strict constructionist; it also emphasized his denial of any Congressional power over slavery in the states.83 As one would expect, the 1837 Inaugural was mentioned. In South Carolina, the Courier admitted that Van Buren had erred in his course during the Missouri controversy. Nonetheless, it consistently maintained that he had atoned for his action and was now the friend of the South.84 When a letter-writer pointed out Harrison's Vincennes speech, the newspaper

80 Ibid., March 2, 1840.
81 Ohio Statesman, April 3, 1840.
82 Globe, March 2, 1840.
83 Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 29, 1840.
84 Charleston Courier, Jan. 11, 21, 1840.
countered with Van Buren's pledges to protect slavery in the nation's capital.\textsuperscript{85} It went on to say that the President was still its candidate. The Louisiana Democrats stressed Van Buren's Inaugural message, both in a giant rally held in New Orleans and in their state convention.\textsuperscript{86}

Despite the authority which the Inaugural speech carried and the publicity which the party had given to it, a Rich­mond county, North Carolina group wrote to the President in late March and asked him to renew the ideas contained in the Amis letter.\textsuperscript{87} Van Buren complied with the request as soon as he received it.\textsuperscript{88} Although the exchange of letters was seemingly unnecessary, it probably did buttress local Demo­crats who were pressed on the matter.\textsuperscript{89}

In addition to presenting Van Buren's record to the voters, the Democrats lashed out at Harrison's campaign. The disgust of the party leaders with the "noise and boasting," the hard cider, and the unwillingness to discuss any issues was typified by the articles that appeared in the

\textsuperscript{85}Ibid., March 12, 1840.
\textsuperscript{87}W. F. Leak to Martin Van Buren, March 21, 1840, Van Buren Papers.
\textsuperscript{88}Martin Van Buren to W. F. Leak, March 27, 1840, Van Buren Papers.
\textsuperscript{89}Ritchie printed the correspondence to show that Van Buren's views were out in the open. \textit{Richmond Enquirer}, April 17, 1840.
New York Evening Post in early March. Another aspect of the race that complimented the "hard huzzaing" of the crowds and drew the fire of the Democrats was the "extraordinary course...taken with General Harrison by his friends in Ohio." The Post ridiculed the work of Harrison's "correspondence committee" which refused to answer the questions directed to the Whig candidate by the Oswego Union Association. Ritchie berated the "non-committal, dodging" policy of the committee. When some Whig papers deplored the existence of such a committee, the Enquirer was quick to inform the general public.

As for the slavery question, the President's Southern friends continued to draw attention to Harrison's Cheviot speech and discoursed on his proposal to use national funds to free the slaves. They also brought up his evasive reply, in the 1836 campaign, to questions regarding the power of Congress to interfere with slavery in the District of Columbia and the policies that he would pursue on the

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90 The price of cider rose from $4 to $7 a barrel. Journal of Commerce, quoted in The Evening Post (New York, N.Y.), June 1, 1840; ibid., March 2, 12, 1840; for the Whig appeal centered around the log cabin theme see, National Intelligencer, Jan. 11, 14, 1840.

91 Evening Post, March 26, 1840.

92 Harrison was asked if petitions dealing with slavery in the District should be received and referred. This question and two others were not answered by any standard of judgment. The committee's letter was dated Feb. 29. Ibid.

93 Richmond Enquirer, March 27, 1840.

94 Ibid., April 7, May 1, 1840.

95 Louisiana Courier, Feb. 12, 1840; the Virginia Democratic Address, Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 29, 1840, also an Appendix to the Address, ibid., March 12, 1840; Globe, March 19, 1840.
issue if he were elected President. Since Van Buren's views on the same problems were clearly stated in the Amis letter and the Inaugural speech, the Democrats pounded away at the comparison between frankness and reliability of the two men. A different charge that the Van Burenites alluded to rather frequently was the one that Harrison once voted to sell white persons into slavery. As can be imagined, this subject carried heavy emotional overtones for the voters in both sections of the nation. By way of substantiating their argument, the Democrats cited the proceedings of the Ohio Senate in 1821. In the course of changing the state's penal code, Harrison voted to retain a clause which provided for the farming out or "selling" of persons who could not pay the fines that had been levied against them. This issue had been discussed during the late stages of the 1836 race but was given greater emphasis in the 1840 campaign. The Ohio Statesman brought forth another explosive charge when it reported that the Whig candidate admitted publicly that he had belonged to an abolition society.

96 The questions came from the Middlebury Free Press Democrat (Vt.) and were addressed April 8, 1836. This was after the Amis letter had been circulated. Harrison complained of ill-health and refused to answer the queries in a reply dated May 29, 1836. Charleston Courier, March 12, 1840; Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 29, March 12, 1840.  
97 Globe, Feb. 14, 1840; Richmond Enquirer, Feb. 27, April 10, 1840; Ohio Statesman, April 7, 1840.  
99 Ohio Statesman, April 3, 1840.
The Southern Whigs fought back against the various Democratic arguments in order to save the reputation of their candidate. Pleasants published another effort of "Powhatan" to counteract the obvious appeal of Van Buren's veto pledge. This time "Powhatan" stated that Harrison had also said in his letter to Harmar Denny of December 2, 1838, that he would veto any unconstitutional legislation.100 "Powhatan" wrote that this was sufficient for the Whigs. Several weeks later Pleasants returned to the subject. He asserted that the Democrats were constantly referring to Van Buren's record on the matter.101 As for the Whigs, they did not want to depend on the veto power too much because of their fear of a strong executive. Pleasants asserted, furthermore, that the South would have the votes, if any bill freeing the slaves in the District were proposed.102

Since the Cheviot speech was given wide publicity by the Democrats, the Richmond Whig was forced to acknowledge Harrison's stand. "Powhatan" supplied a Whig position on this prickly question by declaring that Jefferson also wanted to use Federal money to remove the slaves.103

100 Richmond Whig, Jan. 17, 1840.
101 Ibid., March 10, 1840.
102 He also said that a veto pledge was insulting to the South. There were not six abolitionists in Congress and anyone, even Tappan, could give a pledge at that time. Ibid., March 13, 1840.
103 Ibid., Jan. 24, 1840.
After asking if this made Jefferson an abolitionist, he noted that state approval was needed before Harrison's proposal would become effective. In late March Pleasants saw that it would possibly be a better tactic, from the Whig standpoint, to print all of Harrison's remarks on the slavery problem that were contained in the address. When this long column was published the reader could see that the Whig standardbearer had also been very severe in his criticism of the anti-slavery men. Pleasants finished his comments on the speech, after a reference to Jefferson's views, by saying that he was willing to let the presidential contest be decided on the comparison that could be made between the position of Van Buren and Harrison on the abolition issue. While he thereby revealed his confidence in Harrison's record, he did not let the Democratic charge about a vote for white slavery go unnoticed. He countered that the law was meant for rogues and villains, and as such was similar to an early Virginia act.

The articles and editorials of the Richmond Whig, regardless of their persuasiveness, went to a wide audience and carried considerable weight with those who were sensitive on the slavery issue. The Commonwealth, a paper with a less belligerent tone, spoke for thousands of Harrison followers of both sections when it said that the

104Ibid., March 24, 1840.
105Ibid., April 7, 14, 24, 1840.
Democrats were not convincing the Whigs that their nominee was an abolitionist. It added sarcastically that, since the Van Burenites did not believe that Harrison had a chance, they could stop worrying about the issue.

During the weeks under examination, the Whigs also launched an attack on the President's record designed to undermine his political standing as the Northern man with Southern principles. Pleasants repeated the standard charges that dealt with his vote for the New York Senate resolution on Missouri and his support of Negro suffrage in 1821. Remark ing that these items illustrated his sentiments when he was "no candidate for the Presidency," the Whig editor alleged that Van Buren's vote for Negro suffrage was more unpardonable to Southern gentlemen than the action on Missouri. The suffrage issue was also discussed by the Herald and Gazette in Cleveland. The paper used Holland's work to show that the New Yorker had been sympathetic to Negro voting privileges.

The President's course during the Missouri controversy was brought back before the spotlight by William C. Rives who addressed an open letter to the public condemning the

106Commonwealth, March 10, 1840.
107Richmond Whig, March 13, 1840, also March 21, 1840; the Quincy Whig (III.) recited all of Van Buren's transgressions against Southern sensitivities. The article was copied by the abolitionists to show how the Whigs were using the slavery issue against Van Buren. Pennsylvania Freeman, April 23, 1840.
108Cleveland Herald and Gazette, April 8, 1840.
Chief Executive. Rives compared Van Buren's conduct with that of Harrison and also pointed to the Ohioan's Vincennes speech. Similar letters were written by Henry A. Wise and Waddy Thompson. Both men covered the economic issues of the day and went over the records of the two rivals on the slavery controversy in terms that were suitable to Whig purposes.

One notable result of the Whig assault was the conversion of the Charleston Courier. This paper had been hostile to Harrison since the fall of 1835; it also maintained that Van Buren's position on slavery was all right as far back as November, 1835. Although it did not denounce Van Buren's record, the Courier became an advocate of Harrison's soundness on the abolition question. The evidence cited by the paper centered on the Vincennes address, the letters exchanged between the Oswego Association and Harrison's correspondence committee, and Harrison's letter to Thomas Sloo, Jr. The switch in the allegiance of the Courier,

109 Commonwealth, March 17, 1840; about one-half of the letter was printed by the Cincinnati Gazette, March 4, 1840.
110 Wise's letter is in the Richmond Whig, March 31, 1840; Thompson's letter is found in the National Intelligencer, April 25, 1840.
111 Charleston Courier, April 8, 1840.
112 Harrison wrote to Sloo that Congress could not interfere with slavery in the states but on the application of the states. Without the consent of the adjoining states, Congress could not abolish slavery in the federal District. W. H. Harrison to Thomas Sloo, Jr., Nov. 26, 1836, ibid.
needless to say, added a powerful voice to the Harrison forces in the South.

In the North the Boston Courier reflected the optimism of the party leaders when it reported at an earlier date that Van Buren's cause was hopeless. It is interesting to note that the Whig press in the area was seemingly not so concerned over Van Buren's relationship to the slavery controversy as one might imagine.

At this stage in the campaign, the Liberty party was formed. Myron Holley and Gerrit Smith, two of the champions of an independent party movement in 1839, had called in January for a national convention to meet in Albany on April 1. The supporters of the idea must have recognized that hundreds of abolitionists, after reading the accounts printed in the leading anti-slavery journals at the start of the year, saw that neither of the candidates had a satisfactory record on the great issue that dominated their thoughts. Alvan Stewart sought to arouse the interest of the abolitionists in a new political organization when he published an open letter in the Emancipator which said that a new party was imperative since the established ones were unsound on

113 Boston Courier, Feb. 27, 1840.
114 The Emancipator spoke of the silence of the Whig press on the slavery issue. Quoted in Commonwealth, April 14, 1840.
the slavery question. As a result of this and other appeals, the convention that was held contained delegations from six states. James G. Birney and Thomas Earle were named for the national offices. The delegates resolved, as they closed their session, that slavery was the great issue in the campaign, that Birney would do as much as the Constitution permitted for abolition, and that the other candidates could not be supported.

With this manifesto as a guide, the Liberty party launched its efforts to draw the committed abolitionists, and others who felt strongly about the slavery problem, away from the established parties. There is evidence, however, that, in New England where most of the anti-slavery men were Whigs, the near mania to defeat Van Buren would keep most of them loyal to the Harrison colors. According to this report, the Democratic abolitionists, by the same token, would stick with the President. In the Northwest, Bailey wrote to Birney himself and reiterated his personal feeling that Harrison was not pledged to the South. He liked the Whig leader because he would "not be a tool in the hands of

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115 Emancipator, Feb. 6, 1840, quoted in Richmond Whig, Feb. 21, 1840; the New York Anti-Slavery Society resolved in its state convention held on March 12, that no friend of freedom could vote for Van Buren or Harrison. Pennsylvania Freeman, April 23, 1840.

116 Ibid.

117 It was asserted in this letter that 49/50's of the abolitionists were Whigs. Henry B. Stanton to J. G. Birney, March 21, 1840, Dumond, ed., Birney Letters, I, 542.
Bailey followed this letter with a blast in the Philanthropist against Van Buren's Southern sympathies; he called for the defeat of this friend of the slave power. Another indication of the sentiments of the abolitionists toward Birney's nomination is found in the refusal of the Eastern Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society to endorse him at its May Convention. On the basis of this testimony, it is clear that the third party movement encountered considerable opposition from the reformers themselves as it got underway.

In the Southland, the Liberty party indirectly informed the intelligent voter that both Van Buren and Harrison could be trusted by that section. While many Northern citizens undoubtedly pondered about this implication of Birney's candidacy, the Southern Whigs seized on the excellent propaganda furnished them by the Albany convention. As soon as the news arrived that Harrison had been denounced for his Congressional stand on the Tallmadge amendment and his speech at Vincennes, they spread it before their readers. The National Intelligencer also printed an analysis of the third party movement which labelled it a maneuver of the

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118 Gamaliel Bailey to J. G. Birney, March 30, 1840, ibid., 547.
119 Philanthropist, March 31, 1840; the readers of the paper knew that it feared a third candidate because he would only elect Van Buren. The preference for Harrison was openly stated in ibid., March 3, 1840.
120 Pennsylvania Freeman, May 14, 1840.
121 National Intelligencer, April 7, 1840; Niles' Register, April 11, 1840; Commonwealth, April 14, 1840.
Van Buren abolitionists to split off those Whigs who leaned toward an anti-slavery position. In the words of the New York correspondent who wrote the article, the Van Buren men wanted to insure themselves that New York and Massachusetts would go Democratic. The correspondent concluded, however, that most of the abolitionists would stay loyal to their party affiliations and hence this move would have little effect on the campaign in the North.122

Blair replied immediately to this partisan but rather farsighted article. He said that the Intelligencer admitted that there were abolitionists with Harrison who might split off for Birney. After delivering this thrust at his rival, Blair pointed out to his readers that the Intelligencer also conceded that the reformers preferred Harrison over Birney. As for the statement in the Whig article that the abolitionists themselves were laughing at this action, the Globe retorted that they would laugh if Van Buren interfered in their affairs.123

Four weeks after this exchange the Democrats assembled for their convention. Everyone knew that the naming of the presidential candidate would be a mere formality. There was

122National Intelligencer, April 7, 1840.
123Globe, April 7, 1840; Blair would have been interested in a letter Van Buren received from a Democratic abolitionist who said that he had worked for a third party because it would draw off votes from Harrison. H. P. Bennett to Martin Van Buren, July 1, 1840, Van Buren Papers.
serious opposition to a second term for Johnson, on the other hand, and the party chieftains had to thrash the matter out. In the end, the report of the nominating committee, that Van Buren be named unanimously and that in the best interests of the party no Vice President be named, was adopted by the convention. As the matter stood each state organization could therefore name its own choice for the second place on the ticket. Johnson, who was bypassed at Baltimore because of the sensitivity of the South to his domestic relations, was ultimately nominated by a large number of states including Louisiana.

The Convention also served as a sounding board for Democratic propaganda. In the keynote address, Felix Grundy castigated the Whigs for their "deceptive parade of log cabins and empty cider barrels." He also spoke scornfully of the wealthy Whigs who had suddenly fallen in love with the laboring class. After an allusion to Harrison's correspondence committee, Grundy turned to the subject of abolition and said that neither the opposition candidate nor his committee would speak out. "They know very well," he continued, "that his former correspondence...furnish[es] pretty clearly, by inference at least, two sets of opinions - one for, and the other against Abolition." Contrari-

125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
wise, the Tennessean affirmed that Van Buren had been most explicit on the matter. "He has declared his opposition to that fell spirit in the strongest terms," Grundy asserted.\(^{127}\)

As for a platform, the first one to be adopted by the party was a strong statement of the strict constructionist principles that had come to guide the Jackson-Van Buren men. The seventh article in the document denied that Congress had any power to control "the domestic institutions of the several states."\(^{128}\) It also said:

> all efforts of the Abolitionists or others made to induce Congress to interfere with questions of slavery...are calculated to lead to the most alarming and dangerous consequences...and ought not to be countenanced by any friend to our political institutions.\(^{129}\)

After the convention adjourned, John A. Dix, one of the important New York delegates, penned a note to Azariah Flagg. He stated, "We have, after many embarrassments and difficulties, brought our matters to a satisfactory result....The convention broke up in harmony, and with the very best feeling."\(^{130}\) Dix had little reason to withhold anything from Flagg, and he probably observed the tone of the convention rather closely. As for a review of the proceedings, the ramifications of the slavery-abolition issue undoubtedly influenced the decision of the party leaders on the Vice

\(^{127}\)Ibid.

\(^{128}\)Ibid.

\(^{129}\)Ibid.

\(^{130}\)J.A. Dix to Azariah Flagg, May 6, 1840, Flagg Papers.
presidential question. Despite Johnson's popularity in the North and West, it is difficult to see that Van Buren's cause was helped by the compromise that was worked out.\textsuperscript{131} The resolution in the platform dealing with the slavery controversy followed the lines laid down by Van Buren in the long 1836 campaign. Regardless of any repercussions in the North where attitudes had stiffened considerably on the topic, the President was committed to run again as the Northern candidate with Southern principles. It must be said in passing that, aside from the work of Ransom Gillet who headed the resolutions committee, the dominant role in the proceedings was played by Southerners.

Even before the convention opened, C. C. Clay revealed the importance of the slavery controversy for Van Buren's prospects in the South. He wrote to Flagg, "I wish to undeceive the people of Alabama, on one or two matters, which are likely to have much influence in the pending contest for the Presidency."\textsuperscript{132} Clay wanted "authentic evidence" that Harrison was nominated through the work of the abolitionists and "that Harrison is supported and Van Buren Opposed by the great mass of Abolitionists."\textsuperscript{133} Clay indicated that the information received would be used throughout the lower South.

\textsuperscript{131}One Whig paper said that since the party did not have the strength to run a man for the second office, it ought not to have acted on the Presidency. \textit{Boston Courier}, May 11, 1840.
\textsuperscript{132}C. C. Clay to Azariah Flagg, April 28, 1840, Flagg Papers.
\textsuperscript{133}Ibid.
Flagg could easily cite the rather convincing testimony of the reformers on the first point, but it can only be surmised as to what "authentic evidence" he supplied on the second.

Ritchie also spoke out on the significance of the slavery issue in the race and declared that it was not the low prices or the excitement over a militia bill that really mattered. He stated that the voters must decide between a Federalist and an abolitionist, or a candidate who was pledged to veto any bill touching slavery in the federal District. "This is the true issue," he concluded.134 In Georgia, the Democrats at their state convention praised Van Buren's stand against the abolitionists and contrasted it with Harrison's record.135

Among Southern political leaders there was testimony that the staunch defender of slavery, James H. Hammond, had a decided preference for the New Yorker "As against Harrison."136 Calhoun foresaw a close contest but seemed pleased with the nomination. He predicted that Van Buren would have to support, "in the main, our policy" if he were elected.137 In Georgia, W. T. Colquitt, a prominent state rights leader, declared for the President in a long public letter. The central point that Colquitt stressed was the record of the two major candidates on the abolition menace. He wrote that candor compelled him to say that Van Buren's course in his

134 Richmond Enquirer, May 8, 1840.
135 Globe, June 2, 1840.
early career was against him. However, the Georgian continued that his Inaugural speech, his letter to the Shocco Springs committee in March, 1836, his renewal of these sentiments just two months before, and above all his casting vote in the Senate on the mails bill, redeemed him for the South. Colquitt added that the abolitionists did not consider him to be a friend of Northern interests. This record was compared to Harrison's admission that he once belonged to an abolition society and to his refusal to answer questions on slavery in the federal District.

The attack against Harrison was continued by Grundy who wrote an open letter to a leading Cincinnati Whig and reviewed for the public the General's efforts to dodge a stand on the abolition question. Grundy said he could not close his letter, however, without referring to Harrison's Cheviot speech and the fact that he once belonged to an abolition group. Somewhat later Van Buren received additional public support when two former foes, George McDuffie and Littleton Tazewell, announced their decision to back him.

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138 Georgia Journal, May 19, 1840.
139 Ibid.
140 Felix Grundy to William Neff, June 15, 1840, Ohio Statesman, June 30, 1840.
141 McDuffie's letter is in Miles' Register, July 18, 1840; for Tazewell's communication see Evening Post, Sept. 3, 1840.
In the North it was very apparent that as the weeks had slipped by the Albany Argus had been conspicuously unwilling to discuss the slavery issue or Van Buren's relationship to it. If Vanderpoel's speech was a reliable expression of Northern opinion, the "Southern man" theme had become rather unpopular in the area. Croswell was a shrewd political editor, and it seems safe to assume that he did not take the forthright stand that he had occupied in the previous campaign, because he was aware of the change in the times.

As for the other side of the coin, he was also loath to hang the abolitionist label on the Whig candidate. John Van Buren for one thought, however, that this idea ought to be pushed. He told his father, "I have been laboring for a long while to impress on Mr. Croswell the importance of showing the 

abhition character of the Fed. [sic] party in this state."142

Interestingly enough two days after this letter was written, the Argus printed a brief article on Harrison, the onetime abolitionist.143 It quoted his public notice of 1822 which declared that he joined a society in Richmond at the age of eighteen. Croswell followed this article with an attack on the Whig standardbearer that dwelt upon the charge that he voted to sell white men into slavery.144 A few days later he lashed out at Harrison's New York friends for passing a

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142 John Van Buren to Martin Van Buren, May 17, 1840, Van Buren Papers.
143 Albany Argus, May 19, 1840.
144 Ibid., May 22, 1840.
law that provided for jury trials for fugitive slaves. 145

In early June another important letter from Van Buren which discussed the slavery controversy was printed. It was addressed to four Kentucky Democrats and was actually dated, April 21, 1840. In it the President repeated his opinion that the relation between master and slave was a concern of the states. 146 He also reiterated the substance of the Amis letter for his Kentucky friends. The resolutions from the Pinckney committee that were adopted by the House in 1836 were brought to the attention of the Kentuckians. Van Buren said that they were important because the House represented the wishes of the people. As for his 1837 Inaugural message, he asserted that experience and reflection had strengthened the convictions that he expressed on that occasion. In a final warning to his correspondents he stated, "It is...a most dangerous allusion to believe that the people of the slave holding states are likely to be induced to change a condition...over which...they alone have...control..." 147

Van Buren, of course, knew that this letter would be made public, and it was a comprehensive reaffirmation of the

145 Ibid., May 26, 1840; Blair was quite excited over this proof of the Whig-abolition alliance, Globe, June 1, 1840.

146 Martin Van Buren to Levi Tyler and others, April 21, 1840, Louisiana Courier, June 2, 1840.

147 Ibid.; the letter was included in the Kentucky Democratic Address which was severe on Harrison's evasive tactics on the slavery issue. Globe, June 1, 1840; Richmond Enquirer, June 2, 5, 1840.
views and policies that were associated with his career since 1834.

A sharp contrast to this frank campaign letter is found in the answer that Harrison's committee sent to a correspondent in Palestine, Illinois. Harrison had been asked by one, H. Alexander, if Congress could abolish slavery in the District of Columbia without the consent of the adjoining states. This question and another asking if Harrison would sign a bill freeing the slaves in the District were answered by referring Alexander to the Vincennes speech. Naturally the Democrats were happy with the open dodging employed by the Whig committee.\textsuperscript{148} The \textit{Commonwealth}, stung by the references of the Van Burenites to the "Veiled Prophet," retorted that the committee's reply to Alexander answered everything, for Harrison had only one opinion on slavery.\textsuperscript{149}

The delight in the Van Buren camp over the evasive tactics of the Harrison top command was supplanted by real joy when it was learned that the Whig candidate could be unmasked for playing a double game on the slavery issue. Blair wrote to Jackson that the Ohioan told Congressman George Evans (Me.) that it was a slander to say he was in favor of slavery.\textsuperscript{150}

\textsuperscript{148}Alexander's letter was dated March 3. The reply was sent March 20. \textit{Ohio Statesman}, May 5, 1840; \textit{Evening Post}, May 7, 1840; Croswell printed the letter beside Van Buren's letter of March 26, to Walter Leak. \textit{Albany Argus}, June 12, 1840.

\textsuperscript{149}\textit{Commonwealth}, May 12, 1840.

\textsuperscript{150}P. P. Blair to Andrew Jackson, June 17, 1840, Jackson Papers.
Harrison reminded Evans that he had joined an abolition society and had emancipated a large inheritance of slaves. Blair knew that the letter had "been handed about among the abolitionists in Congress & they have written to confidential friends to use it..." in preventing any bolting from the Whig ranks. Now, announced Blair, there appears another letter "to Mr. Lyon [sic] of Richmond...pretending that he could not believe he had ever said he had belonged to an abolition society..." Blair logically concluded that he hoped this development would ruin Old Tippecanoe.

Before discussing the Lyons letter a word is necessary concerning Blair's first allegation. The Evans letter was not published, but Ritchie pointed out that the Whigs did not deny the letter had been written. Furthermore, William B. Calhoun, a Massachusetts Whig, did not deny that he used it in the manner described by Blair. Ritchie referred to a statement from the Bay State anti-slavery society, which praised the Evans letter, as proof of the fact that Harrison was caught in the middle of a two sided maneuver. The Albany Argus hammered away on the same subject when it published the Lyons letter and followed it with a document from Congressman Lynn Boyd (Ky.) and two others,

151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Richmond Enquirer, June 19, 1840.
154 Calhoun wrote to Judge Morris, a well placed Massachusetts abolitionist, on Feb. 4, 1840, and gave him the Evans letter. Ibid.
which described the Evans letter and Calhoun's utilization of it.155

The Lyons letter to which the Democrats referred was one sent by Harrison to James Lyons, a former Jacksonian who was then a state Senator and the head of the Richmond Tippecanoe Club Number One. In this letter of June 1, Harrison told the Virginian that his Vincennes speech was well known and that his friends therefore treated with scorn the charges that he was an abolitionist.156 The Whig candidate said that he had suffered more for Southern rights than any man north of the Ohio. Concerning Lyons' question as to membership in an abolition society, Harrison wrote that the organization was known as a "humane" society in 1791. He added, "if I did really term it an abolition society in 1827 -- a fact which I can hardly believe...it must have been from forgetfulness...." 157

The Lyons letter was written primarily for Southern consumption. The allusion to the Vincennes speech followed the pattern that had become well known to the Southern Whigs. With regard to the "humane society" argument, it had been expounded earlier by T. W. Pleasants in a letter to the Richmond Whig.158 In fact Harrison cited Pleasants' letter in

155 *Albany Argus*, June 26, 1840.
156 *Richmond Whig*, June 16, 1840; *National Intelligencer*, June 18, 1840.
157 Ibid.
158 *Richmond Whig*, quoted in *Georgia Journal*, May 12, 1840.
his remarks to Lyons. As might be expected, the Southern Whigs were pleased with the document from their candidate. The Whig said, as it printed the letter, that the last argument of the opposition respecting Harrison's "keeper committee" had been annihilated. The paper agreed with Lyons when he announced that the humbug about Harrison the abolitionist was destroyed. It must be said in summary, however, that the evidence would seem to indicate the Democrats had a valid case against the Ohioan. Their publicity on the General's double game could not help but hurt him in both sections of the nation.

Nevertheless, the Whig campaign rolled on, and Webster became confident that a revolution was in progress. The Southland was moving toward Harrison at a rapid pace, if the Richmond Whig had valid reports. It even was sanguine enough to predict that the party would get the entire Southern electoral vote. It ascribed Harrison's popularity to the fact that "his principles and feelings are all Southern...." Although the Whig was openly confident in this issue, it did not neglect a later opportunity to hit Van Buren as a

159 Commonwealth, June 30, 1840; it was also printed in Cleveland with the praises of the New York Express, quoted in Cleveland Herald and Gazette, June 24, 1840.
160 Daniel Webster to Coffin, June 11, 1840, Webster, ed., Correspondence of Webster, II, 83; Medary, on the other hand, reported that as he returned from the convention, he found the silence of the Whigs on the major issues uniting the people behind Van Buren. Ohio Statesman, June 2, 1840.
161 Richmond Whig, May 13, 1840.
Missouri restrictionist and an opponent of the slave trade in Florida.162 The Kentucky Whigs, likewise, were not disposed to let matters rest, for they devoted the largest part of their Address to the Citizens to the slavery controversy. While they attempted to vindicate Harrison from the charge that he was an abolitionist, they took special pains to repeat every one of the standard Whig indictments that involved Van Buren and the slavery issue.163

III

In the meantime, a new charge had been made against the President which was calculated to damage his political reputation in the South and much of the North. It concerned the court martial of Lieutenant George M. Hooe, a Virginian who was dismissed from the navy for his unbecoming conduct. In the course of the 1839 trial, two Negroes were called to testify against Hooe; he objected to their presence on the witness stand on the ground that they were colored men. The court did not allow his objections, however, and their testimony became part of the record of the trial. The Secretary of the Navy, James K. Paulding, subsequently approved the finding of the court. Hooe then asked Van Buren to set the verdict aside, because he considered the proceedings of the

162 Ibid., May 19, 1840.
163 Commonwealth, June 16, 1840; the paper also listed ten anti-slavery journals that had criticized Harrison. This was an effort to buttress his standing in the South. Ibid., June 2, 1840.
court under Florida law to be illegal on this point. After examining the record, the President wrote to Paulding, "The President finds nothing in the proceedings...which requires his interference. M.V.B." This decision by Van Buren was brought to light nearly six months later by Representative J. M. Botts (Va.) who drew the attention of the nation to the Chief Executive's action on June 12, 1840. Botts sounded the hue and cry against the President because he apparently was in favor of Negroes testifying against a white man.

This new indictment did not involve slavery in any way, but, like the vote for Negro suffrage in 1821, it carried implications for the Southerner that were very important in view of the passions that had been aroused by the slavery controversy. Pleasants outlined the thinking of the Southern Whigs when he stated that this episode proved Van Buren had been a negro-philist from the cradle. First the approval of Negroes voting and then the acquiescence in Negroes going to court -- these incidents clearly showed that the President was not entitled to Southern support. Pleasants also suggested that Van Buren's action was more insulting

164 The Northern Man with Southern Principles, 7-8.
165 Congressional Globe, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 460; the next day the House voted to call for the record of the trial and other documents that were pertinent. Ibid., 462.
166 Richmond Whig, June 16, 1840.
167 Ibid., also June 19, 1840.
and dangerous than the preaching of the fanatics. The South was warned that this move toward equality pointed to racial amalgamation. The National Intelligencer agreed that this start toward equal rights was offensive to the South, but it also said that the entire country was shocked. The paper felt that Van Buren's decision would lead to conditions that would overthrow all distinctions and barriers between the races.

The Southern Democrats rushed to the defense of the President. Ritchie first provided a calming note by reminding his audience that the Democrats were willing to have the entire record laid before the House. He next struck back in a strong article which carried the fiery title, "This Nigger Business." Ritchie contended that the Whigs were obviously trying to prejudice the South against Van Buren. He went on to cite a letter from Paulding which explained that the trial took place on a federal ship, not on Florida soil, and thus was not liable to the territorial laws. Moreover, the Southern officers present approved of the Negroes testifying. As for the actual importance of their evidence, he stated that if it was all ignored, Hooe's guilt would still stand. Ritchie concluded that the excitement over this case was part of the vicious Whig attack on

168 Ibid., June 26, 1840.
169 It said that Southern men would be driven from the service and that officers would lose control of their men. National Intelligencer, June 25, 1840.
170 Richmond Enquirer, June 19, 1840.
171 Richmond Crisis, quoted in ibid., June 23, 1840.
the President that included constant, misleading references to his course in New York in 1820 and 1821. The *Louisiana Courier* remarked that the three Southern officers who were on the court were above reproach. It declared that the sentence was considered very lenient by naval officers.

The day after this editorial appeared in New Orleans the *Richmond Enquirer* returned to the subject and cited the opinion of Attorney General Henry Gilpin that there was no reason to set the verdict aside. It also implored the Whigs to end their railing about this incident because every intelligent citizen knew that it involved a delicate issue.

While the press was discussing the question, the Navy Department prepared the requested documents for the House. The total report was submitted to that body on June 24. The report contained a defense of the course of the administration and was not what the Southern Whigs expected. As a result, they were not anxious to have the document printed and stalled any action in that direction for a number of days. Eventually on June 30, the report was ordered printed and referred to the Judiciary committee.

Nothing was heard from the committee; on July 13, Chapman (Ala.) asked that it be required to report who

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173 *Louisiana Courier*, June 29, 1840.
174 *Richmond Enquirer*, June 30, 1840.
175 For the reaction of Botts see *Congressional Globe*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 483.
were legal witnesses under the existing laws covering naval courts-martial and who should be witnesses in such cases in the future. The motion to suspend the rules for the purpose of submitting this Democratic resolution to the House was defeated, with the Whigs generally opposing it. 177 The next day the Whigs again prevented a suspension of the rules and blocked consideration of a resolution that would have directed the committee to report a bill prohibiting the enlistment of Negroes in the armed forces of the United States. 178 Thus the Whigs as a group backed off from the issue after their Southern leaders placed it before the House and the public. 179

The Whig press ignored the proceedings in Congress and continued to exploit l'affaire Hooe as a campaign issue. The Richmond Whig said it did not care about Hooe's conduct; the main point was the fact that Van Buren did not reverse the verdict after Negroes had been involved in the trial. 180 It scorchèd the New Yorker for setting the precedent that Africans could testify against white men in such cases. Calling the President the advocate of free Negro suffrage, the paper insisted that no act of Tappan or Garrison was

177Ibid., 524.
178Ibid., 526.
179Blair was critical of the evasive tactics of the Whigs. Globe, July 14, 1840.
180Richmond Whig, July 3, 1840.
more insulting to the South. 181 The Kentucky Whig organ, the Commonwealth, reviewed the facts in the case and emphasized Van Buren's notation to Paulding. 182 Every white man in Cleveland was asked by the Herald and Gazette to examine Van Buren's course. In reporting the action of the Democratic candidate, the paper announced that it was disgusted with the implication that Negroes were as good as white men in court. 183

This assault of the Whigs against Van Buren was aided when the Emancipator asserted that a rather recent occurrence demonstrated that the government had not declared Negroes incapable of testifying against white men. The abolitionist mouthpiece was obviously pleased with the disposition of the Hooe case, and John H. Pleasants was quick to point out that the anti-slavery men approved of the President's conduct. 184 Later in the summer Van Buren's note to the Naval Secretary was contrasted with a law Harrison signed in Indiana which provided that persons of color could testify only against other persons of color. 185 That the Whigs, and particularly the Southern branch of the party, maintained a steady attack

181 The print scornfully reminded its readers that Van Buren was known as the "Northern man with Southern feelings." Ibid.
182 Commonwealth, July 7, 1840; see also Ibid., July 21, 1840.
183 Cleveland Herald and Gazette, July 15, 1840.
184 Emancipator, quoted in Richmond Whig, July 17, 1840.
185 Southern Advertiser, quoted in Commonwealth, Aug. 18, 1840.
against Van Buren for his decision on the Hooe trial is apparent from the evidence. 186

Over in the Democratic camp, Blair resumed the party’s journalistic defense of the President by saying that the testimony of the blacks did not convict Hooe. 187 In addition to this argument, which was sound but did not meet the objections of Hooe and the Whigs against the mere presence of the Negroes, the Democrats used a diversionary maneuver which hit the Harrison forces for being inconsistent when they allowed Negroes to attend the Ft. Meigs rally as delegates. 188

Actually Van Buren provided the best rationale for his course. He wrote to a North Carolina man, Eugene Burras, and explained that no federal law prohibited Negroes from appearing at courts martial, which were necessarily conducted under federal rules. 189 Therefore, he said that when the two Negroes were called the Southern naval officers on the court allowed them to testify. Since the Naval Secretary and Attorney General had upheld the correctness of the proceedings and the verdict, Van Buren indicated that there was no reason for him to overturn the decision of the court because of the supposedly illegal evidence furnished by the Negroes. As for the future, he stated that he favored

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186 See also Richmond Whig, Aug. 25, Sept. 1, 1840; National Intelligencer, Sept. 12, Oct. 3, 1840.
187 Globe, July 14, 1840; also Richmond Enquirer, July 28, 1840.
188 Ohio Statesman, June 24, 1840; Richmond Enquirer, July 28, 1840.
189 Martin Van Buren to Eugene Burras, Aug. 4, 1840, Globe, Aug. 21, 1840.
changing the federal code which governed the procedure of courts martial.190

The President's exposition of the affair was publicized by the Democrats and undoubtedly calmed the excitement in some areas where it was used wisely by the local leaders.191 In a later editorial, Blair recalled for his farflung constituency the efforts of the party to change the law of evidence for such cases. Moreover, he reiterated that the Supreme Court had ruled that no new trial was necessary in a case where it was apparent that justice had been done, even if a mistake had been made.192 The defensive nature of the last argument, however, illustrated the difficult position of the Democrats. The Whigs did not have to discuss the technical aspects of the trial; it was enough for them to mention Van Buren's ruling and the prejudices of many voters were at once aroused. Indeed, the Democrats alleged that the Whigs influenced the North Carolina state elections with handbills that attacked the President's action in connection with the Hooe trial.193

190 The Democrats featured an editorial from the Lexington Gazette (Va.), a Whig paper, which said that it was too much to expect Van Buren to set the case aside. The paper backed the Democratic position that Congress must change the laws. Ibid., Aug. 1, 1840; Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 14, 1840.
191 Ibid., Aug. 25, 1840.
192 Globe, Sept. 12, 1840; see also Richmond Enquirer, June 30, 1840.
During the mid-summer weeks while the Hooe ease was discussed, Van Buren's friends also hit at Harrison's record as they had done earlier in the race. Croswell chided the Albany Evening Journal for not printing the Lyons letter for its Northern readers. Three weeks later he published evidence that further substantiated the party's claim that Harrison's letter to Evans was used in Massachusetts to keep the abolitionists loyal to the Whig party. In the same issue, Croswell also quoted the greater part of an article from the Philanthropist which denounced Harrison's duplicity on the slavery issue. In this article Bailey referred to the Lyons letter and another of similar import to Governor Owen of North Carolina. Bailey stated that these pronouncements revealed the General's inconsistency because just four months earlier he had told Bailey of his anti-slavery feelings. In his zeal to "undeceive the abolitionists" with regard to the Whig candidate, the editor of the Philanthropist certainly provided Croswell with excellent ammunition.

The Argus was not the only important Democratic organ that publicized Bailey's remarks, however, for Medary and Ritchie also carried the article. In July, Blair printed

194 Albay Argus, July 3, 1840.
195 Ibid., July 21, 1840.
196 Bailey began to waver in his support of Harrison in April and had no other course but to back Birney. See Philanthropist, April 21, May 12, July 14, 21, Sept. 15, 1840.
197 Ohio Statesman, July 3, 1840; Richmond Enquirer, July 10, 1840.
a list of Harrison's inconsistent views on the slavery issue. After the Evening Post ran a longer list of contradictory statements, it concluded that Old Tippecanoe lacked the judgment, constancy and veracity required of a President.

The Democrats continued to uphold Van Buren's record on the abolition issue. The North Carolina Democrats began their manifesto to the people by hailing their leader as a wise and patriotic statesman in his handling of the slavery question. In Virginia the county Democratic meetings usually praised the New Yorker's record as a defender of Southern rights on the slavery question. The Greenville Mountaineer of South Carolina averred that Harrison was an old line Federalist who boasted of his membership in an abolition society. The paper said that Van Buren's vote in 1820 for the New York Missouri resolution occurred because the Clinton men forced the resolution on the chamber. The President's 1837 Inaugural and the casting vote of 1836 were commended. The Mountaineer added that the incendiary pamphlet bill was passed by "the Vice President's vote...."

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198 Globe, July 9, 21, 1840.
199 Evening Post, July 27, 1840; see also Ohio Statesman, Sept. 8, 1840.
200 North Carolina Standard Extra, June 19, 1840.
201 Richmond Enquirer, June, July, 1840, passim.
202 Quoted in ibid., Aug. 4, 1840.
203 Ibid.
In the course of the summer Van Buren had occasion to write more public letters dealing with slavery. On June 16, he answered a question from a group of North Carolina men which dealt with a possibility of a federal law being passed that would abolish slavery in the territories. In his reply the President repeated the pledge given in the Inaugural speech and went on to say, "A bill...for the abolition of slavery in the Territories where it exists, without the assent of the slaveholding States...would not...receive my...sanction." He expressed the hope that this letter would quell the rumors that had been circulated against him. The Mebane letter may have been used to advantage in the Old North state, but it did not receive wide publicity.

Another campaign letter to several Elizabeth City county, Virginia, men indicated that he would not sign a bill giving money to a state seeking to free its slaves. In response to their query about the possible abolition of slavery in the nation's capital, he sent along a copy of his letter to the Kentucky Democrats. When he replied to an Illinois group who asked the same question, he also referred them to his Kentucky letter. Since the Illinois men had asked if Holland's biography was accurate, he assured them

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204 Martin Van Buren to A. W. Mebane and others, June 16, 1840, Van Buren Papers.
205 Martin Van Buren to John Cary and others, July 31, 1840, Niles' Register, Aug. 22, 1840.
206 Martin Van Buren to William Fithian and others, Aug. 20, 1840, ibid., Sept. 19, 1840.
that it was correct as far as it went. He added that he did not communicate with Holland while the book was being written. Van Buren warned them about spurious editions of the volume but said that their copy, which he had examined, was an authentic one.207

These campaign statements showed the importance attached to the Kentucky letter which contained a comprehensive review of Van Buren's opinions respecting slavery. The Elizabeth City county letter, of course, contrasted with Harrison's view that federal funds could be used to help free the slaves. As for the Mebane letter, it carried the President's reassurances on slavery in the District of Columbia over to the question of federal interference with slavery in the territories. Thus, Van Buren indicated that he was going to finish the campaign with the same basic position on the slavery issue that he had assumed in the previous contest.

The Democratic press gave extensive coverage to the Elizabeth City county letter.208 Although the party leaders must have winced when alert Whig editors charged that Van Buren's first reply to Fithian was inadequate and constituted

207 Fithian wrote to Van Buren on May 23, 1840. The President's first answer stated that he wished to examine Fithian's copy of Holland before elaborating on the remainder of the letter. Martin Van Buren to William Fithian and others, June 22, 1840, ibid., Aug. 8, 1840.

208 Richmond Enquirer, Aug. 7, 1840; Albany Argus, Aug. 14, 18, 1840; Ohio Statesman, Aug. 18, 1840; Evening Post, Aug. 13, 1840.
a fine job of dodging, they eventually got his second note to the Illinois men and laid it before the public. 209

At the same time the National Intelligencer noted that a townsman, William Morrison, had published a pamphlet attacking Van Buren. 210 This work labelled Van Burenism a leveling spirit which aimed at the destruction of property rights for the benefit of the common man. In addition to the argument on the economic issues of the day, Morrison described Van Buren as an abolitionist. 211 The proof that was adduced for this statement covered every charge that the Southern Whigs traditionally made against the New Yorker. Moreover, Morrison said that Van Buren refused to discuss Texas in the 1840 race in order to embarrass the South. In closing his discussion, he wrote, "I shall not conclude this catalogue...without mentioning Mr. Van Buren's approval of the introduction of negro testimony against a white citizen ...." 212

Morrison's pamphlet was actually only one of a number that the Whigs printed during the exciting campaign. Among the more prominent ones, that by Richard Hildreth did not

209 The Whig position is exemplified in Cincinnati Gazette, July 22, 1840; Commonwealth, July 28, 1840; for the Democratic publicity, Albany Argus, Sept. 18, 1840; Ohio Statesman, Sept. 22, 1840.
210 National Intelligencer, Sept. 24, 1840.
211 William Morrison, A Word in Season; or Review of the Political Life and Opinions of Martin Van Buren (Washington, 1840), 12.
212 Ibid., 13.
mention the slavery question. The biography of Harrison by Issac Jackson likewise neglected the slavery controversy. Thurlow Weed's booklet, on the other hand, was a review of the President's course during the 1821 constitutional convention. It cited the official records of the gathering to show that Van Buren opposed an exclusive white suffrage for the state. Naturally, the Little Magician's votes for limited Negro suffrage were reported. Another pamphlet which quoted extensively from Holland's biography attempted to demonstrate the ever changing maneuvers of the President. It was severe in its criticism of his approval of Negro voting rights. With regard to the New York resolution on slavery in Missouri, the work charged that one of Van Buren's most significant changes in attitude occurred when he abandoned the position taken in 1820 for that found in the Gwin letter of 1834. A final campaign booklet that is worthy of mention was issued by the Whig Republican Committee of Seventy-Six. This group assembled a most complete collection of materials designed specifically for the Southern reader. The subjects covered in the pamphlet included

213 Richard Hildreth, The Contrast; or William Henry Harrison versus Martin Van Buren (Boston, 1840).
214 Issac Jackson, The Life of William Henry Harrison, the People's Candidate for the Presidency (Philadelphia, 1840), 4 ed.
215 Weed, ed., The Votes and Speeches of Martin Van Buren, 7.
216 Ibid., 12, 23.
217 A Brief Account of the Life & Political Opinions of Martin Van Buren...From the Most Authentic Sources (n.p., 1840).
218 The Northern Man with Southern Principles.
every one pertaining to the slavery controversy that had been discussed during the early part of the campaign. Van Buren's claims to Southern support were disputed with the evidence that had become familiar to the intelligent citizen. Conversely, Harrison was advanced as a foe of abolition and a champion of American principles.

As the campaign came to a close the Democrats maintained much of the confidence that they had exhibited during the summer. The Whig gains in Maine chilled Buchanan, but the Pennsylvanian assured Van Buren that the Keystone state was safe. Blair used the results in Maine to highlight the abolition-Whig alliance that had been working for Harrison since the 1839 convention. He was very positive in asserting that the South must awaken to the danger in the North and fall in solidly behind Van Buren.

A different appeal was sounded by Amos Kendall who wrote to Flagg and enclosed a letter from a prominent Virginia Democrat which told of the plans of Rives, Preston and other Southern Whigs to take over an administration under Harrison and thereby exclude the anti-slavery men. Kendall asked Flagg to use the letter in an effort to get

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219 *Evening Post*, June 29, 1840; *Richmond Enquirer*, Sept. 22, 1840.


221 *Globe*, Sept. 26, 1840.

222 A. Kendall to A. Flagg, Sept. 30, 1840, Flagg Papers.
the people (presumably those with anti-slavery sympathies) to see the real state of affairs. While Kendall was hoping for last minute support from the anti-slavery elements, Jabez Hammond, the student of New York politics, thought that "the abolition movement is a God send." He doubtless figured on Birney drawing off thousands of votes from Harrison. From Virginia Peter V. Daniel wrote that the Hoee case had been used extensively by the Whigs. He went on to say, "Sure I am that I have never witnessed anything like the scenes now passing before me...in the furious volume, the disregard of candor &...the scandalous corruption & profligacy evinced in the existing contest, there is much that is calculated to lower the standard of intellectual or moral attainment in our country."

The results of this furious contest revealed that Van Buren polled 366,124 more votes than in 1836. Yet, he lost by 145,914 ballots out of a total of 2,411,187 cast. As for Birney, he collected a mere 7,069 votes. Harrison thus garnered 52.8 percent of the vote compared to Van Buren's 50.8 percent in 1836 and Jackson's 56.4 percent in 1832. The race in a number of states was closer than might be imagined. Two were decided by less than one thousand ballots and ten by less than five thousand votes. In the final tally.

223 Jabez Hammond to Martin Van Buren, Sept. 21, 1840, Van Buren Papers.
224 P. V. Daniel to Martin Van Buren, Sept. 28, 1840, Van Buren Papers.
Van Buren carried two Northern and four Southern states. Harrison's landslide victory came in the electoral count and not in the popular voting.\textsuperscript{225}

With regard to the slavery controversy, it was obviously important for Van Buren in this campaign. He again discussed the subject more frequently in his public letters than any other. A plank in the Democratic platform dealt with the slavery question and every aspect of his record was aired during the contest. The words expended on his relationship to the various facets of the issue could be counted by the thousands.\textsuperscript{226}

As in 1836, the South was deeply concerned about the dangers to their peculiar institution. Ritchie wrote, "The most vital...and ominous of all questions to the South, is that of abolition."\textsuperscript{227} Birney had no support in the area and regardless of Van Buren's stand on the economic issues of the day, he would not have maintained any following in


\textsuperscript{226}Compare with the accounts in Roseboom, Presidential Elections, 117-123; Stanwood, Presidency, chapter 16; Channing, History, V, 462-463; von Holst, History, II, 330-401; McMaster, History, VI, 556-592; Sydnor, Southern Sectionalism, 319-320; Schlesinger, Age of Jackson, chapter 23; Bassett, Jackson, II, 730-732; Simms, Rise of the Whigs, chapter 6; Robert G. Gunderson, The Log Cabin Campaign (Lexington, 1957), 224-226, 241; Cleaves, Old Tippecanoe, 319-328; Lynch, Van Buren, 452-460; Van Deusen, Jacksonian Era, 141-150.

\textsuperscript{227}Richmond Enquirer, April 14, 1840.
the slave states if the Whigs had been able to convince the public that his record made him a genuine threat to their security. That the Whigs won over many on this issue would seem to be a safe assumption. Nevertheless, the Democrats utilized his pronouncements during the previous campaign, his Inaugural veto pledge, and the letters written during the year to reassure the people that he was safe on the slavery question. Indeed, the Van Buren men, for their part, spent a great deal of time arguing that in contrast to the President's Southern principles Harrison had marked abolitionist propensities. They must have succeeded with thousands of individuals, but the vote indicated that this stratagem failed.

In the North the slavery controversy also provided the most compelling issue in the election for thousands of people. There was no general solidity on a sectional viewpoint, however. In view of the fact that there were more anti-slavery men in the Northern Whig party than the Democratic, it is surprising that the party press did not seemingly attack the President for his "subservience" to the South to any great degree. Harrison and his advisers were certainly aware of the anti-slavery sentiments of many Whigs, and actively courted this vote in the early part of the campaign. Since Harrison was being offered to the South as a friend of the Southern way of life, this double
policy became one of the chief targets of the Democrats. The abolitionists also grew critical of the Ohioan, and their third party ought to have hurt him considerably. As it turned out, however, all but a handful of the reformers gave their votes to the major candidates with Harrison apparently getting the lion's share.\textsuperscript{228}

In this atmosphere Van Buren was known by his acts to be hostile to the work of the abolitionists; the people were surely aware of his pledges to the South. He and his backers did not deny his record, but they did not draw attention to his position as was the case in 1836. Despite the stiffer attitude of the North toward the South, this stand was certain to gain support among those who had Southern connections or were concerned about compromises of the Constitution and the stability of the Union.

\textsuperscript{228}The promises of the Northern Whigs to the anti-slavery men were generally successful as the abolitionists later admitted. See the article in The New Jersey Freeman (Boonton, N.J.), Oct. 1, 1844.
It is apparent from the foregoing material that slavery and the slavery controversy were important factors in the life and career of Martin Van Buren in the years under discussion. With regard to his personal contacts with the institution, it is regrettable that his treatment of the Negroes and his attitude toward slavery were not described in the contemporary documents. As for his early political record in New York affairs, he undoubtedly included the provisions for free Negroes and slaves in the 1814 militia act, because he wanted to utilize some of the Negro manpower that was available at the time. He had a precedent for his plan in a law that was passed by the state during the Revolutionary War. Van Buren's vote for the 1817 bill which provided for the termination of slavery in the Empire state involved a question of greater consequence. Although a goodly number of the ten thousand slaves in the state lived in his Middle District, he resisted whatever pressures there were to sustain the institution and joined the reformers in supporting the measure.

The Missouri Controversy presented a number of problems to the Little Magician. The most important concerned his decision in the summer of 1819 to back Rufus King for a second Senatorial term. He admitted that he had mixed
motives in the matter, and it seems obvious that his desire to gain the help of the King men in his fight against Clinton was the dominant factor in his thinking. The excitement that developed over the Tallmadge amendment, however, forced Van Buren to consider King's position on the momentous issue. With King's speeches of February, 1819, and his letter to John T. Irving before him, Van Buren concluded that the Long Islander would give the Missouri question "a true direction." Since there was no reason to alter the plans of the Bucktails, the party leaders pushed ahead with their drive and were even joined by the Clintonians when the election occurred.

It is significant that the Little Magician shared his views on King with only a few lieutenants. His concern for the national unity of the Republican party, and his desire to assume a role in Washington affairs would appear to explain his reluctance to publicize his opinions on the explosive question. Since he also believed that the Clinton men were using the Missouri agitation for political purposes, his refusal to sign the resolutions of the 1819 Albany mass meeting (which was controlled by Clintonians) was a logical step. In the same manner he refused to discuss the state resolution on the restriction of slavery in Missouri and seemingly avoided the issue in the 1820 gubernatorial race as long as possible. Nevertheless, the evidence shows that Van Buren was sympathetic to the idea of limiting slavery
in Missouri and gave his assent to the state resolution when it was brought to a vote.

The excitement that was generated in the 1830's on the slavery question by the abolitionists, the Walker pamphlet and the Nat Turner uprising, and the belligerent defense of slavery offered by the vocal elements in the South was bound to affect Van Buren. As Jackson's heir-apparent, he was involved in the long 1836 campaign and then as an embattled President in the 1840 race. In both of these campaigns the slavery-abolition issue was important for the New Yorker—more important indeed than the accounts of them indicate.

He was attacked in a most persistent manner by the Southern Whigs who endeavored to undermine his political reputation in the area by demonstrating that his record on the question was completely unsatisfactory for the Southern voter. The Whigs knew that the South would not accept an abolitionist or one who had shown definite tendencies in that direction. Therefore, they hammered away on his course during the Missouri controversy. They also made a strong point of his record in the New York constitutional convention of 1821. The actions which the Whigs singled out were the vote against an exclusive white suffrage and the vote for a limited Negro suffrage. Van Buren's support of a restriction on the slave trade in Florida Territory was mentioned sporadically. In the 1836 race, his affirmation of Congressional power over slavery in the federal District
was linked to similar claims by the anti-slavery men, and in the 1840 campaign the Hoee affair received a great deal of attention. In both campaigns the Southern Whigs tried to split Van Buren's Congressional followers along sectional lines on the matter of receiving abolitionist petitions.

The Little Magician and his advisers fought back against this assault for they recognized the threat to his standing as a national leader; the unity of the Democratic party was also endangered by the appeals of the Southern Whigs. In the first struggle the Democratic press denied the suggestions that the great mass of the Northern citizenry was infected with abolitionism, for this charge implied that Van Buren, as a Northerner, would have to court the agitators. The Democrats, moreover, paced by the documents issued by his lieutenants, minimized their standardbearer's participation in the drive to restrict slavery in Missouri. In addition to Thomas Ritchie's explanation that the 1821 constitution made it more difficult for Negroes to vote than before, the New Yorker assumed a position that was calculated to calm Southern fears that he would assist in any crusade against their slave property. His casting vote on the engrossment of the incendiary mails bill and the compromising resolutions adopted by the Pinckney committee also served to quiet the South and frustrate the plans of the Whigs. In view of the hostility in the North toward the work of the abolitionists, this stance as the "Northern man with Southern policies"
was well received in that section in the 1836 campaign.

It is apparent that Van Buren's Inaugural veto pledge was unnecessary, but it had been promised and it reassured the South. The party's handling of the vexing problem created by the abolitionist petitions was certainly not entirely satisfactory to many in either section. Nevertheless, it probably was considered sensible by the moderates of both sections, and it was seemingly needed to keep the wheels of the government turning. The rejection of the Texas plea for admission to the Union prevented a troublesome issue from disturbing the country. In the light of future developments, this decision against expanding the territory open to slavery was most prophetic and consequential.

The hardening attitude of the North toward the South on the slavery issue, however, made it inadvisable for the party to stress Van Buren's opinions and his Inaugural veto pledge in the North in the 1840 contest. With regard to the South, the President's friends reiterated most of the arguments given in 1836 and were fortified with a new series of public letters from their candidate which reaffirmed his position on the slavery question. They were again fundamentally successful in meeting the Whig arguments.

In the two campaigns the Democrats attacked the inconsistent and vulnerable points in the records of Harrison and White, Van Buren's chief opponents. If the material that has been presented in this study appears to have
neglected the Northern Whigs, it is because they did not seemingly use the slavery issue to a great extent as a weapon against Van Buren. As for the abolitionists, they found all of the candidates repulsive in the 1836 campaign. While the politically minded among the anti-slavery men formed a third party four years later, most of the abolitionists who voted appear to have gone with Harrison.

It must be said in passing that Van Buren's compromising policies on the slavery controversy helped to keep his party united during these stormy years. Since he and his opponents were acceptable to most of the Southern people on the slavery question in each election, the great mass of the voters were therefore free to make their choice on the basis of the other issues at stake. In the North, despite the rising influence of the anti-slavery spirit, the same situation prevailed. These observations do not invalidate, however, the conclusion that the slavery issue was of fundamental importance to Van Buren in these campaigns.
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