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1972
A RHETORICAL EVALUATION OF
THOMAS HART BENTON'S SLAVERY SPEECHES,
1844 - 1858

DISSERTATION

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

By
Donal Junior Stanton, B.S., M.A.

***

The Ohio State University
1972

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express his deep appreciation to Professor Goodwin F. Berquest of Ohio State University for his advice, understanding, encouragement and friendship.

A special word of thanks is due the staffs of the Missouri State Historical Society of Columbia, Missouri and the Missouri Historical Society of St. Louis, Missouri. Without the help of these dedicated individuals such a study would have been impossible.

Finally, I wish to dedicate this study to my parents whose sacrifices, encouragement, love and respect of learning motivated me to undertake graduate study.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. BENTON'S RHETORICAL HERITAGE</th>
<th>21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The North Carolina Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tennessee Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Missouri Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senator Thomas Hart Benton:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokesman for the West, 1821-1844</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>II. BENTON, SLAVERY, AND THE UNION</th>
<th>79</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>III. BENTON'S AUDIENCES</th>
<th>106</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The National Audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Senatorial Audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Missouri Audience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV. BENTON'S MODES OF PROOF</th>
<th>138</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Logical Proof</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Proof</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Proof</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>V. BENTON'S METHODS OF PRESENTATION</th>
<th>184</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benton's Organization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VI. BENTON'S STYLE. .................................................. 219

Introduction
Style of Benton's Slavery Speeches
Conclusion

VII. BENTON'S RHETORICAL IMPACT. ....................... 252

Overall Effectiveness
Benton's Impact Upon Popular Opinion
Benton's Place In History
Contemporary Relevance of Study
Potential For Further Research

BIBLIOGRAPHY ....................................................... 266
INTRODUCTION

In 1809, at the age of twenty-seven, Thomas Hart Benton was elected to the Tennessee State Senate. Thus was launched one of the longest and most productive political careers in the first half of the nineteenth century.

In spite of personal tragedy, financial problems, and career setbacks, Benton was politically active and influential from this time forward. In 1815, Benton migrated to St. Louis, Missouri, and established a politically influential newspaper. In 1821, he became one of the first two members of the Senate of the United States from the newly admitted state of Missouri. He served continuously in that body for thirty years, longer than any other senator up until that time. In 1850, he was defeated for re-election. Benton was elected to the United States House of Representatives from St. Louis County in 1852. He ran for re-election to the House in 1854 and was again defeated. The final phase of Benton's career came in 1856 when he was the unsuccessful candidate of the "Benton Democrats" for the Governorship of Missouri.

Purpose and Justification of the Study

During his long public career, Benton spoke out on every important issue of the period. Much of the legislation of the era bears the mark of his influence. The overall purpose of this study is to attempt a rhetorical evaluation of Thomas Hart Benton's speeches given
on the slavery question between 1844 and 1858.

The justification for such a study in a department of speech rests upon several premises: (1) the political, social, and economic issues of a period are inseparable from the rhetoric of the individuals who articulate the issues and, thereby, give them form and meaning; (2) Benton's speeches did play an important role in shaping the slavery issue nationally and were directly responsible for his own political downfall in Missouri; (3) Benton's slavery speeches have not been subjected to extensive rhetorical examination; (4) contemporary students of rhetoric can profit from a study of both the effective and ineffective aspects of Benton's rhetoric: (a) Benton was adept in the use of logical proofs; this was the characteristic mark of his rhetoric, as well as his strongest point as a speaker; (b) Benton was effective in the use of emotional appeals, especially when speaking from the stump in Missouri; (c) Benton's rhetoric was impaired by unclear organization; this is true even of his shorter and less complex speeches; (d) Benton was effective if adapting to differing audiences. Benton always examined his audiences in advance of the speaking situation, and he did not hesitate to alter his prepared outline or text when actual audience response called for it; significant shifts in style and language from audience to audience are evident.

Benton's greatest failure as a speaker is to be found in his inability, or unwillingness, to even attempt conciliation with those political leaders who disagreed with him. He turned against many of
his closest friends and bitterly denounced them for what most would consider minor breeches. This characteristic played an important role in the slavery dispute. To Benton, all those he considered to possess "disunionist characteristics" were traitors, and he openly labeled them as such. This epithet and others were applied to abolitionists, the spokesmen of the South, free soliers, in fact, anyone who opposed Benton's personal position, which was that the expansion of slavery into the territories should be checked and slavery left alone where it already existed. Such a position eventually cost Benton both his national and Missouri constituency. It was probably inevitable that Benton's singular views alone should cost him heavily in political support, but his egotism and uncompromising attacks on all who disagreed totally destroyed his power base in Missouri by 1854.

Historians agree that the year 1844 and the rebirth of the slavery issue mark the beginning of Benton's last great battle and his eventual political demise. In his extensive study of the election of 1844, Clarence H. McClure indicates both the historical and rhetorical significance of this contest:

Two issues which were soon to become crucial both to Missouri and the Nation were brought into the political arena; the right of Congress to prohibit slavery in the territories and disunion... the fight which began in 1844 and culminated in the election of 1850 was marked by one of the most spectacular and vindictive speaking campaigns in our Nation's history.

Meigs says, "So far as the records show, he (Benton) had little or no difficulty in being re-elected until his defeat in 1851, and he received on most occasions twice as many votes as his opponents or even more." Rogers, after describing Benton's first election to the Senate in 1820, argues, "This was Benton's only serious contest until 1850 when he lost his seat. For the next four terms Missouri re-elected him without more than a formal vote." Roosevelt clearly indicates the cause of such a massive shift of opinion in a period of only six years, "The large Whig minority had never been able to get control, but on the question of the extension of slavery the dominant party itself began at this time to break into factions. Hitherto, Benton had been the undisputed leader of the democracy, but now the proslavery and disunionist democrats organized a very powerful opposition to him."

Because of the importance of the slavery speeches to Benton, the nation, and the state of Missouri, this writer feels that such a study is justified. It should be noted that a combined interest in history and rhetoric, plus strong Missouri ties, initially motivated this writer to consider undertaking such a project. It is also felt that Benton has not been accorded the consideration due him as a speaker and political force in the nineteenth century. These factors combined

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with the discovery of a lack of rhetorical examination of Benton's
slavery speeches resulted in the final decision to undertake the study
described in this chapter.

Review of Literature

Four standard biographies of Benton have been written over the
years: Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Hart Benton, (1896); Joseph M.
Rogers, Thomas Hart Benton, (1905); William M. Meigs, The Life of Thomas
Hart Benton, (1924); William Nisbet Chambers, Old Bullion Benton:
Senator From the New West, (1956).

The works by Roosevelt, Rogers, and Meigs present a somewhat
romanticized portrait of Benton, and in several instances contain his-
torical inaccuracies pertaining to questions of great importance. The
Chambers biography is by far the most objective and scholarly. Chambers
recognized many of the errors of the previous writers, especially those
dealing with Benton's youth and early adult years, and set out to cor-
rect them. In addition to his biography Chambers also wrote a series
of articles which, taken together, provide the most reliable and de-
tailed account available of Benton's formative years.5

5See William N. Chambers, "As the Twigg is Bent: The Family
and the North Carolina Years of Thomas Hart Benton, 1752-1801," The
North Carolina Historical Review, xxvi (October, 1949), 385; "Young
Man From Tennessee: The First Years of Thomas Hart Benton in Missouri,"
Missouri Historical Society Bulletin, iv (July, 1948), 199; "Pistols
and Politics: Incidents in the Career of Thomas Hart Benton, 1816-
1818," Missouri Historical Society Bulletin, v (October, 1948), 5;
"Thomas Hart Benton: Editor," Missouri Historical Review, xlv (July,
1952), 335.
The standard historical works dealing with Benton's political period provide little more than a series of superficial reference to Benton. Benton is given credit for his role in leading the fight in the Senate against the Bank of the United States, but aside from this issue he is completely overshadowed by the mighty triumvirate of Webster, Clay, and Calhoun. Almost no mention is made of Benton's role in the slavery dispute. The most common reference to Benton in these studies is not to the man himself but to his literary works: *Thirty Years' View* and the *Abridgements of the Debates of Congress*; historians rely on these works to place Benton and his contemporaries in perspective and to clarify the social, political, and economic forces of the period in question.

The only comprehensive treatments of Benton's influence relative to the slavery issue are Eugene M. Violette's *History of Missouri* and Clarence H. McClure's thesis, "Opposition to the Re-election of Thomas Hart Benton in 1844." Both of these studies stress Benton's importance in influencing opinion on the slavery issue and credit

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Benton's political decline to his slavery position. Violette argues that the climate created by Benton's anti-slavery speeches and writings is one of the significant forces that kept Missouri in the Union at the outbreak of the Civil War.

Any rhetorical study of Benton is incomplete without a careful examination of his two great works, *Thirty Years' View* and the *Abridgements of the Debates of Congress: 1789-1850*. *Thirty Years' View* is Benton's own history of Congress during his years as a member. This work not only clearly indicates Benton's political philosophy but provides numerous insights into his views on rhetoric and speakers. Benton frequently comments on the great speakers of the day and in many instances criticizes their speaking efforts. Benton also provides clues as to his own methods of speech composition and presentation in conjunction with the inclusion of many of his own speeches. This writer will attempt to reconstruct Benton's theory of rhetoric as it is revealed in part in his best known literary work. *The Abridgement of the Debates of Congress* is also helpful to the rhetorical critic in that the speeches included represent what Benton considered to be the best speeches on the most crucial issues of the era.

Several studies of Benton as a speaker have been conducted. However, none of these deal specifically with the period 1844-1858 or with Benton's slavery speeches. In 1937 at the University of Wisconsin, Charles F. Hunter authored an M.A. thesis titled "Thomas Hart Benton: published doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, 1913."
Spokesman of the West." This study primarily deals with Benton's earlier career with emphasis on his speeches dealing with land policy, the banking system, and transportation. Thomas R. Lewis produced a M. A. thesis in 1938 examining "The Debating Techniques of Thomas Hart Benton in the Anti-Compromise Speech of 1850 With Special Reference to Invention." This study does, of course, deal with an aspect of the slavery issue. However, it is confined to one specific speech and deals almost exclusively with Benton's concept of invention. William E. Seelen conducted another study at the University of Missouri in 1940. This thesis, entitled "A Rhetorical Criticism of Thomas Hart Benton's Expunging Speech," deals exclusively with the bank issue.

Two doctoral dissertations have also dealt with Benton as a speaker. At Cornell University in 1942, Charles F. Hunter analyzed "Four Speeches of Thomas Hart Benton." The speeches examined by Hunter deal with four extremely divergent topics and periods: an 1826 speech on land policy, the Texas Statehood Speech given in 1844, the Oregon boundary dispute debate in 1846, and a House speech of 1855 on the railways. In 1948, Thomas R. Lewis turned to Benton's speaking as a topic for a dissertation. This work, "Thomas Hart Benton as a Congressional Debater" deals primarily with Benton's speeches against the Bank of the United States.

In addition to the more extensive works mentioned above, several articles and essays have been devoted to Benton's speaking: E. L. Magoon, "Thomas Hart Benton," Living Orators in America (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), 302-46; Norman W. Mattis, "Thomas Hart

These studies do indicate an interest in Benton on the part of rhetorical scholars, but they deal either with particular aspects of particular speeches or broad profiles which provide only the most general view of Benton's rhetoric. None focus on Benton's slavery speeches or the period in question.

Plan and Method

This study will attempt to resolve the following research questions arising from an examination of Benton's career in general and his slavery speeches in particular:

(1) What individuals, forces, events, issues, and experiences produced Benton's concept of rhetorical theory and practice?

(2) What was Benton's concept and philosophy of the Union and slavery?
(3) What attitudes toward slavery, the Union, and speech-making characterized Benton's audiences?

(4) What modes of proof (logical, emotional, ethical) did Benton employ in attempting to establish his slavery position?

(5) What was the role and effectiveness of organization, memory, and delivery in Benton's presentations?

(6) What qualities and techniques characterized Benton's style?

(7) What impact, if any, did Benton's speaking have upon the slavery question?

(8) What is the contemporary relevance of Benton's slavery rhetoric?

(9) What is the potential for further research?

The rationale and methodology of this study are essentially neo-classical in nature. The research questions are derived largely from traditional approaches to the three modes of proof: ethos, pathos, and logos and the five classical canons of rhetoric: invention, disposition, memory, style, and delivery. Answers to the research questions related to the slavery speeches are to be derived from the nature, composition, content, effectiveness, and interplay of these eight rhetorical factors as revealed by an examination of the texts of the speeches and accounts and assessments of these speeches provided by Benton's contemporaries. The following chapter breakdown indicates the general procedure and organizational pattern of the study.
Chapter 1 BENTON'S RHETORICAL HERITAGE

Benton's biographers, historians, and rhetorical critics have already examined the events of Benton's life in detail. This study will present biographical data only to the extent necessary for understanding the development of the speaker, the issues, and especially Benton's speech-making.

Stress will be placed on the personalities, events, and training that shaped Benton's views toward the Union, slavery, and rhetoric. In this chapter each important phase in Benton's development will be examined: family background, childhood, early education, college years in Tennessee, migration to Missouri, editorship of the St. Louis Enquirer, and his later political and legal life. Special attention will be directed toward an examination of Benton's politics and associates during his early years in the Senate. Such a survey should reveal the influences which produced both the man and his speeches.

Chapter 2 BENTON, SLAVERY, AND THE UNION

This chapter will examine the historical development of the slavery controversy in the United States in general and in Missouri specifically. The slavery controversy breaks down into two major phases as it relates to Benton's political career: (1) Benton's enthusiastic support of the Missouri Compromise of 1820; (2) Benton's
strong opposition to the annexation of Texas in 1844 (which reopened the slavery dispute) and to the Compromise of 1850. It is imperative to understand the nature of these disputes if one is to evaluate meaningfully Benton's philosophy of slavery and the Union as expressed in his speeches.

Chapter 3 BENTON'S AUDIENCES

Benton seemed to be well aware of his several audiences. At times his listeners were the members of the Senate; at other times, the people of Missouri; and often the Nation at large. Sometimes he appealed to all three at once; such was the importance of his message whether oral or written.

Benton was frequently at odds with his Senatorial colleagues. He often resorted to taking his case to the people as he did in regard to the bank issue in the 1830's. In this case, he and his supporters were successful in bringing enough pressure to bear to force the Senate to change its position. Benton resorted to the same tactic in the slavery fight. He attempted to rally popular opinion against the annexation of Texas and the Compromise of 1850. When the Missouri Legislature specifically instructed Benton to vote in favor of Calhoun's slavery resolutions, he refused and took his case directly to the Missouri voters in a spectacular stump campaign.

Most of Benton's speeches were composed to be read as well as
heard. Benton had his important speeches printed and saw to it that they were widely circulated. Therefore, it is necessary to examine both his listening and reading audiences. His listening audience was generally the Senate and its gallery and the citizens of Missouri during campaigns. His reading audience was the country at large and the people of Missouri.

Therefore, the composition and nature of differing audiences, and Benton's approach to each, will be examined.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are devoted to a detailed analysis of Benton's modes of proof, methods of presentation, and style. It is, of course, necessary here to examine actual specimens of his speeches. On the basis of Benton's own opinion, public reaction, and availability of accurate texts, the following speeches have been selected for examination.

(1) The Annexation of Texas (U. S. Senate, 1844)
(2) Boonville, Missouri Speech (1844)

These two speeches represent the first phase in Benton's break with popular opinion in Missouri over the slavery issue. In the Senate speech Benton opposed the annexation of Texas on the grounds that it was a plot on the part of Calhoun and the South to expand slave territory. The Boonville speech is representative of Benton's attempts to justify his position to the people of Missouri who strongly favored the annexation of Texas.

(3) Speech to the People of Missouri (Jefferson City, 1849)
(4) Fayette, Missouri Speech (1849)
The Jefferson City and Fayette speeches represent the second, and most crucial phase, of Benton's slavery rhetoric. These speeches were given during the canvass of 1849 which resulted in Benton's defeat the following year in his bid for a sixth term in the Senate. The complete texts of both speeches were printed in various Missouri newspapers and literally thousands of reprints were circulated throughout the state. The contemporary press claimed that these two speeches were the greatest of Benton's career. The Jefferson City speech provides Benton's most comprehensive treatment of the slavery issue available in any single speech.

(5) Anti-Tack Speech (U. S. Senate, 1850)
(6) Anti-Compromise Speech (U. S. Senate, 1850)

The above mentioned speeches represent the third phase of Benton's involvement in the slavery struggle. In these speeches, as a lame duck Senator, he bitterly denounced the Compromise of 1850 and the expansion of slavery into the territories.

(7) Kansas and Nebraska (U. S. House of Representatives, 1854)

As a new member of the House of Representatives, Benton continued to oppose the spread of slavery. In the Kansas-Nebraska speech Benton attacked the concept of popular sovereignty.

(8) St. Louis, Missouri Speech (June 21, 1856)

The St. Louis Speech launched Benton's campaign for the governorship of Missouri in 1856. All of Benton's campaign speeches of 1856 were echoes of this speech. In the speech, Benton attacked those he felt responsible for creating slavery agitation and disunion sentiment,
and pleaded for harmony and reconciliation. The campaign of 1856 constitutes the fifth phase of Benton's battle over slavery.

(9) Speech at the New England Celebration in New York (December 21, 1856)

Political extinction and physical suffering did not divorce Benton from the cause of the Union. In late 1856 and early 1857, Benton undertook an extensive speaking tour through the East. The New York Speech is representative of those which followed and was covered extensively by the press. In this final crusade Benton pointed to all the blessings which the Union had provided and foretold disastrous results if the Union were broken. He predicted civil war is slavery agitation were not immediately extinguished. This speaking tour represents the final phase of Benton's crusade to save the Union. He died the following spring.

These speeches provide a representative sampling of Benton's views on slavery during various stages of the dispute. They are more or less evenly divided between those of a local nature presented in Missouri and those given elsewhere. Most of Benton's speeches were destroyed when his Washington home burned in 1855. The speeches selected for examination in this study survive because of their inclusion in the Congressional Globe, the Missouri press, or because Benton printed and distributed them himself for political reasons. Benton also includes full or partial versions of most of the speeches in Thirty Years' View. A cross comparison of newspaper texts with the versions in print and those possessed or remembered by Benton and re-
produced in his works clearly establishes the reliability of the speeches selected.

In the case of the campaign for governor in 1856 almost total reliance has to be placed on press accounts. However, Benton's speeches were limited to a few key themes and although he gave over forty speeches in the canvass they are all almost the same. The consistency of the various press accounts suggest that the reported versions are reliable and faithful to Benton's original presentations.

The following breakdown of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 indicates the approach to be employed.

Chapter 4 BENTON'S MODES OF PROOF

In examining and criticizing Benton's usage of different modes of proof the following elements of his rhetoric will be subjected to analysis:

1 Logical Proofs: (Substantive Proof)
   (A) What key arguments constitute Benton's slavery position?
   (B) What logical classifications do these arguments fit into (i.e., cause, sign, classification, generalization, etc.)
   (C) What kinds of evidence does Benton offer in support of these arguments?
   (D) Based on available information, how valid were his substantive arguments?
II Emotional Proof: (Motivational Proof)
   (A) What was the nature of Benton's emotional appeals?
   (B) To what extent did Benton rely on emotional appeals?
   (C) Do Benton's emotional appeals reflect an accurate assessment of his listeners motives?

III Ethical Proof:
   (A) What ethical proofs did Benton employ to enhance his credibility?
   (B) What was the nature of Benton's image (both nationally and locally) during the various phases of the slavery controversy?

   (This assessment will be based upon editorial comment, reaction of immediate audiences, and assessments of Benton's contemporaries as expressed in letters, diaries, memoirs, etc.)

   In addition to this standard approach to criticism it is intended to subject Benton's most important arguments to an examination by means of the "Toulmin Model." It is felt that the use of the Toulmin format is useful in providing the reader with a visual model demonstrating the relationships among different proof components and is especially helpful in indicating the degree of probability the speaker feels his argument to possess. The model also pinpoints the types of supporting data or evidence employed by the speaker and relates such data to the moral, philosophical, political or economic principle on which the argument is based. In evaluating Benton's logical proofs this writer will employ the modified Toulmin model as developed by Professors Ehninger and Brockriede which is most familiar
to students of argumentation. Two more recent applications of the Toulmin system of analysis to emotional and ethical proof will also be employed in evaluating Benton's rhetorical practices.

Professor Holt V. Spicer has shown the utility of the Toulmin model in evaluating arguments based on ethical or moral questions, and Professor James McCroskey has pointed out the usefulness of the model in assessing a speakers' analysis of motive appeals. Therefore, the combined approach of the above mentioned critics will be employed in assessing the nature of Benton's argument.

It is obviously impossible, in a study of this length and scope, to examine each of Benton's individual arguments on slavery. However, almost all of Benton's slavery speeches are based on common themes and arguments. The intent here is to isolate the key arguments, appeals, and supports common to the speeches in general and to then criticize these arguments in the manner described.


11James C. McCroskey, An Introduction to Rhetorical Communication. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968). The models employed by Ehninger and Brockriede, Spicer, and McCroskey are derived from Stephen E. Toulmin's The Uses of Argument (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958). It is however, necessary to employ the language and formats of the secondary sources because their applications differ substantially in both form and substance from Toulmin's original system. For instance, Spicer and McCroskey rely heavily on what is only implied in Toulmin's works.
Chapter 5  BENTON'S METHODS OF PRESENTATION

In examining Benton's method of presentation the following divisions and questions will be considered:

I  Organization:
    (A) Did Benton employ consistent and discernable structural patterns?
    (B) To what extent were his methods of organization effective?

II  Memory: what role, if any, did memory play in Benton's presentations?

III  Delivery: what were the distinguishing characteristics of Benton's delivery?
    (1) Appearance
    (2) Voice
    (3) Gesture-Movement

Chapter 6  BENTON'S STYLE

Benton's stylistic characteristics will be examined by attempting to answer the following questions:

I  What traits and devices characterized Benton's style?

II  Was Benton's style different from that of his contemporaries?

III  Did Benton attempt to vary his style in adapting to differing audiences?
Chapter 7  BENTON'S RHETORICAL IMPACT

The final chapter will provide conclusions and findings resulting from the study. The writer will specifically attempt to ascertain:

(1) The overall effectiveness of Benton as a speaker after viewing both his strengths and weaknesses.

(2) Benton's impact on opinion relating to the slavery issue
   (a) Senatorial opinion
   (b) National opinion
   (c) Opinion in Missouri

(3) Benton's place in history

(4) The contemporary relevance of Benton's rhetoric.

(5) Possible avenues for further research.
CHAPTER ONE

BENTON'S RHETORICAL HERITAGE

The North Carolina Years

Benton's Progenitors

About 1750, an ambitious young Englishman named Samuel Benton migrated from Central Virginia to the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Samuel's ancestors were among the flood of British settlers who came to the Old Dominion in the early 1700's. Through hard work and perseverance the Bentons established themselves as landed gentry in their section of Virginia. Clearly, Samuel Benton acquired some of the motivation and drive of his ancestors for we find him serving as a justice of the peace in Granville County, North Carolina in 1752. This position was a post of profit and influence; in 1760 Benton was elected to the provincial assembly and shortly thereafter, served as clerk of the Superior Court and county register of deeds.

During these years in public office Samuel Benton acquired a large estate through land speculation. A memorable example of his ability to wield political power to self advantage is found in his successful campaign to divide Granville County into two separate counties. In 1764 Benton introduced a bill in the provincial assembly which divided the county and established a new county seat in the portion in which he lived. Benton not only got the bill passed but secured for himself the chairmanship of the committee in charge of establishing the new county. Benton's committee was authorized to raise a special tax and to "contract for the construction of a court­house, prison, pillory, and stocks." At one of its earliest meetings the committee selected the site for the new county seat, a settlement called Oxford, which was owned by Samuel Benton. In one political maneuver Benton was able to greatly increase the value of his land and assured his own plantation of a major share of the sales to the trades­men, lawyers, and officials who settled at the new county seat.²

Professor Chambers clearly characterized Benton's image:

Samuel Benton was a powerful factor in the politics of colonial Granville, smiled on by the royal governor, active in the assembly, and the boss of the courthouse ring.3

After a few years some of the poor of North Carolina organized the "Regulators movement." The regulators were bands of vigilantes who resorted to violence in protesting exorbitant taxes and fines imposed upon them by judges and politicians like Samuel Benton. In fact, Benton was openly referred to by the regulators. It is not surprising to find that when Governor Tryon called a council of war to deal with the regulators, one officer appointed to track them down was Lt. Colonel Samuel Benton.4

In addition to his love of politics and land speculation, Samuel Benton was also dedicated to learning and culture. He spent a lifetime building a library that became famous throughout the whole Piedmont region.5

Thomas Benton's father, Jesse, was the eldest son of Samuel Benton and became executor of his father's estate when he died in 1770. However, the bulk of Samuel's estate was left to Jesse's younger brother Samuel Jr. Under the terms of the will Jesse received only ten pounds and his father's dueling pistols.

3Chambers, "Twigg", 388.
4Chambers, "Twigg", 390.
Jesse Benton was not consumed with the love of politics his father had experienced. He preferred land speculation and a quiet life at home in which cultural activities played the central role. However, because of his family's position and his inheritance of his father's office as register of deeds he was pulled into the political arena. He became an able and widely known attorney and eventually took great pride in his profession.

By using his capital to engage in land speculation, Jesse Benton was able to accumulate vast quantities of land in North Carolina, Kentucky, and especially in Tennessee. At the time of his death in 1790 Jesse owned over 23,000 acres of land in Tennessee alone, 6,250 more in Kentucky, and over 1,400 acres of prime land in North Carolina.6

Although Jesse Benton made several trips west in connection with his land interests his first love was his home and family. Thomas Benton related to his daughter in later life that his father was "a reserved, scholarly man, he particularly cherished his volumes in Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, and English, ranging from Homer, through Shakespeare and Cervantes to Madame de Sevigne."7 Henderson claimed that, "His library, like his father's, was one of the finest in Piedmont."8

6Chambers, "Twigg", 391-401.
8Henderson, North Carolina, p. 573.
Jesse Benton did his best to avoid involvement in the American Revolution and diligently tried to avoid taking sides. He was successful in keeping out of the dispute until 1781 when the Torries began to engage in violent acts such as kidnapping and murder; at this point Jesse cast his lot fully with the patriots.

Jesse Benton's political views, differed substantially from those of his father. The elder Benton's affiliations seem to have been totally with the money and property class. Jesse, on the other hand, tended to sympathize with the underdog. Despite his close connection with the property class, as a member of the assembly, he voted against a bill which would have given the courts the power to protect creditors against debtors by allowing for adjustments of currency values. As a result of his vote on this bill Benton was not re-elected to the assembly.9

In the 1780's when the question of the ratification of the Federal Constitution arose, almost all those in the Piedmont region were opposed to it. Again bucking popular opinion, Jesse Benton staunchly supported the Constitution. He argued that a strong central government was necessary for financial stability and to check currency speculators.10

The political activities of Jesse Benton demonstrate a faith in justice for all classes, a willingness to help those less fortunate, and

9Chambers, "Twigg", 394.
10Jesse Benton to Thomas Hart, Hartford, June 29, 1788 in Thomas Clay papers, Library of Congress.
the courage to stand on principle in the face of criticism; we shall later see obvious parallels in the careers of father and son.

The mother of Thomas Hart Benton was born a member of the Virginia aristocracy. She was the only surviving child of James Gooch and Ann Hart. James Gooch’s brother Sir William Gooch was the Royal Governor of Virginia from 1729 to 1749 and the Hart family had settled in America in 1690. Ann (Nancy) Gooch was born in Hanover County, Virginia in 1758. Nancy’s parents died when she was only an infant and she was raised by her uncle, Thomas Hart, who moved his family to North Carolina when Nancy was only two years of age.11

Thomas Hart was a man of position and great wealth. He was a major partner in the Transylvania Land Company, was a delegate to the North Carolina Convention in 1774, and was a colonel in the Revolutionary Army. He provided his ward, Nancy, with the best education available, given the time and location, by hiring the best private tutors in the region to direct her studies.12

These were the forebears of Thomas Hart Benton; an ambitious, somewhat conniving, politically motivated, but highly successful grandfather; a high principled, politically courageous, and land wealthy father; and an aristocratic and well educated mother.

11 Authority for statements in the above paragraph comes from the following sources: Fremont, "Biographical Sketch," pp. 241; Sarah Young, Genealogical Narrative of the Hart Family in the United States, p. 78. Manuscript in Library of the Tennessee State Historical Society, Nashville.

12 Authority for statements in the above paragraph comes from the following sources: Young, Genealogical Narrative, p. 78; Thomas Hart to Jesse Benton, November 28, 1782, in Thomas Clay papers, Library of Congress.
Thomas Hart Benton was born on March 14, 1782, in Hillsborough, North Carolina. The same year would witness the births of John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, Martin Van Buren, and Lewis Cass. These men, along with other leaders such as Andrew Jackson and Henry Clay were to guide the destiny of the United States during the crucial first half of the nineteenth century.

Thomas Benton was always proud of his father's courage in political matters. Perhaps his father's actions served as a model for him in later life when he would be the proponent of many unpopular measures. In one of his speeches in the Senate Benton recalled that his father had assisted Revolutionary War soldiers in recovering their rights to bounty lands after they had been induced to "part with them for a mere song." Benton said his father's action made a great Impression on his mind and that from that time on he hated to see the word "assigns" contained in any legal document.  

When Thomas was only eight years old his father died of the consumption that had afflicted him for years. Jesse Benton's early death obviously limited the influence he would exercise over his children, but he did leave a political and cultured heritage that was to influence Thomas for the remainder of his life.

Jesse Benton's thirty two year old widow was so physically and emotionally impaired by the shock of his death that she was not permitted to see her children for nearly a year. When Thomas was finally taken to

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13 Thomas Hart Benton, Congressional Globe, 33rd Congress, 2nd session, 998.
his mother he found a white-haired, aged woman instead of the beautiful, spirited mother of a year before. Mrs. Benton took her son's hand and calmly told him that he was now the head of the family and must take the lead in caring for the others. The impression of the event remained with Benton permanently and, he felt, helped to mature him at an early age by placing grave responsibilities upon him.  

There is no question that Thomas Benton considered his mother to have been the prime factor in forming his character and major interests. He began his "Autobiographical Sketch" with a tribute to his mother, and in it he specifically notes her influence upon his public career:

... she lived to see the fruits of her pious and liberal cares: ... to see her eldest son through half of his Senatorial career and taking his place among the historic men of the country for which she had begun so early to train him. These details deserve to be noticed, though small in themselves, as showing how much the after life of the man may depend upon the early cares and guidance of a mother.  

Education

Jesse Benton had been gravely concerned about the education of his children. As soon as Thomas was old enough to learn he was taught by his mother at home. About the time Thomas was six his father employed a Reverend Mr. Micklejohn, who was sent from England as chaplain.

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to the governor, to take charge of the childrens' education.16

Benton wished that his family might have a more formal educa-
tion, with a greater variety of subjects, and spearheaded a drive to
establish an academy at Hillsborough. He served on the board of trus-
tees and contributed to its financial support, but the school disap-
ppeared about 1790 and the Benton children never attended it.17

While in his early teens, Mrs. Benton enrolled Thomas in a
grammar school conducted by a New Englander named Richard Stanford.
Records do not clearly indicate the dates of Benton's attendance at the
school, but he probably attended Stanford's school between 1794 and
1797. Stanford later served a number of terms in Congress and was a
close friend of John Randolph and Nathaniel Macon. It is possible that
the politically motivated Stanford may have had some influence in fur-
thering Benton's political interests, but nowhere does Benton mention
Stanford except to comment that he was one of his teachers.

The continuing responsibility for Thomas' education rested with
his mother. Benton said his mother was a "woman of reading and observa-
tion" and that she had him "reading solid books and studying the great
examples of history at the age of ten or eleven and was encouraging him
to emulate these examples." As a result of his mother's prodding,
Benton claimed that he developed an early interest in history and law
from books in his father's library. Mrs. Benton began by reading to her

16Fremont, "Biographical Sketch," pp. 3-4.
17Chambers, "Twigg," 400.
son from *The British State Trials*. After reading portions to Thomas she would ask questions and encourage him to study further on his own. It is, perhaps, significant to note that Mrs. Benton was prompting young Thomas to verbalize the knowledge he was acquiring.

Evidently Mrs. Benton's plan worked. In a speech only two years before his death Benton claimed that under his mother's direction his reading quickly ranged from the *Bible* to *Plutarch's Lives* to British history and law in general, at a time in life when most boys "were reading *Robin Hood* and *Robinson Crusoe*." During the early years in Hillsborough, Thomas continued to read in his father's library which was weighted toward the law, history, and the classical writers of Greece and Rome. In addition to numerous volumes dealing with history and law the library also contained extensive holdings dealing with languages and the arts; included were volumes in Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, and English, ranging from Homer through Shakespeare and Cervantes to Madame de Sevigne.

From his reading Benton acquired not only the bare facts which would later pack his speeches and essays but a basic political philosophy as well. After reading the *British State Trials* Benton developed a hatred for the English jurist, Sir Edward Coke, because of his treatment of Sir Walter Raleigh. Benton claimed that his dislike for Coke was so

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strong that he could never bring himself to quote him in later life.

Benton was enraged by the treatment of other martyrs who he thought fought for British liberties. He mourned at the fate of Algernon Sydney, Lord William Russell, Lady Alice Lisle, and Sir Walter Raleigh. In 1856 he recalled:

> How he (Benton) loathed the king, how he grieved at the fate of those carried off at the royal behest to the dungeon, to the court, to the scaffold, to be half-hung and cut down half-alive, belly ripped open and bowels torn out—and their property confiscated by the crown.20

Thus, from his early reading, Benton acquired a Whig passion for liberty and equality. He claimed to have developed at this time a hatred of all forms of tyranny which guided him throughout his public career. During his years in the Senate Benton opposed all legislation and institutions which he felt favored a particular class or section. His greatest speeches deal with such subjects as Injustice of public land sales based on financial ability, the necessity of public transportation for all classes, control of the Bank of The United States by a vested financial interest, and, of course, his insistence that the slavery controversy was a plot by Calhoun aimed at securing the Presidency for himself and elevating the political power of the South. All of these later positions seem, in part, to be a reflection of Benton's earlier studies and resulting philosophies.

20T. H. Benton, "Speech at the New England Celebration." The people to which Benton referred were Algernon Sidney, Lord William Russell, Lady Alice Lisle, and Sir Walter Raleigh. All of these individuals openly opposed Charles II and James II prior to the Bloodless or Glorious Revolution of 1688. It should be noted that in both his speeches and writing, Benton often referred to himself in the second person.
By the time he was sixteen Benton was openly and forcefully expressing his political views. In one of his early newspaper contributions, Benton provides an example of one of his first attempts at oral persuasion. The situation arose out of President Washington’s dismissal of James Monroe as minister to France. Benton felt that Washington’s action represented a "sell out" to the British crown and a seditious of the republican cause. According to Benton,

He went into every company he found declaiming with the fury of a little sansculotte against the base ingratitude of the President, and passionately extolling the disgraced minister.21

Mrs. Benton providing Thomas with political models to copy, and also gave him her own personal moral code which would, except for one major breech, serve as his guide of conduct for life, Benton characterized his mother as follows:

She was a pious and religious woman and cultivated the moral and religious education of her children...all the minor virtues, as well as the major ones, were cherished by her; and her home, the resort of the eminent men of the time, was the abode of temperance, modesty, and decorum. A pack of cards was never seen in the home; from such a mother all the children received the impress of future character...

When Thomas Benton was sixteen his mother decided that he had learned what he could from his father’s books and her teaching; in 1798 he enrolled at the University of North Carolina.22 When Benton arrived

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22Roosevelt, Meigs, and Rogers do not consider the period of time that Benton spent at Chapel Hill. They simply pass over the period by remarking that Benton probably dropped out of the University because his
at Chapel Hill there were only forty students in attendance. There were
a dozen students in the freshman class who were subjected to a limited
curriculum with a strong classical bias. The students studied:

Latin introduction, Virgil's Ecologues, the Greek Testament, Telemachus, Cicero, and later, algebra, astronomy, Delolme on the English Constitution, Horace, trigonometry, Millot's Elements of History, Paley's Moral Philosophy, and Blair's Lectures.

On February 5, 1799, Thomas Benton was elected to membership
in the Philanthropic Society, a literary club with weekly meetings
which "included reading aloud, declamation, and the delivery of
original compositions." Although Benton attended classes only for a
few months, he was exposed to some formal instruction in rhetoric and
probably did participate in public speaking at meetings of the Philan-
thropic Society.

In March of 1799 a series of tragic incidents took place that
were to plague Benton for the rest of his life. Several of Benton's
roommates had noticed money missing from their personal effects. After
a period of days they consulted with other students and decided that
Benton was the thief. They carefully marked their money and returned
it to the regular hiding places. When some of the money turned up mis-
sing they confronted Benton and the marked money was found on his
person. The proof against Benton was overwhelming and on March 19, 1799

family had decided to move west to Tennessee. It is probable that they
chose to ignore the period because of the real circumstances which
forced Benton to withdraw from the University under a cloud. Professor
Chambers has engaged in extensive study of Benton's University days and
has discovered many previously unknown bits of information. For these
reasons heavy reliance is placed upon Chamber's studies in examining
this phase of Benton's development.
(four months after his arrival), he was expelled from the University.

Benton's disgrace was not destined to end with his expulsion from Chapel Hill. A few days after his arrival home another of Benton's classmates named Thomas King appeared at the Benton home and accused Thomas of stealing from him. In the presence of his mother he confessed to the theft and admitted that he had made a key to fit King's trunk.

We can only speculate as to why a man with Benton's background would resort to stealing from his friends. It can be noted, however, that though the Benton family was land wealthy, it was money poor. The other students at the University remarked that Benton didn't seem to receive nearly as much money from home as other students. Perhaps he stole to keep from placing a further hardship on his mother who was saddled with raising a large family and keeping her husband's estate together. It is possible that his love for his family prompted him to commit an act which was reprehensible to that family and inconsistent with his heritage.23

While it is impossible to determine the cause of Benton's crime, we can trace the effects of this act upon his subsequent career. From this time forward Benton was hyper-sensitive about the matter of his honor. In a few years he would fight a duel with Andrew Jackson because of remarks Jackson had uttered about him and his brother. In Missouri he would jeopardize a budding political career by killing a young attorney in a duel because he had questioned Benton's representation

23Chambers, "Twigg," 410-16.
of facts in a case at the bar.

Edmund Ruffin says that the rumors about Benton's thefts followed him throughout his public career. Ruffin even theorizes that one of the main reasons Benton never campaigned for the Presidency was his fear of the wider dissemination of the story and its subsequent effect. In any event from this time on Benton lived an exemplary life in terms of personal and political honesty. In his long political career he would alienate many due to his egotism and reliance on sarcasm and ad hominem attacks, but his personal integrity was never again seriously questioned.

Shortly after Thomas' return from Chapel Hill, Mrs. Benton decided she could do better for her family in Tennessee, so she sold most of her North Carolina holdings to pay her debts and in 1801 resettled on family land in the next state to the west.

Thomas Hart Benton spent his first seventeen or eighteen years in North Carolina. It took more years and a wider range of experience to produce his final adult views, but the base of his personality, morals, education, and political views are rooted in the North Carolina years.

From an educated and politically active father and grandfather Benton inherited a political and cultural tradition. Among his fathers books he found his political models. From an ambitious, learned mother he acquired a basic education and a burning desire to learn more. His

24 "Extracts from the Diary of Edmund Ruffin," William and Mary College Quarterly, XXIII (July, 1914), 33.
education favored the classics; this probably accounts for his lifelong tendency to employ almost unlimited classical references in his speeches and writings. His family and education also instilled within him a respect for justice for all, irrespective of station in life. From his mother he also acquired a strict moral code which became a religion in itself. His dismissal from the University of North Carolina provided him with even a stronger desire to make something of himself and to compensate for his failure. Benton always seemed self-conscious about not having a college education. Perhaps his desire to compensate for a lack of formal education accounts for his obsession in presenting "the facts" in his speeches and writings. Tradition in North Carolina tells the story that upon leaving the University Thomas turned his horse at the gate, faced the students in the yard, and proclaimed, "I am leaving this place now, but damn you, you will hear from me again."

The Tennessee Years

Farmer-Student-School Master

The Bentons new home was twenty miles from Nashville, in the wilderness, on the fringe of Indian country. The Bentons made sections of their land available to settlers at a low cost and soon a settlement called "Benton's Town" sprang up. The new settlers provided a market for the wares of the Benton plantation and also helped in warding off Indian attacks. Thomas, his brothers, and the family slaves immediately set out to clear more land for their own use.
The isolation afforded by the remote settlement provided Thomas with ample time to pursue his independent studies. From the standpoint of education, the early years in Tennessee were of tremendous importance. Benton recalled in his "Autobiographical Sketch:"

The scholastic education of her son had ceased but reading continued; and books of solid instruction became his incessant companion. He has been heard to say that in no period of his life, has he ever read so much, nor with as much system and regularity, nor with the same profit and delight. History and geography was what he considered his light reading; national law, the civic law, the common law, and finally the law itself as usually read by law students - constituted his studies...25

In 1804 Benton took a position as schoolmaster and left the plantation for a time. The school was at Duck Creek, almost forty miles from home, and it soon became obvious that Benton had taken the position as much for purposes of his own education as that of his students.

Benton wrote to merchants in Williamson County and asked that they sell him books on credit.

Those books I spoke of when with you, I request you will now send me. They are: Millot's General History; Logan on William Cooke's Voyages; Goldsmith's Natural History; Gay's fables and Sheridan's Dictionary.26

Evidently, Benton decided to become a lawyer and was hard at preparing himself for his examinations for he was formally admitted to the Tennessee Bar on July 15, 1806.27


26T. H. Benton to Hardeman's Duck River, December 10, 1804, copy in Benton papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri.

Attorney and Legal Reformer

Benton managed to get a few small cases early in his practice and rode the circuit. During this time he became acquainted with other neophyte attorneys. Benton relates that the young attorneys entertained themselves by reading history and great speeches:

We belonged to a circle of young lawyers and students at law...It was the custom of all that belonged to it to spend their leisure hours in the delightful occupation of reading. History, poetry, elocution, biography, the ennobling speeches of the living and dead, were our social recreation...28

Benton also indicates that he was particularly struck by Lord Chatham's speeches on the American Colonies and Rousseau's writings on the natural rights of man.29 In light of Benton's background, it is not surprising that he was impressed by these works. Rousseau's argument that all men inherently possess basic rights, liberties, and privileges that no government, individual, or institution can abridge closely parallel Benton's own philosophy. His belief in the rights of the common man, hatred of vested interest, and disgust with any form of tyranny are similar to Rousseau's thinking. Rousseau's teachings, so important in producing the French Revolution, were probably equated by Benton with the principles expressed by his political heroes of the Glorious Revolution.

William Pitt, later Lord Chatham, was a primary spokesman for the cause of the American Colonies in Parliament. Chatham tried to persuade

28T. H. Benton, View, II, 569.

29T. H. Benton notebooks in Benton Documents, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia, (not to be confused with the Missouri Historical Society at St. Louis).
Parliament and the Crown of the importance of the colonies to the British Empire and, at the same time, reminded them that the colonists were British citizens with the same rights as residents of England. Chatham opposed most of Parliament's colonial legislation on the ground that it discriminated against a certain class of citizens. Pitt felt the breakup of the Empire would harm all parties concerned. Even after the American Revolution began he continued to urge close political and economic ties with the former colonies. Again, Benton could sympathize with Chatham because of his egalitarian views. It can also be noted that Chatham was fighting to hold together a "union", the Empire, because of mutual benefits for all citizens derived from that union. At the zenith of his career, Thomas Benton would defend another "union" on similar grounds.

Sometime in 1807 Benton joined a law firm headed by O. B. Hays. Hays was primarily a land claims attorney and his briefs were known for his "erudite and voluminous citations of previous decisions." Evidently, Benton's two years with Hays had a great influence on his methods of preparing a case for argument. From this time on Benton meticulously cited all relevant precedents, historical facts, and testimony in his own briefs, writings, and speeches.

It didn't take attorney Benton long to decide that the entire judicial system of Tennessee was in need of major reforms. Benton felt that the major problem was an insufficient number of courts, which favored the wealthy and courts with overlapping jurisdiction. Between February and July of 1808 Benton wrote a series of articles for the
Impartial Review and Repository, at Nashville, entitled "Sir John Oldcastle's Remarks on the State of Tennessee." Benton wrote these articles under a pen name, but it was common knowledge that he was the author.

In this series of articles Benton proposed a "new system" of justice based on the following four points:

First, a single supreme court to sit alternately at Nashville and Knoxville, with power of supervision and correction over lower courts, but no original jurisdiction.

Second, six judicial circuits with a court of one judge in each to hold three sessions a year...with law and equity administered together in these courts.

Third, the county magistrates to be divested of power over law jurisdiction, and left to manage county affairs.

Fourth, the summary jurisdiction of the magistrates in minor matters to remain, with appeal to the circuit courts.30

Chambers clearly indicated the extreme importance of the Oldcastle Articles to Benton's career and future development:

These articles showed the young writer's self-conscious erudition in their repeated references to authorities like Blackstone, John Randolph, Swift, St. George Tucker, and Hume...(They) marked Thomas Benton's first major appearance as a propagandist and rhetorician. Throughout life he was a prolific 'word man', with a gaudy and expansive style clothing a factual and argumentative content, all of which became as much a part of his character as his driving personality, alert mind, and massive presence.31

30Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 24-30.
31Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 27-30.
State Senator

Benton's Oldcastle Articles won him instant popularity among the rural people in his own area, and within a year of their appearance he was elected to the Tennessee State Senate. Benton took his first political seat on September 18, 1809 at the age of twenty-seven.\(^{32}\)

Probably no one visiting the Senate chamber during 1809 and 1810 would have taken Thomas Benton for a novice member of that body. He immediately and enthusiastically set out to secure passage of his pet projects, particularly the judicial reform measures.

Benton drafted and introduced the Judicial Reform Act and was successful in securing its passage. In old age he still spoke of his first legislative act with pride:

He was the author of the Judicial Reform Act, by which the old system of superior courts was substituted by the circuit system, in which the administration of justice was relieved of a great part of its delay, and of its expense, and much of its inconvenience to parties and witnesses.\(^{33}\)

The Reform Act constitutes the first piece of legislation in which Benton espoused the cause of the common man of the South and West, but his efforts in their behalf did not end with judicial reform. Benton was concerned that settlers were constantly being thrown off land that they had improved simply because they couldn't pay the full price as someone else. The law provided that public lands would be sold to any party, at any time, who could pay the price. The pattern was that poor

\(^{32}\text{Chambers, } \text{Old Bullion, pp. 31-2.}\)

\(^{33}\text{T. H. Benton, } "\text{Sketch," p. iv.}\)
settlers would improve the land by clearing it or by constructing buildings, and as soon as the improvements were completed a land speculator would buy the tract and force the settler to move and start over again. During his term in the Senate Benton supported a pre-emption act which allowed a settler who had improved land to have first chance in purchasing it. The act also provided that if the original settler could not afford to buy the land the state was required to provide a comparable plot of land for his use. The act passed and Benton established himself as a champion of the common people in Tennessee.\(^{34}\)

During the same session, Benton became politically involved with slavery for the first time. He felt that even though slaves were legally parcels of property, they deserved the same legal rights as white when faced with capital charges. Accordingly, Benton became the author of "the humane law, giving to the slaves the same full benefit of jury trial which was the right of the white man under the same accusation." Thus, at the first opportunity, Benton converted his political beliefs into legislative action.

For unknown reasons, Thomas Benton did not seek re-election to the Tennessee Senate, but his activities during this one term are representative of his entire political career. The great issues with which he was to be associated in the United States Senate dealt with equality for the common man, whether the specific issue happened to be a tax on salt, the banking system, or internal improvements. For the entirety of his life

\(^{34}\)Chambers, *Old Bullion*, p. 33.
Benton would believe that any man could attain success if he could acquire land of his own. This belief constantly guided his position on land policy. On the question of slavery, Benton eventually came to regard it as an evil and a threat to the Union and sacrificed his political career in fighting its further spread into the territories.

Military Career

Probably Benton's greatest disappointment in life was his failure to achieve recognition as a great military leader. During his thirty years in the Senate he constantly refused to accept various political appointments from various presidents and even declined a vice presidential nomination. Near death, he revealed that there were only three appointments that he would have accepted if fate had rendered them obtainable:

Three appointments he would have accepted, had the occasions occurred - command of the army by General Jackson, if war took place with Mexico during his administration; the same command by the same president if war had taken place with France in 1836; the command of the army in Mexico, by President Polk, with the rank of Lt. General, if the bill for the rank had not been defeated in the Senate after having passed the House by a general vote.35

Benton apparently had his heart set on a military career as early as 1812. When war broke out with England he wrote to his friend, General Jackson, asking for a position in the army Jackson was supposed to raise:

In the event that a volunteer force should be raised there is no doubt but that you will command the division.

35 T. H. Benton, "Sketch," p. V.
which goes from this state; and as I have always been resolved to quit the gown for the sword, whenever the sword was to be used, I mean, or some terms or other, to be in that corps.

In the same letter young Benton indicated that he hoped to combine his love of writing with his desire for military accomplishment. He said that if his services were accepted he would also:

...Try to make an experiment of my capacity to use the pen as well as the sword, by keeping a journal of the expedition and memorable transactions...I think with Tacitus, that every man should aim at doing something worthy of being written, or at writing something worthy of being done...36

Benton was much in favor with Jackson at this time and through Jackson's influence was given the rank of Lt. Colonel and placed under his command. Benton was made Jackson's aide de camp and he claims to have written several important speeches for Jackson as well as having generally assisted him in correspondence and recruiting.

Before Jackson's forces reached New Orleans they were ordered disbanded by the War Department (New Orleans no longer seemed in danger at this time) and left to get home from Natchez at their own expense. Jackson refused to leave his men stranded and issued personal notes of credit to secure supplies to transport the army back to Tennessee. The Secretary of War refused to pay off Jackson's notes and the General was faced with financial ruin. At this point, Benton intervened, went to Washington, and convinced the Department of the Army to pay the notes.

36T. H. Benton to Andrew Jackson, January 30, 1812, copy in Benton Documents, Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia.
Years later when Benton was a member of the House of Representatives he delivered a eulogy of Jackson and related how he had persuaded the Secretary of War that the government should assume the General's notes. The incident is an indication of Benton's early persuasive power and argumentative ability. In his meeting with the Secretary, Benton reminded him of Jackson's tremendous popularity with both the citizens of Tennessee and the state militia. Benton then strongly suggested that if the administration appeared to be responsible for General Jackson's financial ruin it would lose Tennessee's votes in the next election. Benton clinched his argument by pointing out that unless the administration altered its position it was probable that few Tennessee men would volunteer for military service. The following morning the Secretary informed Benton that the Department of the Army would honor all of Jackson's notes of credit.  

The Jackson Duel

While Benton was pleading Jackson's case in Washington, his brother, Jesse, became involved in a dispute with a close personal friend of General Jackson. A duel resulted in which Jesse was wounded and Jackson served as a second to his opponent. When Thomas Benton returned and found that Jackson had sided against his brother a bitter quarrel erupted which culminated, on September 4 of 1813, in a "shoot

37Thomas Hart Benton, "Address on the Presentation of the Sword of General Andrew Jackson to the Congress of the United States," February 26, 1855, copy in Missouri State Historical Society Library, Columbia.
out" between Jackson and several of his supporters and Thomas and Jesse.
During the encounter Thomas Benton shot General Jackson and very nearly
killed him.

As a result of the Nashville duel, Jackson and Benton became bitter enemies. Jackson refused to allow Benton to participate in any significant military activities, and while Jackson was earning eternal fame at the Battle of New Orleans, Benton was in Washington asking for a new assignment. When Benton returned to Tennessee at the end of the war he found that life was unbearable due to the activities of Jackson and his followers. In the autumn of 1815, Thomas Hart Benton crossed the Mississippi and settled at St. Louis in the Missouri Territory.38

The Missouri Years

Resettlement

Leaving Tennessee and his family must have been a bitter pill for Thomas Benton to swallow. In a period of only two years he had been toppled from the rank of one of Tennessee's most promising young men to the position of a social outcast. As he stood on the east bank of the Mississippi and looked at the little village of St. Louis he was undoubtedly aware that life in such a place would be very different from that he was accustomed to in Nashville. He wrote to a friend after arriving in Missouri that he was "an adventurer ready to begin on a new theatre"

38Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 51-61.
and was determined to lay some foundation of character and fortune."\textsuperscript{39}

Benton's political and legal career in Tennessee had been aided by his friendship with Jackson, and in Missouri fate smiled on him once again. The very first friend Benton made in St. Louis was Charles Gratiot, the most influential man in the territory. Gratiot was "a successful merchant, investor, land merchant, and President of the St. Louis Board of Trustees (the city council). His home was the cultural center of the city, and Gratiot had played host to every important man in the area. Benton met Gratiot while seeking lodging during his first day in St. Louis. Gratiot invited Benton into his own home and the two remained close friends for life. Benton continued to board with Gratiot until January of 1817 when he moved his mother to St. Louis and purchased a home of his own.

Benton wasted no time in setting up a law practice; on October 2, 1815 he was enrolled as a member of the local bar.\textsuperscript{40} Most novice attorneys in the territory were forced to resort to advertising for clients in the local press, but Benton failed to do so. Chambers theorizes that Gratiot's influence provided Benton with so many cases that soliciting was unnecessary. In any case, in the matter of only a year or so, Benton was recognized as one of the leading lawyers in Missouri.

\textsuperscript{39}Thomas Hart Benton to James P. Preston, St. Louis, November 14, 1819, in Benton papers, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis

\textsuperscript{40}William N. Chambers, "Young Man From Tennessee: The First Years of Thomas Hart Benton in Missouri," \textit{Missouri Historical Society Bulletin}, IV (July, 1948), 201-204.
Soon after commencing legal practice Benton met Edward Hempstead, a sophisticated New England native, attorney, community leader, and former Territorial delegate. Benton was greatly impressed with Hempstead's courtroom style. Hempstead was noted for a "firey, sharp, sarcastic, barking style of courtroom oratory which Benton imitated." This same style was characteristic of Benton's oratory for the remainder of his speaking career. Hempstead came to be Benton's closest friend; when he was killed in an accident in 1818 Benton stayed with the body until burial and was depressed for weeks.

Timothy Flint, a noted preacher and friend of Benton's has provided us with a description of Benton's courtroom oratory during his early years in Missouri:

Benton's courtroom oratory is acute, labored, florid rather sophomorical to use our word, but he is a man of strong sense and industry...There flashes strange fire from his eye, and all that he does smells of the lamp. From these descriptions we see a speaker not substantially different from the orator he would be in later life. It will be noted in subsequent chapters that Benton's concept of speaking did not change radically as he became older; later critics would note the same strengths and weaknesses.

The bulk of Benton's legal practice consisted of litigating land
disputes. It is not surprising to find that Benton arrayed himself on the side of small landholders who were trying to establish the legality of claims granted by the Spanish. At the time, land speculators were attempting to void the Spanish claims and establish the validity of more recent claims of their own. Benton was successful in winning several precedent cases and soon had all the legal business he could conduct.44

Benton was fascinated by the backwoodsmen, farmers, trappers, and miners in Missouri. He made it a point to understand them and their problems. Most of Benton's spare time was spent in talking with such people. He gained a knowledge of the frontier and sincerely believed that its settlement would provide the "good life" for all who would seek it. He never ceased to champion the cause of those who chose to migrate west.45

The Lucas Duel

In 1817 a tragic event took place which was destined to plague Benton's conscience, as well as his political career, for the remainder of his life. The event is demonstrative of Benton's ego and his sensitivity regarding any question of his honor.

Judge John B. C. Lucas was a prominent member of the St. Louis bar and was heavily engaged in land dealings. Due to Benton's land

44Chambers, "Young Man," 205-8.

policy, which favored small landholders, he was intensely disliked by the judge. In 1817, Benton and Judge Lucas' twenty-one year old son, Charles, were on opposing sides in a legal case. Young Lucas questioned Benton's honesty in presenting certain evidence and a bitter verbal exchange took place in the courtroom. The ill feeling between Benton and Lucas smoldered for several weeks, and finally, at a public meeting, Benton referred to Charles Lucas as a "little puppy." In response, young Lucas challenged Benton to a duel.

The following day Benton and Lucas were engaged on "the field of honor." In the first exchange of fire, Benton shot Lucas through the throat and nearly killed him. Benton immediately demanded another meeting as soon as Lucas was able. Lucas insisted that his honor had been satisfied. After pondering the matter for several days Benton withdrew his demand for a second meeting.

Judge John Lucas' honor was not satisfied. He charged Benton with being a coward and claimed he was afraid to fight his son again. After days of agitation from his father, Charles Lucas issued another challenge to Benton. The entire city was involved with one side or the other and Benton had little choice but to accept. The following morning, Thomas Hart Benton put a bullet through Charles Lucas' heart.46

Benton suffered great mental anguish as a result of killing Lucas and refused to speak of the event for the remainder of his life. In the

future he was to support anti-dueling legislation and was instrumental in talking several other men out of engaging in duels.47

Judge Lucas' friends owned the Missouri Gazette, and the paper bitterly attacked Benton for engaging in the duel with Lucas. He was labeled as an assassin and portrayed as a skilled duelist who had murdered an inexperienced boy. Feelings ran so high that Benton chose to leave St. Louis for several weeks.48 As a result of the duel Benton lost the support of many influential political backers.

Judge Lucas never forgave Benton and the Lucas group formed the core of opposition to Benton's nomination to the Senate in 1820. The following excerpt from the Missouri Gazette is representative of the attacks waged against Benton immediately before the election.

Benton is a man crimsoned with the blood of one of our most promising young citizens, under circumstances of cold and deliberate calculation, whose only fault was to be in the way of his ambitious designs.49

Newspaper Editor

From 1818 until his election to the Senate in 1820, Benton was the editor of The St. Louis Enquirer, the second oldest newspaper west of the Mississippi. Benton recognized the potential consequence of the Lucas affair and it is generally believed that his decision to assume the editorship of the Enquirer resulted in part from his need to offset


49 St. Louis Missouri Gazette, July 12, 1820.
the adverse publicity resulting from the duel. Benton remained quiet in regard to the duel itself and concentrated on building his image on substantive issues. The newspaper in affording Benton an opportunity to make his views known to a large number of people in the territory, was of tremendous value in securing his election to the Senate.50

Benton recognized the power of the press in forming public opinion and compared newspapers to the Roman Forum in impact and influence. In an early editorial he expressed his view of the press:

...Newspapers are in America what the Forum was in Greece and Rome, with the advantage of speaking to a nation instead of an assembly...They are the most powerful lever that can be applied to the human mind...51

Benton never lost faith in the Influence of the press. During his tenure in the Senate he continued to write volumes of material for newspapers all over the country, and when he found himself in the minority on questions of importance he attempted to rally popular support for his cause through the press. Benton had most of his important speeches printed and distributed them in Missouri and elsewhere.

Benton's newspaper experience exercised a marked influence on his speaking style. He came to have little respect for speakers who spoke to move only those who actually heard a speech. Benton believed that such rhetoric relied too much on emotion and would have only a

50Chambers, "Editor," 335-6.

51Thomas Hart Benton, Selections of Editorials from the St. Louis Enquirer (St. Louis, 1844) (Copy in Missouri Historical Society Library, St. Louis).
short term effect and would at best influence only a small number of hearers. He believed that speeches should be delivered to be written down and published this type of speaker would have the real influence and would be remembered by posterity. Benton clearly explains this rhetorical concept in his criticism of William Pinkney's oratory included in Thirty Years' View:

He was considered in his day the first of American orators, but will hardly keep that place with posterity, because he spoke more to the hearer than to the reader—to the present rather than the absent—and avoided the careful publication of his own speeches...He courted his imagination too much, and laid too much stress upon action and delivery—so potent upon the small circle of actual hearers, but so lost upon the national audience which the press now gives to a great speaker.

Benton claimed that Pinkney's greatest speech was one in support of the Missouri Compromise, but he subjects it to the same criticism:

...it was only a magnificent exhibition, as Mr. Pinkney knew, and could not sustain in the reading the plaudits it received in delivery; and therefore, he avoided its publication.52

Therefore, Benton came to practice a rhetoric that made little distinction between oral and written presentation. The cause of this practice undoubtedly stems from his concept of the power of the press. This practice probably accounts for many of the criticisms of Benton's oral presentations. Benton speeches seldom gathered large gallery audiences, but his printed speeches were in demand nationwide.

During his tenure as editor of the Enquirer, Benton fully aired

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52T. H. Benton, View, 1, 19-20.
and debated the issues he considered to be of greatest importance; land policy, the fur trade, expansion of the territory of the United States, banking slavery, and Missouri statehood. To Benton, all these great issues were inter-related. He believed that it was the destiny of the United States to eventually encompass all of the Mississippi Valley, Texas, and Oregon. Benton saw a pattern in the way in which the new areas would be settled and American supremacy established. The fur traders would open up and map the wilderness, settlers would follow the trappers, colonization would take place rapidly, and the number of United States citizens would swell to the point that other nations would be forced to give up their claims to the areas, and finally the newly settled areas would attain statehood. Benton predicted that such settlement and growth would strengthen the economy of the United States and eventually establish her as the most powerful nation in the world.

Benton also viewed westward expansion as a kind of "cure all" for the social and economic problems of the nation. He believed that the United States would become a "yeomans Arcadia" on the Jeffersonian model, where any man, by hard work, could raise himself socially and economically and forge his own destiny. In the end, he saw the expansion of the yeoman class widening the base of popular democracy and producing a political system which would extend the blessings of democracy to all. Benton, in his frontier thesis, would explain the

significance of the frontier in a strikingly similar manner.\textsuperscript{54}

The policy Benton suggested to implement his theory was basically simple; the government should finance further exploration of the West, encourage settlement of the territories with a cheap land policy, and set aside more money for internal improvements.

While Benton was editor of the \textit{Enquirer}, he became a minor stockholder in a St. Louis bank. The bank overextended itself by issuing notes worth far more than the specie it held in reserve. As a result the bank failed and Benton lost his investment. He ran a series of editorials in the \textit{Enquirer} denouncing worthless paper money and recommended specie as the only sound base for an economic system.\textsuperscript{55} Benton stuck to a hard money policy for the rest of his public career. In a few years his economic policies in the United States Senate would earn him the nickname, "Old Bullion."

By 1819 the drive for Missouri statehood was underway. The question brought the slavery issue back into national policies for the first time since the ratification of the Federal Constitution. A fight began when an amendment was attached to the statehood bill which prohibited slave migration into the state and freed all resident slaves when they reached age twenty-five. Benton immediately launched into a series of editorials attacking the restrictionists and defended the


\textsuperscript{55}Chambers, "Editor," 336-40.
right of Missourians to hold slaves. Benton's position was consistent with the background of a man born into a large slaveholding family. He, himself had owned slaves all of his adult life. In one of these editorials Benton wrote, "No process of reasoning can make it right that the people of this territory should be forced to the surrender of their slaves."

During Benton's first two terms in the Senate he continued to adhere to the position that no agency of government had the power to regulate the spread of slavery into the territories. However, Benton had completely reversed himself on this question by 1844. He finally came to accept the position that slavery was, in itself, an evil, a serious threat to the Union, and that its movement into the territories was subject to Congressional regulation. Benton also came to believe that a massive transplantation of the economic system of the South in the territories would threaten his dream of a national of small private landholders.

As a result of the activities of Benton and other important "anti-restrictionists" the amendment excluding slavery from Missouri was defeated. The instrument of policy finally agreed upon was the Missouri Compromise which admitted Missouri to the Union as a slave state and Maine as a free state. The Compromise also permanently pro-

56St. Louis Enquirer, April 7, 1819.

57Chambers, "Editor," 343.
hibited slavery in the western territories north of latitude $36^\circ 30'$.\textsuperscript{58}

United States Senator

When the question of Missouri's admission to the Union was apparently settled by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the political forces of the state set into motion the machinery to select men to fill the offices that statehood would create. In spite of the attacks resulting from the Lucas duel, Thomas Benton became a senatorial candidate.

Benton's support came primarily from western delegates to the General Assembly who favored his land policy, anti-restrictionists whose support Benton had won through his slavery position, and a group of professional men from St. Louis.

The first Missouri General Assembly convened on September 18, 1820 in the Missouri Hotel in St. Louis. One of the first matters taken up was the election of the two new United States Senators. There were three prime candidates for the Senate seats: Benton, Judge John B. C. Lucas, and the popular David Barton. Barton was assured of election from the beginning and the real contest for the remaining seat was between Lucas and Benton. Both sides went into delaying maneuvers in an attempt to buy more time to rally support to their side. Almost three weeks of parliamentary sparring took place before a vote could be taken.

Apparently the only factor holding the Lucas group together was

a common hatred of Benton. In the end the anti-Benton forces were unable to reach agreement on a common candidate to oppose Benton. As a consequence three anti-Benton candidates entered the race: Lucas, Henry Elliot, and John R. Jones.

On October 2, 1820 the vote for the two Senators was finally taken, twenty seven votes being required for election. As expected, David Barton won a seat by an easy margin, securing thirty four ballots. Thomas Hart Benton was elected with twenty seven votes, or the exact number required for appointment. The anti-Benton camp split their votes; Lucas received sixteen, Elliot ten, and Jones nine. If Benton's enemies had been able to unite behind a common candidate, then, Benton's political career in Missouri might have ended before it even started.59

In any case Benton had won a United States Senate seat, and in many ways his election was remarkable. Benton's election came five years to the day from the date he was admitted to the Missouri Bar; he was only thirty eight years old, and during his five years in his adopted state he had made as many enemies as friends.

Benton set off for Washington only one week after his election; on the way he stopped off at Lexington, Virginia; he had a very special reason for this detour. During a previous visit to family friends in Lexington in 1815, Thomas had met Elizabeth McDowell, the daughter of Colonel James McDowell who was related to the influential Preston family. Benton was impressed with Elizabeth's "gracious manner, in-

59Monas N. Squires, "A New View of the Election of Barton and Benton to the United States Senate in 1820, "Missouri Historical Review, XXVI (October, 1932), 29-32.
teI lect, energy, and devotion to the Presbyterian Old School." Only a few days after their first meeting Thomas proposed marriage and Elizabeth refused. The couple continued to correspond for five years. In 1820 Senator-elect Benton proposed again; this time Elizabeth accepted. In a span of a little over one week Benton won the political career he had so long sought and the hand of the woman he loved.60

The United States Congress convened on December 13, 1820, but Benton and Barton were denied their seats because the Congress had not formally accepted Missouri into the Union. The two new Senators were permitted to attend sessions and receive pay, but were denied the right to vote. Benton did not gain full privileges until December of 1821.

Senator Thomas Hart Benton: Spokesman for the West, 1821-1844

For twenty-three years, between 1821 and 1844, Thomas Benton enjoyed a position of power and popularity that few politicians have attained. In Missouri, Benton's party was in firm control, and he had personal control of the party. Benton's power and personal popularity were so great that it was unnecessary for him to seriously campaign for re-election until 1844. In the Senate, much of the important legislation he supported was passed. The personalities of Webster, 60Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 58, 101-2. (A more complete account of the courtship would be possible if Benton's personal letters had not been destroyed by a fire in his home in 1855.)
Clay and Calhoun earned them a greater measure of popularity in the Senate, but in terms of legislative accomplishment, Benton was their equal. John F. Kennedy graphically characterized Benton's position during the period:

From 1821 to 1844 he reigned supreme as kingpin of Missouri politics, her first Senator, her most beloved idol...It meant political death to any man to even whisper a breath against (him)...Benton did not even need to ask to be re-elected during that charmed period...Democratic candidates for the Missouri Legislature were required to pledge to vote for his re-election under pain of humiliating defeat in their own campaigns....Benton achieved a prominence which no other Senator from a new state could claim, and he championed the West with a boundless energy no opposing candidate could match.61

Benton's political and rhetorical education did not end with his entry into the Senate. The novice legislator was greatly impressed by his first session of Congress, and was determined to learn from his illustrious colleagues. He commented that he "felt he was among masters whose pupil he must long remain before he could hope to become a teacher."62

**Political Philosophy**

Characteristically, Benton wasted little time in becoming actively engaged in the activities of the Senate. Much of Benton's early Senatorial efforts concerned matters of a local nature which

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directly related to Missouri interests. One of Benton's earliest acts was the introduction of legislation to reform governmental policies regulating the sale and handling of public land and natural resources. Benton claimed that such reform had been one of his major goals since his settlement in Missouri:

When I came to the then territory of Missouri in 1815, and saw land exposed to sale to the highest bidder, and lead mines and salt springs reserved from sale, and rented out for the profit of the federal treasury, I felt repugnance to the whole system, and determined to make war upon it whenever I should have the power.63

The question of the price of public lands was to occupy a large part of Benton's time and energy during his years in the Senate. A survey of the Annals of Congress and the Register of Debates indicates that between 1822-1827 Benton gave no fewer than ten major speeches urging substantial reductions in the price of public lands. Benton was aiming at a land price so low that any man who wanted land could afford it. The price of land would be determined by a graduated scale which was based on ability to pay and the intended use of the land. Benton's public land reform went down to overwhelming defeat in 1827, but Benton re-introduced similar legislation during each of his remaining terms in the Senate, and each time they were voted down either in the Senate or House. Benton did not live to see the complete implementation of his land policy, but the Graduation Act of 1854 and the Homestead Act of 1862 enacted into law most of what he had envisioned.64

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63T. H. Benton, View, 1, 102.

64Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 114, 120, 134-6, 193, 196, 226-7.
Benton's crusade for land reform represents an important phase in his development as a statesman and rhetorician. Chambers argues that his early efforts in the 1820's "developed his skill at applying a lever to public opinion." According to John Quincy Adams, Benton's speeches and use of the press in promulgating his land policy had stimulated all the people of the West to madness.  

Early in his first term, Benton launched a campaign against the tax on salt and the treatment of Indians in the territories. He also introduced legislation to abolish the electoral college, construct roads to the Mexican provinces, improve all forms of transportation, reduce tariffs, and occupy the Oregon country. Benton's speeches on these issues alone would fill volumes. The latter group of legislative acts indicates that the new Senator quickly involved himself with the great national issues of the period.

From 1828 until 1837 Benton was the Senatorial leader in the attack upon the Bank of the United States. In 1823, Benton made peace with Andrew Jackson as a result of serving on a committee headed by the General. Benton's and Jackson's political views were so decidedly similar that it was inevitable that they would be drawn together in the Senate. By 1828 the two were close friends and Benton gave his full support to Jackson in the Presidential election of 1828. As Jackson's

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65 Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 135.

political spokesman in the Senate, Benton led the administration's attack on the Bank.

As early as 1828, Benton took action directed toward reduction of the Bank's power. In a speech in March he proposed a reduction of federal deposits in the Bank, and secured passage of his measures. In December Benton introduced legislation requiring the Bank to pay interest on the federal money it held in deposits. The third phase of the initial attack came in January of 1829. This time Benton argued that the power of the Treasurer of the United States to remove deposits also gave him the power to make terms for allowing deposits to remain. The last two measures did not secure passage.

In his first annual message to Congress in 1829, Jackson declared his opposition to the re-charter of the Bank when it became subject to Congressional renewal in 1836. Even though the charter would not expire until 1836, the President wanted Congressional action well in advance of that date.

In early 1831 legislation to re-charter the Bank was introduced in both houses of Congress. In a series of speeches during 1831-1832, Benton charged that the Bank was unconstitutional, was an institution of sectional privilege controlled by New England financial interests, and interfered with the rights of the states to control their own internal affairs. In the Senate Bank fight, Benton's primary opponents were Webster and Clay. In June of 1832 both houses voted to re-charter the Bank; on July 10 President Jackson vetoed the re-charter bill.
Jackson's veto prompted a bitter debate which raged, off and on, in the Senate for four years. Again, Benton was the primary defender of the administration and in the course of the Bank debate introduced additional economic reforms. Benton advocated a new ratio between gold and silver of sixteen to one and a system of currency fully backed by metallic reserves and was successful in securing passage of his measures in both the Senate and House.

Benton could not, however, budge the Senate on the question of the Bank's re-charter. Both the House and Senate again passed the re-charter bill over the Presidential veto. When Jackson learned that his veto had been overridden, he ordered the Secretary of the Treasury to remove all federal deposits from the Bank. Thus, in a legally questionable manner, Jackson was successful in a de facto destruction of the Bank. The majority in the Senate was infuriated by Jackson's action and on March 28, 1834 passed a resolution charging Jackson with having violated the Constitution. The fate of the Bank was sealed, but the censure of the President produced a new Senatorial debate.

On February 18, 1835 Benton introduced a motion to expunge from the Journal of the Senate the resolution censuring President Jackson, and the ensuing debate lasted for nearly two years. Benton's measure was bitterly opposed by Webster, Clay and Calhoun, but on January 12, 1837 the expunging resolution passed the Senate.67

67The above description of Benton's connection with the Bank issue is based upon the detailed account provided in Lewis, "Persuasive Techniques", pp. 91-134.
Benton was one of the first members of Congress to urge the construction of a transcontinental railroad. As early as the 1840's he was arguing that such an undertaking was not only practical but essential. At the time Benton first suggested a transcontinental railroad the Rocky Mountains were considered an insuperable barrier to intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific regions, and the entire area was designated on maps as "the great American Desert." Benton suggested a course that the railroad should follow which was in opposition to the expert opinion of engineers and surveyors. He said that the only engineer who did not lie was the buffalo, and that the buffalo proved that the better climate was northward by coming south to graze in the summer and returning northward in winter. Although his views were rejected at the time Benton's route proved itself to be by far the most desirable when the railroad was finally constructed in the 1860's.68

The legislative measure which Benton expoused during his first four terms in the Senate are a clear manifestation of the political philosophy which was already largely developed before he came to the Senate. His fight for cheap, graduated land prices is a reflection of his belief that any man could raise himself out of poverty and deprivation if he could own his own land. The attack on the salt tax and high tariffs reflects his general opposition to any form of legis-

lotion which discriminated against a particular group of people. To Benton the high tariff was of benefit only to the New England manufacturing class, and the salt tax imposed an economic burden falling primarily on the producers of raw salt. Benton favored internal improvements because they would aid in the settlement of the territories and the expansion of the commerce of the West. His urging of the immediate settlement of Oregon is again a reflection of his desire for cheap land and territorial expansion. Benton's land, economic and expansionist policies were all tied together and directed toward the end of a self-sufficient "agrarian Arcadia."

Benton's speeches indicate that his attack on the Bank of the United States originated in the belief that such a financial monopoly possessed the potential to strangle popular democracy through economic control. He also felt that the Bank discriminated against the agriculture interests of the West and in favor of the industrial complex of the East. By issuing bank notes in excess of actual specie, Benton saw the Bank impairing what he considered the only sound monetary system—one based on a balance of notes and specie. Finally, he viewed the Bank as a violation of the Constitutional guarantee of the right of the states to exercise all power not specifically delegated to the federal government.

Benton's suggestion that the electoral college be abolished is clearly in line with the Jacksonian belief in popular democracy, and his concern with the treatment of Indians reflects the humanitarianism first
evidenced in the Senate of Tennessee.

**Senatorial Mentors**

Meigs claims there is little question that the individual who exercised the greatest influence upon Benton's politics during his early years in the Senate was Nathaniel Macon of North Carolina. Chambers concurs in this opinion saying, "as a prophet of Arcadia, Macon had left (Benton) a larger legacy - the dream of an agrarian democratic commonwealth, a dream for which Benton fought valiantly even as the aged Macon died."69 In his Thirty Years' View Benton offers his personal assessment of Macon's influence:

Mr. Macon was the real Cincinnatus of America, the pride and ornament of my native state, my hereditary friend through four generations, my mentor in the first seven years of my senatorial career, and the last seven years of his senatorial life; and a feeling of gratitude and filial affection mingles itself with this discharge of historical duty to his memory.

The views of Benton and Macon were quite similar on the important questions of land policy, taxation, and tariffs. Benton credits Macon's influence in regard to these issues. His assessment of Macon's role in opposing the salt tax is representative:

The venerable Mr. Macon considered a salt tax in a sacrilegious point of view--as breaking a sacred law--and fought against ours as long as his public life lasted; and I, his disciple, not disesteemed by him, commenced fighting by his side against the odious imposition; and have continued it since his death, and shall continue

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69See Meigs, Life, pp. 139-40, and Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 228-9.
it until the tax ceases, or my political life terminates.

Benton's speeches on the Bank question directly reflect Macon's position on money and banking. Benton recalled in his View:

He (Macon) was against paper money and the paper system, and was accustomed to present the strong argument against both in the simple phrase, that this was a hard-money government, made by hard-money men, who had seen the evil of paper-money, and meant to save their posterity from it. 70

Many of his contemporaries thought John Randolph, of Roanoke, to be insane. Randolph's behavior in the Senate from time to time had been both ludicrous and extreme, but in other instances he demonstrated intelligence and insight. Benton recognized Randolph's peculiarities but attributed them to poor health and eventually came to be one of his closest friends. Benton claims in the View that Randolph was a brilliant political theoritician and was the person he most enjoyed engaging in conversation. It is probable that Benton's initial respect for Randolph came from his long association with Thomas Jefferson. Benton always classified himself as a "member of the political school of thought founded by Jefferson." Randolph shared Jefferson's views and was a key advisor to him during his presidency. Benton points to Randolph's association with Jefferson in assessing his political impact:

He was one of those whom that eminent statesman (Jefferson) habitually consulted during the period of their friendship, and to whom he carefully communicated his plans before they were given to the public. 71

70 T. H. Benton, View, 1, 115-17, 154.
71 T. H. Benton, View, 1, 473-4.
Of the younger members of the Senate, Benton was most impressed with Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina. Benton wrote:

Of all the senators he seemed the nearest to me—both young in the Senate, entering it nearly together; both in adjoining states; not wide apart in age, a similarity of political principle; and, I may add, some conformity of tastes and habits. Of all the young generation of statesmen coming on, I considered him the safest and best entitled to a future eminent lead.72

Benton also developed a strong respect for William H. Crawford of Georgia. Crawford was a quiet, unassuming man who Benton felt was really greater than he was credited with being:

He was among the few men of fame that I have seen, that aggrandized on the approach—that having the reputation of a great man, became greater, as he was more closely examined.73

Undoubtedly, other members of Congress and the Washington circle also influenced Benton's political development, but the men here examined appear, from his own assessments, to have been most significant in that respect.

We should not be surprised to find that those Senators who most influenced Benton came from the South and shared his views on land policy, taxes, tariffs, and internal improvements. The proper relationship between Benton and these political figures is probably more related to reinforcement of views than one of changing views.

72T. H. Benton, View, II, 188.
73T. H. Benton, View, II, 562.


Senatorial Rhetoric

Prior to coming to the Senate in 1820, Benton's speaking opportunities had been limited to one term in the Tennessee Senate and courtroom pleading. It has already been noted that he had been greatly influenced by his experience in editing the St. Louis Enquirer. Benton began giving major speeches as soon as he was admitted to the Senate and was no doubt influenced by the rhetoric of his fellow Senators. Scattered throughout Thirty Years' View are isolated comments about speeches, speakers, and speaking which provide insight into influences upon Benton's rhetoric and his concept of deliberative speaking.

One of Benton's early speeches in the Senate concerned the appropriation of funds for improving the navigation of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Benton became quite angry and emotional in regard to the comments of opponents of the bill. Benton repiled in a manner that evidently offended several members. After the speech Senator Rufus King of New York offered criticism that Benton recalled years later:

When (the speech) was over, Mr. King of New York, came and sat down in a chair by me, and took hold of my hand and said that he would speak to me as a father—that I had great powers, and that he felt a sincere pleasure in seeing me advance and rise in the world, and that he would take the liberty of warning me against an effect of my temperament when heated by opposition; that under these circumstances I took an authoritative manner and a look and tone of defiance, which sat ill upon the other members; and advised me to moderate my manner.

In a few days Benton spoke again on the same issue. According to Benton, King's comments caused him to modify this and subsequent speeches:
I suppressed that speech, through compliment to him, and have studied moderation and forebearance ever since.\textsuperscript{74}

Benton's future speeches indicate that he did \textit{not} profit from King's advice. Lewis clearly demonstrates that Benton alienated almost all of his opponents in the Bank debates, and his early slavery speeches are characterized by a decided lack of "moderation and forebearance." In several instances Benton compliments other speakers for their moderation, but he seems not to have viewed this quality as a model for himself.\textsuperscript{75}

In terms of the actual practice of speaking Benton seems to have been most impressed by Webster, Clay and Calhoun. Benton's writings indicate that he deeply respected Webster, character and oratory even though they were generally at odds politically. The following comment from Benton's pen indicates the degree of this respect:

He was the colossal figure on the political stage during that eventful time; and his labors, splendid in their day, survive for the benefit of distant posterity.

Benton clearly considered Webster the greatest orator in the Senate; in his review of the Webster-Hayne debate he describes his oratorical powers in the following manner:

To cope with Webster, was a distinction, not to be crushed by him was almost a victory: to rival him in copious and graceful elocution, was to establish an equality at a point which strikes the masses. But, equal argument, that was impossible!

\textsuperscript{74}T. H. Benton, \textit{View}, I, 58.

\textsuperscript{75}Lewis, "Persuasive Techniques," pp. 332-33.
In the *Thirty Years' View*, Benton includes his own assessment of "great men who have since passed on." In his portrait of William Wirt he stops in the middle of his account and inserts a section of the Senate eulogy of Wirt given by Webster saying, "But why use this feeble pen, when the voice of Webster is at hand?"

The aspect of Webster's speaking which struck Benton with the greatest force was his argument and supporting material, his stress on content, and avoidance of personality.76

Benton admitted that he did not like Calhoun but said he "felt admiration for his high intellectual endowments and respect for the integrity and purity of his private life." Benton assesses Clay in the following terms:

He had great talents, but not equal to some whom he led. He had eloquence—superior in popular effect, but not equal in high oratory to that of some others. But his temperament in fervid, his will strong, and his courage daring; and these qualities, added to his talents, gave him the lead and supremacy in his party—where he was always dominant, but twice set aside by the politicians.

In his discussion of the Senate debate on the economic policies of the Van Buren Administration Benton contrasts the differences in the speaking styles of Calhoun and Clay:

It (the debate) abounded with exemplifications of all the different sorts of oratory of which each was master: on one side—(Clay) declamation, Impassioned eloquence, vehement invective, taunting sarcasm; on the other (Calhoun)—close reasoning, chaste narrative, clear statement, keen retort.

76 The above descriptions of Webster are taken from *Thirty Years' View*, Vol. I, 333-4, 97, and Vol. II, 188.
Benton goes on to characterize Clay as depending primarily on wit, sarcasm, and emotional appeal. Calhoun, on the other hand relied on proof and sound reasoning. Benton concedes that Clay is superior in delivery, but clearly prefers Calhoun's approach.

Mr. Clay opened the debate in a prepared speech, commencing in the style which the rhetoricians call *ex abrupts*—being the style of opening which the occasion required—that of arousing and alarming the passions.

Invective mingled with sarcasm, was one of the phases of his oratory. He was supreme at *philippic* (taken in the sense of Demosthenes and Cicero), where the political attack on a public man's measure was to be enforced and heightened by a personal attack on his conduct. He owed much of his fascinating power over his hearers to the exercise of his talent—always so captivating in a popular assembly, and in the galleries of the Senate; not so much in the Senate itself...

Manner, and all that is comprehended under the head of delivery, is a different attribute; and there Mr. Clay had an advantage, which is lost in transferring the speech to paper. Some of Mr. Calhoun's characteristics of manners may be seen in these speeches. He eschewed the studied exordiums and perorations, once so much in vogue, and which the rhetoricians' rules teach how to make...(Calhoun) had a high example both in oratory and in the analogies of the occasion, before him; and well had he looked into that example. I happened to know that in this time he refreshed his reading of the Oration on the Crown; and, as the delivery of the speech showed, not without profit.77

**Deliberative Rhetoric**

Benton's own rhetorical practices will be subjected to a detailed examination in subsequent chapters, but it is essential at this juncture

to summarize his major rhetorical beliefs in order to trace previous influences and to provide a foundation for the comprehending of his slavery speeches. A survey of Benton's comments on the speeches included in his works indicates three basic premises which constitute his overview of congressional rhetoric.

(I) **Congressmen should produce speeches that will be effective in print.**

There can be no doubt that Benton felt this to be an overriding consideration. This concept stems from his belief that the press was "the most powerful lever that can be applied to the human mind." Benton was often willing to sacrifice effect in terms of the immediate audience in order to influence the large audience which the press provided. In his view Benton criticized many of the prominent speakers of the day for producing speeches directed toward show and immediate effect and not publication. His criticism of William Pinkney most clearly expresses this bias:

> He was considered in his day the first of American orators, but will hardly keep that place with posterity, because he spoke more to the hearer than to the reader— to the present than to the absent—and avoided the careful publication of his speeches. He labored them hard, but it was for the effect of their delivery, and the triumph of present victory. He loved the admiration of the crowded gallery—the trumpet-tongued fame which went forth from the forum—the victory which crowned the effort; ...His forte as a speaker lay in his judgement, his logic, his power of argument; but, like many other men of acknowledged pre-eminence in some great gift of nature, and who are still ambitious of some inferior gift, he courted his imagination too much, and laid too much stress upon action and delivery—so potent upon the small circle of actual hearers, but so lost upon the national
audience which the press now gives to a great speaker. In other respects Mr. Pinkney was truly a great orator, rich in his material and strong in his argument—clear, natural and regular in the exposition of his subject, comprehensive in his views, and chaste in his diction. His speeches both senatorial and forensic, were fully studied and laboriously prepared—all the argumentative parts carefully digested under appropriate heads, and the showy passages often fully written out and committed to memory.78

Benton recognizes the value of effective delivery, but he clearly views it as secondary to content and effective literary style. Benton practiced what he preached and all of his important speeches were either carried in the press or printed and distributed at his expense. In referring to his speeches on the expunging resolution Benton says:

We contended strenuously in both Houses; and as courageously in the Senate against a fixed majority as if we had some chance of success; but our exertions were not for the Senate, but for the people—not to change senatorial votes, but to rouse the masses throughout the land.

Benton indicates that he pursued the same strategy in fighting the Whig majority in the 1840's:

We kept their measures upon the anvil, and hammered them continually: we impaled them against the wall, and stabbed them incessantly. The Globe newspaper was a powerful ally (Messrs. Blair and Rives); setting off all we did to the best advantage in strong editorials—and carrying out our speeches, fresh and hot, to the people; and we felt victorious in the midst of unbroken defeats.79

(2) **Congressmen should function as businessmen and their speeches be businesslike.**

Benton is not clear in describing what he means by a "business
oriented speaker", but evidently he is referring to a man that refuses
to let his preparation and delivery of speeches interfere with, or take
time from, his execution of legislative business. Benton says the "business member is; "Intelligent, well informed, attentive, upright,
an effective speaker without pretending to oratory, well read with his reading subordinate to common sense and practical views." In characterizing the effective members of the Senate he says they are,

...men of judgement and few words - are extremely valued and respected in (the Senate) and have great weight in the conduct of business. They are in fact the businessmen, often more practical and efficient than the great orators.

Here Benton is equating oratory with delivery and ornament, perceiving these traits as detracting from message content. A second assumption is that great orators evidently take time away from their business activities in preparing their speeches. Benton also indicates a preference for employing, as support, the testimony of statesmen of the past who fit his concept of a business legislator:

In the speech I delivered I quoted copiously from British speakers--not the brilliant rhetoricians, but the practical, sensible, upright business men to whom countries are usually indebted for all beneficial legislation: the Sir Henry Parnells, the Mr. Joseph Humes, the Mr. Edward Ellices, the Sir William Pulteneys; and men of that class, legislating for the practical concerns of life, and merging the orator in the man of business.80

80For Benton's discussion of the "business legislator" see View, 1, 94, 187-8, 476.
Throughout the *Thirty Years' View*, Benton refers to those he labels as effective legislators as businessmen.

(3) **He respected the ability of different types of speakers.**

Benton rarely spoke extemporaneously except in replying to a prepared speech he had already presented (this was especially true during the period in question). Since Benton perceived the effective speaker as one who spoke to and for the press, he was reluctant to speak without at least some time for preparation. However, Benton had great respect for what he termed the debaters, in Congress, the speakers who won their fame by extemporaneous efforts. His comments on Senators Giles and Forsythe are indicative of Benton's rhetorical preferences and show his respect for the debaters in Congress:

He (Giles had that kind of speaking talent which is most effective in legislative bodies, and which is so different from set speaking. He was a debater; and was considered by Mr. Randolph to be, in our House of Representatives, what Charles Fox was admitted to be in the British House of Commons: the most accomplished debater which his country had ever seen...Mr. Giles neither read nor studied, but talked incessantly with able men, rather than debating with them all the while; and drew from this source of information, and from the ready powers of his subject with the fulness which the occasion required, the quickness which confounds an adversary, and the effect which a lick in time always produces.

Mr. Forsythe was a fine specimen of that kind of speaking which constitutes a debater, and which, in fact, is the effective speaking in legislative assemblies. He combined the requisites for keen debate—a ready, copious, and easy elocution; ample knowledge of the subject; argument and wit; great power to point a sarcasm, and to sting courteously; perfect self-possession, and a quickness and clearness of perception to take advantage of every misstep
of his adversary.\textsuperscript{81}

Thomas Hart Benton was a seasoned observer as well as a frequent practitioner of Senatorial speechmaking. Published speeches were the vehicle he used for influencing the millions of Americans he never met.

\textsuperscript{81}For assessments of Giles and Forsythe see \textit{View}, Vol. I, 683 and Vol. II, 659.
In 1787 the Congress created by the Articles of Confederation passed the Northwest Ordinance. This act represents the first attempt of the new government to legislate on the question of slavery. The Northwest Ordinance provided a system of government for the territories and established procedures whereby a territory might eventually attain statehood. The Ordinance originally pertained to the area west of the existing states, north of the Ohio River, and east of the Mississippi. The most important provision of the Ordinance excluded slavery in the Northwest Territory.

The Federal territories had been created when Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina ceded their western lands to the central government. The effect of the Northwest Ordinance was to forever ban slavery in the area north of the Ohio and to sustain it south of the River. Therefore, the extension of slavery was prohibited in much of the area ceded by Virginia but permitted in the territory relinquished by Georgia and North Carolina. The Ordinance was viewed, at the time, as a permanent solution to the slavery question since it resolved the issue in all of what then constituted the United States and its territories. One of the first acts of the new, and more powerful, Congress created by the
Constitution was to reaffirm the provisions of the Northwest Ordinance.

The slavery dispute was first reopened by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The Purchase almost doubled the size of the United States, and by 1818 several territories which had been carved out of the Purchase area had attained sufficient size to petition for statehood. In 1818, the Missouri Territory sent such a petition to Congress, and slavery became a burning national issue for the second time. When the Missouri Statehood Bill was introduced in the Senate, Senator James Tallmadge of New York was successful in attaching to it an amendment which provided that all slave children in the state be freed upon reaching age twenty-five and that the future migration of slaves into the state be prohibited. The obvious effect of the Tallmadge Amendment was the total abolition of slavery in Missouri in a period of twenty-five years. Congress adjourned before it could act upon the statehood bill, and the slavery debate engulfed the nation.¹

In 1820 there existed an exact balance between the number of free and slave states, and both sides were determined not to let the balance slip to the other side. The issues were quickly drawn along sectional lines; the southern elements argued that Congress had no authority to prohibit slavery in the territories, and that the new states had the same right to decide for themselves as the original states. The free states argued that the Northwest Ordinance, adopted in 1787 and

ratified by Congress in 1789, had excluded slavery from the Northwest Territory, and served as a clear indication of the right of Congress to legislate on the matter.2

One of the most active proponents of Missouri statehood was the editor of the *St. Louis Enquirer*, Thomas Hart Benton. Benton had been urging statehood for two years and was one of the authors of the original Missouri Statehood Petition which contained provisions retaining the institution of slavery. Benton was infuriated by the Tallmadge Amendment. In a series of editorials, he attached the restrictionists and took the position, along with the proslavery leaders, that Congress had absolutely no power to even consider the exclusion of slavery from the territories or to require abolition as a condition of statehood.

On May 18, 1820 Benton was the featured speaker at a mass antirestrictionist rally in St. Louis. In the course of the speech, Benton explained his concept of the legal status of slavery:

(Missouri) must make a fair and regular stand against the encroachment of Congress upon the Sovereignty of the States...When the abolition of slavery should be the order of the day throughout the Republic, then perhaps the people of Missouri would go voluntarily as far as any other portion of the Union; (but until such a time) ...no process of reasoning can make it right that they should be forced to the surrender of their slaves.

At the end of his speech, Benton proposed the six resolutions summarized below:

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(1) Congress has no control over a state constitution beyond requiring a republican form of government.

(2) The prohibition of slavery is contrary to the constitutional rights of the states.

(3) The delay in Congress is an insult to Missouri.

(4) Missouri's right to statehood depends only on the provisions of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty and the Constitution.

(5) The people of Missouri have a right to form a state government, and a second rebuff by the Congress would make it expedient to exercise the right.

(6) If Congress rejects a constitution thus adopted it will be the same as an attempt to rule Missouri out of the Union.

Benton's resolutions were unanimously adopted by those present at the rally. During May, June, and July, Benton continued to vigorously pursue this position. At a banquet held to honor the leaders of the anti-restrictionist movement, Benton summarized his position in a dramatic toast: "The future state of Missouri; equal in sovereignty to the original states, or—nothing!"

It is obvious from Benton's stand on Missouri statehood that he believed, at that time, that Congress had no authority to legislate

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³The account of Benton's May 18 speech and his anti-restrictionist activities is based upon summaries proved in the St. Louis Enquirer May 19, 1820 and William N. Chambers, Old Buillon Benton: Senator from the New West (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1956), pp. 92-3.
on slavery in the territories or to establish conditions regarding slavery as a requirement for statehood. In Benton's mind the sole power to regulate slavery was vested in the states and territories.

The Missouri controversy was finally settled by the Missouri Compromise, which provided that Missouri be admitted to the Union as a slave state and Maine as a free state. The Compromise also provided that, henceforth, slavery was to be prohibited north of $36^\circ 30'$, but permitted south of that line in the territory acquired through the Louisiana Purchase. In short, the Missouri Compromise embraced the principle first expressed in the Northwest Ordinance and roughly extended the slavery boundary established in the Ordinance. Again, a crisis had been resolved by a compromise which designated, geographically, the areas in which slavery could and could not exist. The Missouri Compromise quieted the slavery issue on the national level for twenty years, but it was destined to rise again with the acquisition of new territories. The next time the question would not be so easily put away.

**Nullification**

From the time of the passage of the Missouri Compromise until the debate over the admission of Texas, the issue which divided the nation sectionally was not slavery but the tariff question.

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In 1824 and 1828 Congress passed legislation providing for extremely high protective tariffs. The southern and western states objected stringently, claiming the high duties discriminated against their sections by increasing the cost of manufactured goods while at the same time decreasing the price of cotton and other agricultural goods (due to retaliatory foreign tariffs). In 1828 Congress passed the "Tariff of Abominations," the highest tariff in the history of the United States. It was in response to this tariff that John C. Calhoun first articulated his doctrine of concurrent majorities or nullification. Calhoun was serving as Vice-President at the time of the tariff controversy, and his spokesman in the Senate was the junior senator from South Carolina, Robert Y. Hayne.

Late in 1829 Senator Samuel Foote of Connecticut introduced a bill to freeze, for a specified time, the further sale of public lands in the West. Benton bitterly attacked Foote's legislation arguing that it would stop the development of the West and deprive the poor of a chance to improve their situation. Obviously, the bill was in direct opposition to Benton's land policy, his belief in an agrarian democracy, and his concept that Westward expansion was the best answer to the social ills of the East. In a long speech Benton accused the industrial interests of New England of promoting the bill in order to provide themselves a large pool of cheap labor. He closed the speech by appealing for a closer alliance between the West and South to curb the selfish legislative proposals of the North. The resulting controversy produced,
what is now considered to be, one of the greatest parliamentary debates in American history.

Senator Hayne of South Carolina followed Benton on the floor and echoed his cry for a closer South-West alliance. Hayne did not confine his analysis to the public lands. He immediately expanded the scope of the debate by enumerating all the major differences between North and South and hit hardest on the tariff question. Hayne concluded his first speech by suggesting that individual state legislatures possessed the legal power to nullify federal laws in their own states if no other remedy brought relief. Hayne also implied that the sovereignty of the states extended even to removing themselves from the Union. The immediate response to Hayne came from Daniel Webster of Massachusetts. Webster argued that the Union was based on a single sovereign people who have established a national state whose constitution and laws are supreme. The great debate between Webster and Hayne raged off and on for over a month and introduced into Congress, for the first time, a dispute over the nature of the federal system of government which would be resolved only by civil war thirty years later.

Benton's role in the Webster-Hayne debate demonstrates that, in 1830, he fully supported the Southern position. At several stages in the debate, Benton took the floor in defense of Hayne's position and provided additional examples of the North's discriminatory activities against the South and West. In Webster's final pleas he
claimed that the literal application of the nullification doctrine would create agitation and disharmony which could eventually destroy the Union. Webster concluded the debate with the peroration: "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!" Benton scoffed at Webster's warnings. At the close of Webster's speech Benton spoke again, saying that Webster's disunion warning was absurd, lacking in propriety, and unwarranted by circumstances. He proclaimed that a threat to the Union existed only in Webster's mind and that the only time in the nation's history that his remarks would have been appropriate was on the occasion of the Hartford Convention in 1815 when five New England states threatened to secede from the Union. He concluded his attack on Webster by saying,

That time (referring the the Hartford Convention) was the fit occasion for this speech; and had it been delivered then...what effects it must not have produced! What terror and consternation among the plotters of disunion! But, here, in this loyal and quiet assemblage, in this season of general tranquility and universal allegiance, the whole performance has lost its effect for want of affinity, connection, or relation, to any subject impending, or sentiment expressed, in the Senate; for want of any application, or reference, to any event impending in the country.\(^5\)

Thomas Hart Benton did not see a threat to the Union in 1830. He seems to have dismissed Webster's warnings because he believed nullification was only an idle threat never to be implemented. His inclination to side with Hayne was strengthened by personal friendship and a

\(^5\)This account of the Webster-Hayne Debate is based upon Benton's own assessment. See Thomas Hart Benton, Thirty Years' View (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1856), I, 135-143.
similarity of opinion on the tariff and land questions. Between 1830 and 1835 a series of events were to take place which would cause Benton to change his mind. First, South Carolina would actually attempt to nullify a Federal law; secondly, the South would (in Benton's opinion) revive the slavery agitation; and finally, nullification would be applied to the slavery question. By 1835 Benton was breaking his traditional Southern ties, siding more and more with the North on questions of governmental philosophy, and seriously questioning the desirability of permitting the territorial expansion of slavery. By 1844 he would totally reverse his earlier slavery position and become the leading prophet of disunion.

On April 13, 1830 President Jackson presided over a banquet in honor of Thomas Jefferson's birthday. Since the Webster-Hayne debate John C. Calhoun had stepped up his campaign to promote the nullification doctrine. Jackson was a Southerner and had championed various measures to preserve states' rights, and both sides were waiting for him to declare his position on nullification. Jackson waited for the Jefferson banquet, to take his stand. In a toast that electrified the audience Jackson proclaimed, "Our Federal Union, it must be preserved." Calhoun was obviously offended by Jackson's toast and responded with one of his own: "The Union, next to our liberty the most dear." From this time on Jackson and Calhoun were bitter enemies and became the leaders of two factions of the Democratic Party. Thomas Benton, the organizer of the banquet, began to think that Calhoun might really be serious about
nullification. It did not take long for the tide of events to bear out Benton's worst suspicions.

In 1832 the tariff came up for Congressional review, and, again, the North was successful in securing passage of a very high protective tariff. Calhoun immediately called upon South Carolina to convene a nullification convention. The South Carolina Convention met in December and quickly enacted an ordinance of nullification directed toward the tariff laws in general and the Tariff of 1832 in particular. The nullification ordinance also provided that if the Federal government made any attempt to enforce the tariff laws the result would be to end the continuance of South Carolina in the Union.

Jackson's response was immediate; he issued a proclamation declaring nullification an unconstitutional and traitorist act, and pledged himself to the use of armed forces if necessary to enforce all the laws of the United States. Both Jackson and Benton believed the Tariff of 1832 to be unduly harsh and had proposed lowering it even before the nullification crisis, but both recognized the power of Congress to pass such an act. Benton immediately rushed to Jackson's aid, and once again became his spokesman in the Senate. Benton was successful in securing senatorial passage of the controversial "Force Bill" which authorized the President to take whatever action he deemed necessary in securing compliance to Federal law in South Carolina. South Carolina was surprised by Jackson's strong and swift stand and extended the effective
date of the nullification act. Before another showdown resulted, Congress passed a new tariff act which substantially reduced the previous duties. In the long run South Carolina achieved almost all of her objectives and withdrew the nullification ordinance. Calhoun made it clear that the ordinance was suspended only because Congress had removed the reason for its existence and indicated that the device could be used again in the future.

Strangely, Benton opposed Jackson's acceptance of the reduced tariff. He argued that South Carolina should have been forced to reject nullification and accept the supremacy of Federal law before granting tariff relief. Benton viewed the settlement as dangerous appeasement which would only encourage the South to employ nullification in regard to other issues in the future.

Benton's stand against nullification constitutes an important landmark in his career. For the first time in his senatorial life he had acted contrary to majority opinion in his own state and had broken his close personal alliance with the South. In this crisis, Benton took the stance that would be characteristic of the remainder of his political career. He would, henceforth, oppose all laws and activities which pose a threat to the Union; no matter what the consequences to his own career. From this time on Benton viewed all other issues as secondary to the overriding issue of preserving the Union. Roosevelt effectively summarizes the significance of the nullification struggle.
to Benton's subsequent political situation:

(Benton) was a believer in a low tariff and his sectional antipathies were the other way. Yet, even when deserted by his chief (Jackson), and when he was opposed by every senator from south of the Potomac and the Ohio, he did not flinch for a moment from his attitude of aggressive loyalty to the national Union. He had a singularly strong and upright character; this country has never had a statesman more fearlessly true to his convictions, when great questions were at stake, no matter what might be the cost to himself, or the pressure from the outside.6

During the Congressional session of 1835-1836 the slavery issue, in a new form, was again thrust upon the Senate. The slavery abolition societies had been organized in the late 1820's and early 1830's, and by the middle of the decade their programs began to have a national impact. In 1835 various abolition societies petitioned Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. The South, led by Calhoun, claimed that the Incendiary publications of the societies were aimed at triggering off a slave revolt in the South and introduced legislation to ban sending abolition material through the mails.

Benton took the position that neither side had legitimate grounds for re-kindle the dispute. He argued that the Constitution had settled the question of slavery in the District of Columbia, and that the Missouri Compromise provided a permanent solution to the problem in the territories. As a result of these beliefs, Benton voted against receiving the abolition petitions. When Calhoun demanded the petitions be

read, to demonstrate the hatred of the North toward the South, Benton vehemently objected. Calhoun was not content with the public airing of the petitions and introduced a score of pamphlets supposedly circulated in the South by the abolitionists. Calhoun's effort to augment the agitation, coupled with the implacable position of the Southern press, convinced Benton that the major source of the slavery agitation was the South and not the North. He viewed the re-opening of the dispute as a plot conceived by Calhoun to dissolve the Union and further his own political advancement. Writing years later in his Thirty Years' View, Benton explains his belief that 1835 marked a crucial turning point in the slavery controversy:

(1835-1836 represents) a period when a new point of departure was taken on the slave question; when the question was carried into Congress with avowed alternatives of dissolving the Union; and conducted in a way to show that dissolution was an object to be attained, not prevented; and this being the starting point of the slavery agitation which has since menaced the Union... From the beginning of the Missouri controversy up to the year 1835, the author of this View looked to the North as the point of danger from the slavery agitation; since that time he has looked to the South for that danger... Equally opposed to it in either quarter, he has opposed it in both.7

Several important conclusions result from an examination of Benton's political activities between 1830 and 1835. First, Benton was slow in recognizing the presence of a threat to the Union; this probably accounts for his support of Hayne in the great Senate debate.

7T. H. Benton, View, 1, 609-23.
Secondly, South Carolina's behavior during the tariff crisis convinced him that the South would employ the nullification principle, and this he felt constituted a clear threat to the Union. Thirdly, Benton came to hold the South responsible for reviving slavery agitation on a national level. Finally, Benton's personal belief was that the Constitution, the Northwest Ordinance, and the Missouri Compromise had permanently settled the slavery question; therefore, any future debate on the matter was unnecessary, undermined the law, and threatened the Union. For the remainder of his life, Benton pleaded that previous law was sacred and binding and exercised all of his influence in an attempt to quiet the rising tide of conflict. In the future Benton would see a disunion plot behind every attempt to add new territories, create new states, or discuss the slavery issue.

Texas

The question of Texas statehood was the issue that resulted in Benton's final break with the South. The Texas debate ultimately led Benton to denounce the territorial expansion of slavery and pitted him against popular opinion in Missouri.

In 1836 the independent government of Texas asked the United States to extend diplomatic recognition to the new republic. In the Senate, Calhoun went far beyond the question of recognition and proposed that Texas be immediately admitted into the Union. Benton thought Calhoun's behavior provided an ominous portent for the future:
I see the shadowings of coming events; the revelation of a new theatre for the slavery agitation; and a design to make Texas an element in the impending election.®

By 1844, Texas had secured her independence from Mexico, and formally petitioned for statehood, and James K. Polk had been elected President on a Texas annexation platform. The possibility of securing new territories immediately touched off a new slavery debate in Congress.

Benton had always been in favor of territorial expansion. The procurement and settlement of new territory was at the heart of his land policy and was the foundation of his hope for the development of a yeomans Arcadia. Yet in spite of his desire for new territories, Benton opposed the Texas Annexation Treaty. His reasons for opposing the treaty are clear; he viewed the whole issue as a plot hatched by Calhoun to promote disunion and further his own ambitions. In a Senate speech that lasted nearly two days, Benton attacked Calhoun, denounced nullification and secession, and pleaded for the rejection of the Texas Treaty. In his opening comments Benton openly argued that nullification, secession, and Texas were all tied together:

I have often intimated it before, but now I proclaim it. Disunion is at the bottom of this long concealed Texas machination; Intrigue and speculation cooperate, but disunion is at the bottom, and I denounce it to the American people. Under the pretext of getting Texas into the Union, the scheme is to get the South out of it. A separate confederacy, stretching from the Atlantic to the Californias is the cherished vision of disappointed

ambition; and for this consummation every circumstance has been carefully and artfully contrived.

Calhoun and the Southern leadership threatened to call a convention of the Southern states if Texas was not annexed, and the clear implication was that the purpose of such a convention would be the consideration of an ordinance of secession. In the course of his speech, Benton argued that Calhoun's position was, "Texas without the Union, sooner than the Union without Texas." Benton went on to claim that the annexation of Texas was essential to the South if she planned to attempt secession:

For a few states to secede, without other alliances, would only put the rest to the trouble of bringing them back; but with Texas and California to retire upon, the Union would have to go!

Benton's argument was that if the South really did secede, she could greatly improve her chances of success if the massive weight of Texas and California with their population, resources, and maneuvering room fell to the side of the secessionists. The next portion of Benton's speech emphasized that Calhoun did not want agreement between the North and South. Benton believed that Calhoun was deliberately attempting to produce an irreparable sectional split which would result in the establishment of a separate Southern confederacy. Only in this context could Benton understand Calhoun's constitutional arguments, promotion of agitation, and uncompromising stance.9

In a second speech on the Texas Annexation Treaty, Benton, for the first time, opposed the expansion of slavery into areas in which it had never existed:10

I am southern by my birth—southern in my affections, interests, and connections—and shall abide the fate of the South in everything in which she has right upon her side. I am a slaveholder, and shall take the fate of other slaveholders in every aggression upon that species of property...I will resist the intrusive efforts of those whom it does not concern, to abolish slavery among us; but I shall not engage in schemes for it's extension into regions where it was never known—into the valley of the Rio de Norte, for example, and along a river of two thousand miles in extent, where a slave's face was never seen.

Arguing from this position, Benton introduced a compromise bill of his own for bringing Texas into the Union. Under the provisions of Benton's bill slavery would be excluded in areas where it had never existed under Spanish and Mexican rule, but would be permitted in the areas where it had previously existed. It was recognized at the time that Texas was so large that it would eventually be divided into several states. Benton's compromise provisions were unclear but evidently aimed at maintaining the old principle of the Northwest Ordinance and Missouri Compromise which attempted to keep some sort of balance by dividing the territories into slave and non-slave areas.

Back in Missouri, the pro-slavery voters were up in arms over Benton's position on the Texas question. In 1844 Benton was forced to come home and engage in the first serious campaign since 1820. The

10Text of this speech is included in T. H. Benton, View, 11, 619-24.
entirety of Benton's campaigning was directed toward explaining his stand on the annexation of Texas. Benton was re-elected in 1844, but it was evident that his power base was weakened. Eighteen forty-four and the Texas dispute marked the beginning of Benton's political decline in Missouri; from this time on he would be more and more in opposition to the local party leadership on the question of slavery extension. Roosevelt points out the results of Benton's Texas position:

He had now entered on what may fairly be called the heroic part of his career; for it would be difficult to choose any other word to express our admiration for the unflinching and defiant courage with which, supported only by conscience and his loving loyalty to the Union, he battled for the losing side, although by doing so he jeopardized and eventually ruined his political prospects, being finally, as punishment for his boldness in opposing the dominant factions of the Missouri Democracy, turned out of the Senate.¹¹

The Texas question caused Benton to become totally committed to the total exclusion of slavery from the territories. He argued that the Mexican statutes banning slavery in Texas and California were binding upon the United States Government. Evidently, he came to believe that the only way to permanently stop the slavery question, and Calhoun's personal designs, was to accomplish a comprehensive ban on slavery expansion.

In 1847 Calhoun introduced a series of slavery resolutions in

¹¹Roosevelt, Benton, 319.
the Senate which denied the power of Congress to prohibit slavery in the territories. The Calhoun Resolutions stated that: the territories were the joint property of all the states; the Congress has no power to make any law which discriminates against the institutions of any state; citizens who migrate from a state to a territory are protected by the Constitution in carrying their property and institutions with them; the majority of the people in a territory have the right to draft a state constitution which they feel best secures their liberty, happiness, and prosperity. The power of Congress is limited to requiring the establishment of a republican form of government. Therefore, any slaveholding citizen is perfectly free to move his slaves to a new territory, and Congress has no power to stop such migration. When a territory meets the general requirements for statehood it is free to institutionalize slavery in its constitution and Congress is powerless to change it.12

Benton's attack on the Calhoun Resolutions represents a total shift away from the position he had taken in 1820. In fact, Calhoun's resolutions are almost identical to the resolutions Benton offered in the St. Louis Anti-Restric tionist Rally in 1820. In attacking the Calhoun Resolutions Benton claimed that the territories were public property owned by the Federal government and, thereby, subject to absolute Congressional control. He went on to characterize the reso-

12The resolutions are presented in the entirety in T. H. Benton, View, 11, 696-7.
olutions as simply a new phase in Calhoun's plan to drive the North and South apart and split the Union:

(The plan was), to force issues upon the North under the pretext of self-defense, and to sectionalize the South, preparatory to disunion, through the instrumentality of sectional conventions, composed entirely of delegates from the slaveholding states, falling in that scheme ...a new one was fallen upon...

Benton concluded by claiming that Calhoun knew the resolutions would fail and that the effect would be to further polarize sectional animosities. At the end of Benton's speech Calhoun shouted that he "had expected the support of Mr. Benton as a representative of a slave holding state." Benton quickly replied, "I shall be found in the right place-on the side of my country and the Union." Recalling the reply years later, he wrote, "that answer, given on that day, and on that spot, is one of the incidents of his life which Mr. Benton wishes posterity to remember." 13

Between 1847 and 1849, Calhoun continued to introduce numerous resolutions and manifestos which were designed to unite those who supported his position. Benton categorically objected to each of Calhoun's measures, and the result was a growing split between Benton and his own party. Not only had Benton alienated the Democratic leadership in Congress, but he had openly broken with President Polk on the Texas question. In 1848, Benton refused to campaign for Lewis Cass because he thought he was soft on slavery. Many members of the Democratic Party

held Benton partially responsible for the loss of the Presidency to the Whigs. Chambers claims:

Benton's developing antislavery convictions and refusal to follow a proslavery course in the Senate, and his break with Polk and long walk away from Cass in the presidential canvass, alienated him further from the new men of power in a Democratic Party that was to become more and not less proslavery in the future. Henceforth, Benton found himself increasingly linked with a few New York and Northern allies. The great party stalwart and advocate of the 1830's was increasingly isolated from the main stream of national Democratic politics.14

As Benton's power in the national party was crumbling, the political situation in Missouri was approaching crisis proportions. Senator David Atchison, Benton's Missouri colleague in the Senate, spearheaded a movement to draw together the proslavery forces in Missouri and defeat Benton in 1850. The proslavery majority in Missouri regarded Benton as the greatest obstacle in their path and were dedicated to Benton's political defeat. In March of 1849 the Missouri Legislature passed a series of resolutions known as the Jackson Resolutions. The resolutions were authored by Claiborne F. Jackson who became the secessionist governor of Missouri in 1860. The Jackson Resolutions were direct copies of Calhoun's Slavery Resolutions. The Missouri version went one step further than Calhoun's in proclaiming the unconstitutionality of the Missouri Compromise. The Missouri Legislature sent a copy of the resolutions to Benton with instructions to "act in conformity with them." The battle lines were sharply drawn; Benton must either give in

14Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 337.
to the Legislature or risk his own political career. On May 26, 1849 Benton took his stand; speaking from the steps of the Capitol of Missouri, he openly attacked each of the resolutions and announced that he would ignore the instructions of the Legislature.15

During 1849 and 1850 Benton carried his attack on the Jackson Resolutions to all parts of the state. He upheld the right of Congress to prohibit slavery in the territories, condemned the further expansion of slavery, accused Calhoun of deliberately attempting to destroy the Union, and claimed that Calhoun was applying all of his influence to defeat him in Missouri.

During the fight over the Jackson Resolutions Benton returned to Washington to oppose the Compromise of 1850. In urging the rejection of the Compromise Benton employed essentially the same arguments that he had employed in opposing the annexation of Texas. He also argued that the Compromise represented a sellout to the "secession threatening South." Benton said that he was unalterably opposed to any connection of slavery to the statehood bills of potential states.

Benton had two primary opponents in the election of 1850; Henry S. Geyer, a Whig and James S. Green an Anti-Benton Democrat. In the middle of the balloting Geyer announced that he believed that Congress had no power to legislate on the question of slavery in the

15Authority for the above paragraph is to be found in Thomas Hart Benton, Speech to the People of Missouri, Jefferson City, Missouri, May 26, 1849. Printed copy in Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia.
territories. Evidently, this statement helped in swinging a few Anti-Benton Democrats to Geyer's side. In any case, after fourteen days and forty ballots Geyer was elected and Benton's thirty year senatorial career ended. It was obvious that his defeat was made possible by the defection of members of his own party to the Whig candidate.\footnote{Chambers, Old Buillon, pp. 374-6.}

The end of Benton's senatorial career did not mark the end of his political career or his fight against disunion. In 1852 he was elected to the House of Representatives from St. Louis County. During his House term Benton opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act which allowed the residents of a territory to decide, by majority vote, whether a new state created from the territory would be free or slave. In 1854 he was defeated in a bid for re-election. In 1856 the seventy-four year old Benton campaigned for the governorship of Missouri on a unionist platform. During the campaign of 1856, Benton traveled 1200 miles and gave over forty speeches, but was again defeated. From 1856 through 1857 Benton undertook an extensive speaking tour through the East in which he warned of impending disunion and civil war unless the slavery issue was immediately and permanently silenced.

Benton's last days were totally dedicated to efforts which he hoped might help save the Union. Volume two of his \textit{Thirty Years' View} deals extensively with the development of the slavery dispute and its potential for destroying the Union. He closes his great work with this
If what is written in these chapters shall contribute to open their eyes to these dangers, and rouse them to the resumption of their electoral privileges and the suppression of sectional contention, then this View will not have been in vain. If not, the writer will still have one consolation - the knowledge of the fact that he has labored in his day and generation, to preserve and perpetuate the blessings of that Union and self-government which wise and good men gave us.\textsuperscript{17}

In March of 1857, the Supreme Court handed down the Dred Scott Decision. In writing for the majority, Chief Justice Taney upheld the doctrine that the Constitution protected slaveholders absolutely in their slave property, wherever they might go. The Court based its decision on the property-rights clause of the Fifth Amendment. In concluding the opinion, the Court declared the Missouri Compromise restriction on slavery unconstitutional. Thus, seven years after his death, Calhoun won what was apparently a total victory.\textsuperscript{18}

Benton was deeply disturbed by the Dred Scott Decision, and spent the remainder of his life in preparing a rebuttal to it. In a pamphlet that ran to almost two hundred pages in length, Benton reviewed the historical and legal issues surrounding the slavery dispute. The point of Benton's Examination of the Dred Scott Decision was to prove that the Constitution, the Northwest Ordinance, the Missouri Compromise, and scores of lesser acts all recognized and demonstrated the power of

\textsuperscript{17}T. H. Benton, View, II, 788.

\textsuperscript{18}Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 432-3.
Congress to legislate on the question of the territorial expansion of slavery. Benton's Preface to the Examination clearly summarized his position: 19

As it concerns the Missouri Compromise Act, it will be the point of the whole Examination to show that Congress exercised, and rightfully, supreme authority over these territories, both original and acquired; that it governed them independently of the Constitution, and incompatibly with it, and by virtue of sovereign and proprietary rights; that it did what it deemed best for the young community, as a father does for his children; and that the question of admitting or prohibiting slavery, either in the new or old territories, never rose higher than a question of expediency, and that this continued to be the case, without distinction of men or parties, and with the universal concurrence of all departments of the Federal government...down to the abrogation of the Missouri Compromise in 1854.

In Benton's thinking the Northwest Ordinance is actually a part of the Constitution. He points to the sixth article of the Constitution which declares that "all debts contracted, and all engagements entered into before the adoption of the Constitution, shall be valid against the United States, under the Constitution as under the Confederation", and declares that this article affirms the validity of the Ordinance. In Benton's words:

"Though entitled for the North-West Territory this fundamental territorial law was intended for the South-West also, and was applied to the territories there as soon as they were ceded; and became the basis for all the territorial governments down to the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. The Ordinance was the Constitution for the territories, as the Constitution..." 19

Itself was for the states...

The Preface to the Examination explains that Benton's purpose in writing is to rally popular opinion against the Dred Scott Decision and give a rallying point to the friends of the Union. Thomas Hart Benton ended his political life as he had begun it almost fifty years before in Tennessee; as a propagandist employing the power of the press in an attempt to shape public opinion.

It is paradoxical that Benton's first exposure to the slavery issue led him to argue that Congress had no right or power to interfere with slavery, and his last political act was to deny the legitimacy of such a position. The reasons behind Benton's reversal of positions are not to be found in his opinion of the nature of slavery, but, rather, in his belief that slavery posed a threat to the Union. His hatred of Calhoun undoubtedly stems from his belief that Calhoun had deliberately intensified the slavery dispute for personal reasons. Ultimately, Benton came to believe that the only way to save the Union was to permanently eliminate the source of the agitation by checking slavery expansion. Only in this context can his political activities after 1844 be understood.

Benton's love of the Union transcended and overrode all other issues. In 1856 John C. Fremont, his son-in-law, was the Republican candidate for the Presidency, but Benton refused to support him saying, "I cannot support him because his party is a sectional party." In late 1856 a reporter asked Benton to autograph his copy of Thirty Years' View;
perhaps what he wrote then best summarizes his political career:

Thomas Hart Benton, of Missouri, Senator in the Congress of the United States for thirty years, and all that time devoted to the harmony, the stability, and the perpetuity of the Union.20

CHAPTER THREE

BENTON'S AUDIENCES

Introduction

Before commencing a study of Benton's rhetorical practices it is necessary to examine, first, the composition and attitudes of the audiences to which his appeals were directed. Only in such a contextual framework can the nature of specific appeals be understood and their effect evaluated.

Previous chapters have indicated that Benton's rhetoric was usually directed toward several different and distinct audiences. His immediate audiences consisted of the members of the United States Senate or the electorate of Missouri. Since most of his important speeches were also composed for the press and national circulation it is necessary to examine his reading audiences as well. Benton was often in disagreement with the Senate membership, and his unique position on the question of slavery produced an even greater division between Benton and his senatorial colleagues. During the bank fight, the dispute over public land policy, and the tariff crisis Benton had attempted to change Senatorial behavior by rallying popular support to his side. He was forced to resort to the same tactic during the slavery dispute. Benton used his speeches, which were carried in the press,
pamphlets, and *Thirty Years' View*, to incite popular opinion against the annexation of Texas, the Calhoun and Jackson Resolutions, the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott Decision. As Benton's slavery position tended more and more to come into conflict with opinion in Missouri he spent more and more time speaking in the state to justify his position. In 1844 he returned to Missouri to explain his Texas policy and in 1849 he engaged in a statewide stump campaign designed to secure the repeal of the Jackson Resolutions and his own re-election in 1850.

Benton clearly recognized that his slavery views were unpopular with most of the members of the Senate as well as the leadership of his own party. Therefore, the secondary audience provided by the press appears to be of great importance. Benton's only real opportunity for influencing legislation was dependent upon the direction and pressure of popular opinion. In Missouri, Benton had to take his case to the people as well. The Missouri Legislature specifically ordered Benton to vote for the Calhoun Resolutions and commanded that he deny the power of Congress to legislate on slavery. Benton ignored the directive of the legislature, voted against the "Resolutions," and appealed his actions to the people of Missouri. It is, therefore, necessary to examine each of Benton's audiences if his slavery rhetoric is to be understood.
The National Audience

Opinion on the slavery issue broke down pretty much along sectional lines. The national audience can probably best be examined by following the traditional sectional divisions of South, West, and North.

The Southern Audience

Up until the early 1840's Benton was the leading proponent of an alliance between the South and the West. On the great questions of land policy, tariffs, internal improvements, and taxation Benton was in almost total agreement with the Southern leadership. In the 1830's Benton had denounced nullification and when the question of territorial expansion arose again in 1844, he found himself drifting more and more away from his former political ties. Benton strongly favored territorial expansion, but he believed that slavery should not be permitted in areas where it had never existed or in areas where Spanish or Mexican law had prohibited it. Benton's position outraged the South and by the late 1840's the Southern leadership, headed by Calhoun, was exercising all its influence in an attempt to defeat Benton in Missouri.

In December of 1848 and January 1849 Calhoun called a caucus of Southern Congressmen. The convention prepared a document known as the "Southern Address" which proclaimed that "the Federal Government
has no right to extend or restrict slavery, no more than to establish or abolish it." Benton refused to attend the Southern Convention and later refused to subscribe to the doctrine expressed in the Southern Address. Benton was one of only a few Southern Congressmen who did not attend the convention and from this time on he was repudiated by the Southern Democrats. The Southern Democratic Leadership came to regard Benton as the greatest obstacle in their path, and determined on his political extinction.1

There is overwhelming proof that Calhoun and his followers played a significant role in turning pro-slavery opinion in Missouri, against Benton. Benton recognized that the South was working for his defeat in Missouri. In a letter addressed to the people of Missouri he said:

I know of no cause for this conspiracy against me, except that I am the natural enemy of all rotten politicians...I am for the Union as it is; and for this cause Mr. Calhoun has denounced me as a traitor to the South (which was) a signal to all his followers in Missouri to go to work upon me...The conspiracy is now established...nullification resolutions passed by fraud, which it was known I would not obey...Men appointed to attack me in all parts of the state...Packed meetings got up to condemn me...Newspapers enlisted in their service...and many good citizens deceived.

Benton's break with the South was a natural and inevitable outcome given his pronouncements on slavery. For years the pro-slavery


elements had conditioned the people of the South to renounce all who opposed slavery or its territorial expansion. The South came to believe that the only way it could preserve its culture and power was to expand slavery into the new territories. Benton's opposition to slavery expansion was diametrically opposed to what had become the primary Southern goal. Professor Eugene Genovese of Columbia cogently summarizes the Southern view:

As Southerners came to regard slavery as a positive good, and as they came to value the civilization it made possible as the world's finest, they could hardly accept limits on its expansion. To agree to containment meant to agree that slavery constituted an evil. The free-soil argument struck at the foundations of the slaveholder's pride and belief in himself.3

The eminent social historian, Alice Felt Tyler, argues that attempts to reason with the South after the early 1840's were futile. Professor Tyler suggests that the South erected a barrier to all anti-slavery rhetoric which filtered in only what the "leadership" wished to use for propaganda purposes.

Between 1835 and 1860 all the threads of Southern thought came to their culmination and were woven into a cloak designed to be impenetrable to the heat of Northern argument.

Eventually, all of the institutions of the South became vehicles of slavery defense and obstacles to outside persuasion. The Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Campbellite Churches dissolved their affiliation with national organizations and re-established their structures

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on a regional basis. Such tremendous pressure was brought to bear on the Southern press that only the pro-slavery position was aired. Academic freedom was stifled and moderates were silenced or purged. Tyler concludes:

Constant pressure was exerted by the vested interests to prevent any criticism of slavery in the Southern press, and economic reasons alone were sufficient to deter most editors...the ministry became acquiescent if not outspokenly proslavery. All skepticism was stifled, and the ideal Christian was one who was completely subservient in opinion...In no Southern college after 1840 could a member of the faculty express with impunity any sentiment in opposition to slavery...

Given the situation in the South, it would be naive to assume that Benton's rhetoric could have registered any substantial effect. In short, the South had walled itself off from the rest of the Union and outside opinion played a role limited to supporting proslavery propaganda.

The Western Audience

The anti-slavery movement gathered most of its strength from the Midwest; primarily from Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois. The slavery question came to be a great political issue only with the thrust of settlement to the trans-Mississippi area. The Midwest had been settled largely by small farmers who eventually came to oppose the spread of slavery because they perceived it as a threat to their class. As

Tyler says:

The strength of the abolition movement had not been in Eastern urban areas but among the small farmers and merchants of the Middle West, and in the same area, among those who hoped to find new homes for themselves or for their friends and families in the trans-Mississippi area, the Free Soil doctrine took root.

The Midwestern settlers viewed an economic system in which a few landholders held most of the land as a direct threat to their own welfare. The plantation system was simply incompatible with a society composed of small independent landholders. It was also feared that small landholders and settlers with limited means would be unable to compete financially with the Southern planters for the purchase of Western lands. The slavery question had been unimportant to Midwesterners until it became evident that new territory would be added to the United States. The territorial question "brought to the fore in opposition to slavery many men whose anti-slavery sentiments had not been urgent until that time." The contest for the new Western lands broke the bonds of the old Western-Southern alliance forever.

"At last the agrarian regions of the country were divided into hostile camps - Southern planters and their satellites against the farmer population of the Northwest." The strong prevailing attitude in the Midwest was either one favoring the total abolition of slavery or total opposition to slavery expansion.5

5Tyler, Ferment, pp. 543-5.
The Northern Audience

The New England industrial complex had long supported the pro-slavery view because of commercial ties with the South. The Northern business community had refused to become entangled in the slavery dispute during the early stages for fear of jeopardizing Southern commercial ties. When the West and Northwest began to develop strong anti-slavery sentiments the Northeast was forced to re-evaluate its position. It became obvious that in the long run the growing Western area was more essential to the industrial interests than the South. As a result the Northeast broke its traditional Southern ties and re-aligned itself with the West. Tyler assesses the consequences of the new political alignment as follows:

The Northwest wanted security for its penetration of the territories and its exploitation of their resources, a homestead act, and railroads. Those things the Northeast was willing to grant in return for protective tariffs, banking and currency reforms, and cheap labor. In the 1850's the union between the West and the industrial capitalism was cemented, and the economic sectionalism of which the South had so long been apprehensive became a reality. Big business, which had for so long supported the proslavery position because of commercial ties, now became antislavery, and its entry into the Republican Party was signalized by a protective tariff plank in the 1856 platform.6

It should not be assumed that the antislavery attitude of the West and North was derived totally from economic considerations. Tyler demonstrates that the antislavery crusade "was also an integral part

6Tyler, Ferment, pp. 544-7.
of the larger humanitarian movement that was sweeping through the North." The Northern reformers could hardly advocate better treatment of convicts, children, women, etc. and not be concerned with the slave. The anti-slavery campaign, therefore, took on a moral and religious complexion. More and more people came to view slavery as a sin and with this belief it was only a short step from opposing the spread of slavery to abolitionism.7

It would appear on the surface that Benton's slavery position should have been popular in the West and North, but this was not the case. First, Benton was equally opposed to both Southern and Northern agitators. According to Kennedy:

(Benton) was equally opposed to the abolitionists and the secessionists, to the permanent extension of this evil into new territory by the South and the partisan exploitations of its miseries by Northern agitators. Above all, he was the most distressed about the fact that the issue was constantly raised by both sides as a barrier to westward expansion and the admission of new states to the Union.8

Benton's goal was to silence all slavery agitation irrespective to source. The theme of all of Benton's speeches between 1844 and 1858 is essentially the same; the agitation must be stopped or the Union will be destroyed. In Benton's mind there was no legitimate basis for discussing the slavery question; the Missouri Compromise line and the slavery laws of Mexico had provided a permanent solution.

7Tyler, Ferment, pp. 489, 513.

With this guiding philosophy Benton read selfish or disunion motives into the actions of all who raised the slavery question. In short, Benton argued that all agitators, both Northern and Southern, were guilty of reviving an issue already settled by inviolate laws. Benton's position is clearly revealed in numerous passages in *Thirty Years' View*. Referring to the slavery dispute in a speech given in 1839 Benton said:

I say it with profound regret, and with no intention to occasion irritation here or elsewhere that there are persons in both parts of the Union who have sought to mingle slavery with politics, and to array one portion of the Union against the other.

In a speech given in 1847 Benton claimed:

Close observers who have been watching the progress of the slavery agitation since its inauguration...knew it to be a game played by the abolitionists on one side and the disunionists on the other, to accomplish their own purposes...

and in 1854 he declared:

Truly the abolitionists and the nullifiers were necessary to each other -- the two halves of a pair of shears, neither which could cut until joined together. Then the map of the Union was in danger; for in their conjunction, that map was cloth between the edges of shears.

As late as 1854 Benton still clung to the belief that the Union could be saved if only both sides would cease the agitation. He closed *Thirty Years' View* with this appeal.

If what is written in these chapters shall contribute to open their eyes to these dangers, and rouse them to the resumption of their electoral privileges and the suppression of sectional contention, this View
will not have been written in vain.\(^9\)

Secondly, Benton's disagreement with the abolitionists went much deeper than his dislike for their propaganda and agitation. It should be remembered that Benton defended the existence of slavery in areas where it was an established institution. Benton had made this position clear in opposing the annexation of Texas in 1844:

I am a slaveholder, and shall take the fate of other slaveholders in every aggression upon that species of property...I will resist the intrusive efforts of those whom it does not concern to abolish slavery among us; but I shall not engage in schemes for its extension...\(^10\)

Benton eventually came to view slavery as an evil but feared the results of emancipation of existing slaves. In a speech given in 1850 he quoted Jefferson's argument that emancipation would eventually produce a race war which would culminate in the "extermination of one or the other race." Benton concludes:

I find the largest objection to the extension of slavery...The incurability of the evil is the greatest objection to the extension of slavery. It is wrong for the legislator to inflict an evil which can be cured: how much more to inflict one that is incurable...I quarrel with no one for supposing slavery a blessing: I deem it an evil: and would neither adopt it nor impose it on others. Yet I am a slaveholder, and among the few members of Congress who hold slaves in this District.\(^11\)

It is evident that Benton perceived slavery to be an evil without cure,

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\(^9\)The above excerpts are to be found in Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, II (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1856), 157-8, 695, 788.


and he opposed the extension of that evil into new areas. However, he was equally opposed to the abolition of existing slavery on the grounds that a greater evil would result. It appears inconsistent that one who viewed slavery as a positive evil would, himself, continue to hold slaves. However, a clear understanding of Benton's position indicates that he was perfectly consistent. Benton was a resident of a slaveholding state and, therefore, legally entitled to possess slaves, and he could hardly be expected to practice a cure (emancipation) that he argued to be worse than the evil.

It is obvious that the abolitionists would have little respect for a Senator who held slaves, defended the institution where it already existed, and openly voiced fears of Negro emancipation. Benton could expect no more support from the abolitionists than from the Southern radicals. Benton's Northern support consisted of a small group of Northern moderates who, like Benton, loved the Union more than they hated slavery.

The Senatorial Audience

The new slavery dispute produced first by the question of Texas annexation and later augmented by arguments over California, New Mexico, Oregon, and Utah quickly polarized senatorial opinion along proslavery or antislavery lines. Slavery became the overriding consideration and even party titles came to be useless in attempts to
define political structures and allegiances in Congress. An examination of the membership of the Senate demonstrates a significant change of membership in a period of only six years. In 1850 the Senate roll contained the names of only ten men who had been members of that body in 1844. In noting the changes in Senate membership Benton commented:

In this list (of Senate members) the reader will not fail to remark the names of Mr. Clay, Mr. Webster, and Mr. Calhoun, all of whom, commencing their congressional career nearly a generation before, and after several retirings, had met again... It was soon seen that the slavery question mingled with the election and gave it its controlling character.12

Benton felt that the reappearance of the great triad of Webster, Clay, and Calhoun clearly foretold the direction of events to come. Clay had campaigned on the basis of a great new compromise which would provide a final solution to the slavery issue; Calhoun's presence was a clear indication, to Benton, that the radical Southern line would again be pursued; only in Webster's presence did Benton read any hope for protecting the welfare of the Union.

Clay wasted no time in presenting his compromise measures to the Congress. The most important planks in the Compromise Bill provided:

First, that California should be admitted as a state without Congressional restriction on the exclusion or introduction of slavery; second, that new territorial governments for the rest of the Mexican-ceded areas should be established, without Congressional action concerning slavery; third and fourth, for a

Clay argued that the key to the compromise lay in incorporating all its provisions into one legislative bill to be passed in one package.

In the great Compromise Debate of 1850 Benton attacked almost all aspects of Clay's Compromise. He claimed that the measure was a surrender to a threat of disunion on the part of Southern radicals. Benton also reiterated his previous attacks on expanding slavery into areas where it had never existed or was currently illegal under terms of Spanish-Mexican law. He concluded his attack by arguing that each measure should be acted upon separately; California, for example, should enjoy the same right as previously admitted states to independent consideration.\(^\text{14}\)

Benton's position aligned him against Clay and its "free-soil" overtones further enraged the planter-Democrats against him. The Compromise Debate resulted in a radically new political alignment in the Senate. Clay had little support from the Northern Whig Senators; only Daniel Webster and one other Northern Whig supported the Compro-

\(^\text{13}\)Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 357.  
\(^\text{14}\)See Thomas Hart Benton, Anti-Tack Speech, delivered in the United States Senate, Monday, April 22, 1850 (Washington: Congressional Globe, 1850) and Thomas Hart Benton, Anti-Compromise Speech, delivered in the United States Senate, June 10, 1850 (Washington: Congres-
misme. However, Clay did receive the support of most of the Democrats. Cass and Douglas joined with Clay, and even a few Southern Democrats such as Henry Foote abandoned Calhoun's doctrines to defend both the Union and slavery. Opposing the Compromise were most of the Northern Whigs, including the antislavery leader Seward, and radical Democrats such as Benton and Hamlin. The confusing and absurd nature of the new political alignment was described by Chambers as follows:

More and more, Benton, the Democratic Senator from slaveholding Missouri, emerged as the apparent floor leader for the procedure advocated by Taylor, the Whig President; while Douglas, the Democratic Senator from free-soil Illinois, emerged as the effective political manager supporting the proposals of Clay, the Whig veteran. 15

In the midst of the debate President Taylor suddenly died and was succeeded by Millard Fillmore. Fillmore was a close friend of both Clay and Webster and immediately threw his support to the Compromise, and Benton's political isolation was complete. Benton had deserted the Democrats and now the Whigs had deserted him. The important provisions of the Clay Compromise were passed and Benton's effect upon them was obviously quite limited. A few weeks later the Missouri Legislature convened to elect a new Senator, and in March of 1851 Thomas Hart Benton left the Senate forever.

15Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 359-60.
The Missouri Audience

The Nature of Missouri Slavery

Slavery had existed in Missouri since 1719 and from that time until the outbreak of the Civil War the number of slaves steadily increased. The following statistics provide a general picture of the development of the institution:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Whites</th>
<th>Slaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>20,845</td>
<td>17,227</td>
<td>3,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>66,586</td>
<td>54,903</td>
<td>9,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>140,455</td>
<td>115,364</td>
<td>25,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>383,702</td>
<td>322,295</td>
<td>57,891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>682,044</td>
<td>592,004</td>
<td>87,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1,182,012</td>
<td>1,063,489</td>
<td>114,931</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Admittedly, the ratio of slaves to the general white population was much lower in Missouri than in other slave states, and many have used this fact in arguing that slavery was, therefore, a relatively minor factor in determining the political disposition of the state. Such an assumption ignores the nature of Missouri slavery. In the cotton states few large planters held most of the slaves whereas in Missouri more people owned smaller parcels of slaves. The average number of slaves owned by masters in Missouri was less than five. The reason for this different pattern is to be found in the economic organization of the state. Missouri was a slave state composed of small

farms, small businesses, and, therefore, small slaveholders. Many of the slaves were personal or household servants. Slaves were used as farm hands, miners, dockworkers, riverboat hands, and in general work about the towns. A system of large plantations simply never developed in Missouri.17

The above description should clearly indicate that slavery was, indeed, a critical political issue in Missouri. Probably more common people were actually directly connected with slavery than their counterparts in the deep South. But even non-slaveholders were committed to the slave system. As Genovese says, "the non-slaveholding counties of Missouri were inhabited by men from other parts of the South who owned no slaves only because they were as yet too poor."18 There is no question that slavery was a pervasive element in Missouri politics.

**Missouri and Texas**

Missouri, Texas annexation, and slavery were inherently bound together. The deep South favored the annexation of the Texas Territory for political reasons but the issue was a personal one for most Missourians. Moses Austin, an early settler in Missouri, had made a fortune in the mining business, and in the 1820's he concluded an agreement with the Mexican Government for the settlement of Texas. The

area was largely unsettled and the Mexicans were anxious to populate it in order to create a buffer against the Indians and to increase tax revenues. The arrangement was lucrative for Austin as well, for every parcel of land he was able to populate the Mexicans granted him an equal parcel. Since Austin was a Missourian he turned to Missouri to locate potential Texas settlers. As a result of the activities of Moses Austin and his son, Stephen, many of the early settlers of Texas were Missourians. Obviously, most Missourians overwhelmingly supported the annexation of Texas and Texas statehood. Missourian historian Eugene M. Violette clearly portrayed the attitudes of Missouri toward Texas:

(There was a) close blood relationship between the people of Missouri and Texas. Shortly after the revolt of Mexico from Spain in the early twenties, Missourians began to migrate to Texas, and by the time Texas had begun her war of independence, there were a goodly number of Missouri colonists in Texas. Moreover, the struggle against Mexico induced a great many more Missourians to join their fortunes with the Texans, so that it is safe to assert that between 1822 and 1836 there were few prominent Missouri families that were not represented in the life of the new state...Missourians were interested in having Texas annexed to the Union, and were willing to engage in war to see that end accomplished.

Therefore, the Texas issue was multidimensional in Missouri. Missouri sympathized with her sister slave states in viewing Texas as a fertile ground for the expansion of slavery, but equally important were the blood ties between the two areas. It is not surprising that


20 Violette, Missouri, pp. 151-2.
Benton's opposition to the Texas Annexation Bill, subsequent territorial bills, and to the expansion of slavery in general produced a massive outpouring of criticism against him in Missouri.

In the election of 1838 Benton received more votes than all of his opponents combined, but in 1844 he was re-elected by only a margin of eight votes. There is little doubt that Benton's position on Texas annexation and slavery extension account for the shift in opinion. Benton survived in 1844 because his position on slavery was unclear to the voters. He had long condemned Calhoun and slavery agitation, but it was not until 1844 that he openly denounced the expansion of slavery into the territories. Therefore, Benton's speeches and votes on Texas represent the first important instance in which he acted contrary to popular opinion in Missouri. His "Godlike image," derived from his past behavior, plus his control of the Democratic Party carried him to a narrow victory in 1844, but by 1849 his slavery position had neutralized his popularity in the state.21

The two most prominent authorities on the slavery dispute in Missouri conclude their studies with the following assessments:

As one might naturally infer from the passage of the Jackson Resolutions, the radical pro-slavery element in Missouri had acquired sufficient strength and courage in 1849 to take the field openly against Benton...a majority of the Newspapers appear to have been anti-Benton.22


It must now appear clear that his position on the slavery issue was in large measure his undoing; he had opposed the proslavery interests of the state. At this period the 'institution' was still too strongly intrenched in state politics to tolerate any attack upon it...23

The public mind in Missouri was totally consumed by the slavery controversy. It became necessary for all candidates for public office to circulate and publish open letters indicating their stand on slavery and Benton. Public meetings were held in every community and public opinion was so divided and inflamed that calm assessment was impossible. Even the Whig party split on the slavery question, the pro-slavery elements going over the Anti-Benton Democrats and the anti-slavery Whigs to the Bentonites. Party labels became totally worthless; the only meaningful distinction was pro-slavery or anti-slavery.

The majority of the newspapers in Missouri were opposed to Benton by 1849 and about half of the Democratic papers were anti-Benton. All of the important political leaders in the state, except for a few in the St. Louis area were working toward his defeat. In editorials and at public meetings throughout the state, Benton was labeled a traitor, apostate, scoundrel, barnburner, abolitionist, and freesoiler. Everywhere Benton's appeal, his course, slavery in the territories and abolitionism were discussed in the most heated fashion. David Atchison, Benton's Democratic colleague in the Senate, was the

leader of the pro-slavery element and canvassed the state in 1849 in opposition to Benton.24

The anti-Benton press reprinted numerous Benton articles and speeches given during the 1820's and suggested that his current contradictory position was motivated by a desire to capture the Presidency in 1852. Perhaps John F. Kennedy has best summarized Benton's status in 1849:

Now he was a man without a party, a politician without a recognized platform, and a Senator without a constituency.25

Ethnic, Religious, and Social Background

After the acquisition of the Louisiana Territory by the United States the Missouri region was rapidly settled. Missouri had a population of 20,845 in 1810 but by 1814 it was more than 25,000. By 1820 the population had grown to more than 66,000. Most of those who settled in Missouri during this period came from Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas. Overall, these new residents were of Scots, Irish, and English extraction, protestant in religious affiliation, and fiercely democratic politically. During the 1840's and 1850's, Germans began to settle in large numbers in St. Louis and the surrounding area. The Germans were largely Catholics and Lutherans;

24Kennedy, Profiles, pp. 176-7.
many had only recently arrived from Europe; and most were strongly opposed to slavery. German immigration to St. Louis County was so heavy that they quickly became a significant political force. In the decade before the Civil War, Missouri Germans actively supported the abolition movement. After 1848 the German communities were political strongholds for Senator Benton; largely because of his outspoken opposition to slavery expansion.26

New settlers arriving in Missouri after the Louisiana Purchase found St. Louis and most of the major settlements controlled politically and racially by French and Spanish aristocrats. Prior to the Purchase, Catholicism was the established religion, was subsidized by the local governmental bodies, and the formal establishment of any other church was prohibited by law. The French and Spanish Catholics looked upon the arrival of scores of Southern slave-holding protestants as a threat to their institutions. Conversely, the new settlers viewed the established social and religious order as elite and undemocratic. It is not surprising to find that Missouri became a stronghold in the 1820's and 1830's of Jacksonian Democracy. During this period Missourians were caught up in the evangelism of the Jacksonians who preached total equality of all citizens. They believed their opinions were important and could produce political results. As a consequence ordinary citizens moved to exert a greater political influence. One of the prime targets

26Violette, Missouri, pp. 74, 85.
of the democrats was the existing aristocracy. In a relatively short period of time many of the old political leaders were turned out of office and replaced by farmers, miners, trappers, etc. The prevailing attitude was that all citizens were competent to fill public offices and should strive to do so.27

Most of the new settlers located in relatively remote areas. As a consequence there were no established schools or churches. Nevertheless, the Missouri frontiersman made every possible effort to see that his children received the best education he could afford. Soon a pattern of rural schools became evident. Often the teachers were poorly qualified, school terms were short, and discipline difficult. In addition to basic training in the "three R's" the Missouri schools stressed the importance of citizenship and the Greek and Roman republics were the primary models. Even though the Missouri backwoodsman was generally uneducated in a formal sense he possessed a fair knowledge of the basic elements of Greek and Roman history and mythology. The frontiersman also recognized that ignorance and inarticulateness emphasized the distinction between the rulers and the ruled, and he acted upon the belief that effective public speaking would increase his sons' opportunity to move up in politics and society. Most of the early Missouri schools came to offer training in rhetoric. In rhetoric as in politics, Greece and Rome provided the examples which the students were taught to revere and emulate.

27Dudley J. Bidstrup, "The Background of Public Speaking in Missouri, 1840-1860," Missouri Historical Review, xxxvi (December, 1941), 133.
Religion also exerted a strong influence upon the spirit, ideas, and education of the Missouri settler. Most of the new residents of Missouri were Baptists, Methodists, or Presbyterians and these fundamentalists stressed that self study of the Bible was necessary to salvation. Therefore, the ability to read and communicate was associated with personal salvation. Circuit riding preachers stressed the importance of education and schools and encouraged community discussion and study of the Bible.\(^2\)

Missourians placed great importance upon public speaking. Their society was largely an oral one characterized by frank and open discussion. The common man believed he had a right, in fact a responsibility, to become politically involved, and to effectively engage in political activities he needed some skill in speaking. The backwoodsman also desired to elevate himself socially as well as politically and he perceived eloquence as one way to attain this end. The Missouri voters respect for education and politics and his fear of a ruling class is reflected in his demand that politicians should explain his actions and speak only from the facts.

The Missouri Concept of Speakers and Speech-Making

The importance of public speaking was clearly recognized by Missourians in the first half of the nineteenth century. An examination

of attitudes toward public speaking and public speakers indicates that the political speaking of the period fulfilled three essential functions.

First, Missourians believed that ability in public speaking was a prerequisite for political office holders. The following excerpt from an editorial appearing in the Franklin Missouri Intelligencer is representative of this belief.

That man who can stand in the legislative hall, clothed with the people's powers, when the best interests of his country are at stake, without being able to do more than grunt out a simple "yes" or "no", who like the startled hare, knows not how to move---who like the sheep before the shearer, opens not his mouth: that man is unfit to represent the majesty of the people.29

Missourians expected an officeholder to defend their interests, and they believed that goal could not be accomplished without some ability in public speaking. It was also expected that the politician would keep the people informed. At election time the candidate was expected to give a full accounting of his behavior.

The typical Missouri voter also viewed public speaking as an activity open to audience participation. It was common practice for members of the audience to hand the speaker written questions to respond to; it was even more common to simply shout out questions during the speech. The audience always let the speaker know their sentiments and reaction to his speech. If they were opposed they booed and hissed; if they agreed they shouted their approval. Bidstrup pictures the

29Franklin Missouri Intelligencer, June 25, 1822.
kind of response an unpopular speaker could expect:

When members of an audience were opposed to the political principles expressed by the speaker, they did all in their power to embarrass him. Heckling was common, especially if the speaker happened to be facing an unfriendly audience.³⁰

The personal aspect of Missouri politics is reflected in the manner in which one Martin Palmer tested the sincerity of Governor Alexander McNair's equalitarian pronouncements. Palmer, a printer, insisted on sharing a bed with McNair so he could tell the people at home that he had slept with the Governor. McNair agreed to the request rather than taking a chance on generating a political issue.³¹

The second function of speaking on the Missouri frontier was that of promoting the education of the listeners. The pioneer sincerely believed that speechmaking was an essential element of the educational process. The Missouri Almanac of 1848 advised parents:

Your children's scholarship depends more on what books you furnish them with, and on how much good public speaking they hear, than on how much schooling you give them.³²

But speaking was also for adults. Much of the common man's knowledge of government came from the speeches he heard. Political figures of the period claimed that they packed their speeches with specific facts because their constituents demanded it. Press announcements of speaking events commonly promised that the speaker would "speak

³⁰Bidstrup, "Background," 136.
³¹McCurdy, Stump, p. 136
³²Quoted in McCurdy, Stump, p. 14.
only from the facts." McCurdy argues that "Benton's encyclopedic speeches in the United States Senate were filled with facts and figures, and, in this respect, he had his counterparts on the frontier." Eastern visitors to the Missouri Legislature commented on their surprise at the sophisticated content of the speeches given there.33

The third function of public speaking on the Missouri frontier was that of entertainment. A public speech, especially one involving a famous personality, was an event not to be missed. Work stopped, the entire family dressed in their finest clothing, and parades and town celebrations generally preceded the actual speech. Speaking events were frequently used as excuses for drinking and fighting as well. The following graphic account provided by Judge Leigh Woodside, of Reynolds County, indicates the nature of excesses that often accompanied political speeches:

On the day that a grand jury convened at Centerville Colonel Benton spoke before a crowd that frequently hissed him with a cry of "Abolitionist." In those days no public speech was given unless there was a table, and on that table was a bucket of cold spring water, a bucket of pure corn whiskey...each man helped himself at will...The grand jury had been dismissed for Benton's speech and at its conclusion the jury foreman thrust his head in the door of the courtroom and shouted, 'Judge, you can adjourn court. All the grand jury is drunk but me and we can't do a damned thing today.'34

Frances McCurdy claims that whenever a crowd congregated a fight was likely to follow. The combat was brutal, "with their

33Quoted In McCurdy, Stump, pp. 91, 113.
34Springfield, Missouri Advertizer, March 5, 1922.
thumbs gladiators gouged out opponents eyes: they bit off noses, ears, or chunks of flesh from their adversaries. The best and most respected man in the community was the one who had whipped all the rest.  

The coarse behavior of the Missouri audience was often equaled by the speakers. The audience was likely to be disappointed if a political speaker did not wage a bitter and personal attack on his opponent. The typical campaigner "filled his speeches with low and vulgar epithets, which he freely applied to the opposition party and its representatives." In an era when cholera was common, politicians spoke of the infection in a rival candidate or party and "likened their opponents to carrion rotting with the disease." They called upon Hell and Satan to castigate the opposition, and "they condemned what they disliked in terms of adultery, illegitimacy, and miscegenation." One of the most popular stories of the 1840's involved the dispute between Thomas Hart Benton and Judge James Birch. In a public speech, Birch called Benton "a thief, a murderer, and a father of Negroes." Benton in turn accused Birch of being "a sheepkilling cur dog who had beaten his wife when she objected to his having a Negro mistress."  

In addition to launching bitter personal attacks on opponents, Missouri stump speakers went to great lengths in praising themselves. The sophisticated New Englander, Timothy Flint was appalled at the "unblushing effrontery of candidates who mounted the stump and declared

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35 McCurdy, Stump, p. 7.

36 Authority for the above paragraph is to be found in Bldstrup, "Background," p. 139, 158 and McCurdy, Stump, p. 89.
that they alone were competent to make the laws and direct the affairs of government." Flint could not understand how a politician could make such statements and not offend his listeners, but after an examination of the Missouri audience he concluded: "that the more imprudent a man appeared the greater were his chances of success."\(^{37}\) Evidently, the audience expected, in fact appreciated, such behavior.

The Missouri audience also expected the stump speaker to employ a liberal number of Biblical quotations and examples and illustrations based on Greek and Roman history. The typical Missouri pioneer believed the Bible to be the "word of God" and an all encompassing guide for all human endeavors, including politics. Missourians were intensely democratic and the democracies of Greece and Rome were viewed as important models. Speeches of the period were filled with classical allusions and examples, and Philip of Macedon and Caesar were used as examples of the decline of civilization when despots gained control.

An examination of speeches delivered on political questions indicate that a speech two hours in length was not at all unusual, and talks of substantially greater length are not infrequently mentioned in the press. The extreme length of political speeches would seem to indicate a genuine fondness for the activity.

It was common practice for political speakers to limit their speeches to a single theme. The pattern followed was for a town, com-

\(^{37}\) McCurdy, *Stump*, p. 89.
munity, or organization to formally invite the candidate to speak, and this invitation generally indicated a proposed topic or theme that was favored by the sponsors. In 1844, Benton limited his speeches to consideration of Texas annexation, in 1849 he dealt exclusively with the Jackson Resolution, and in 1856 most of his speeches dealt with either the Compromise of 1850 or the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

The Missouri speakers of the early and mid 1800's consciously attempted to adapt to their audiences. One of the most obvious attempts at such adaptation is to be found in the nature of language. Even highly educated men who ordinarily practiced a more elevated language employed the language of the common man when speaking at home. Political speakers consistently chose illustrations from everyday life and spoke in the common vernacular when they addressed their constituents. However, it should be noted that the admiration of the nineteenth century for ornate style and literary allusions carried over even into frontier Missouri. Delivery placed great stress upon expansive figures of speech but the figures were related to familiar experiences. McCurdy offers the following examples:

A speaker could accuse a man who attempted to push a measure past the opposition of trying to ride the community booted and spurred, or he might comment that a controlling faction was in the saddle and be fully understood by his audience. Borrowing terms from the domestic side of life, speechmakers personified the state as a mother, counties as members of a family, the West as an infant. Representatives from frontier counties accused leaders in the assembly of treating their districts like stepchildren and making a house pet of St. Louis. When men refused to sanction a bill, they termed it a bastard
bill or declared they would not stand godfather for the measure.  

Similar figures were based on agricultural, racial, geographic, and historical themes.

There is little doubt that public speaking, especially political speaking, was one of the most popular activities on the Missouri frontier. This popularity is reflected in press coverage and popular attendance of such events. Many speeches were presented in the press in their entirety, and comments on speakers and speech-making were usually on the front page. People would often travel hundreds of miles often in wagons or by foot, to hear well known political figures speak. "Even the ordinary legislator frequently drew an audience of interested citizens, who sat in the gallery and applauded a telling phrase or popular sentiment."  

Bidstrup concludes his study of public speaking in Missouri by claiming that Thomas Hart Benton was a typical Missouri speaker. He offers numerous examples in showing that Benton employed the tactics and methods discussed above. He concludes:

His force, his vigor, his use of bitter invective, his fearlessness, his long speeches, his general demeanor while on the platform—all combined to make him a truly representative speaker of the period from 1840-1860.

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38 McCurdy, Stump, pp. 115-6.

39 For a complete examination of the popularity of political speaking see Bidstrup, "Background," 140-3 and McCurdy, Stump, pp. 105-8.

40 Bidstrup, "Background," 156.
Conclusion

An examination of the various audiences to which Benton directed his appeals demonstrates that they were generally hostile to the speaker and his cause. This hostility began to develop about 1844 and gained consistently in intensity until Benton's public career ended. In overview, Benton was opposed by almost all of the South, his own party, the Northern abolitionists, and a growing number of his constituents in Missouri. His sole support came from a limited number of moderates who found it expedient to defend slavery where it was already in existence but opposed its further spread into the territories. During the period in question, this group composed only a very small minority.

A survey of the immediate Missouri audience indicates that a majority of voters and legislators were in opposition to Benton by 1849 on the question of slavery. An analysis of Missouri audiences shows that they were rather crude and unsophisticated. They expected speakers to provide entertainment as well as information. However, Missourians of the period expected the political speaker to argue from the facts and they held him accountable for his political behavior. In reference to his audiences' background and education the effective political speaker confined his examples and illustrations to the familiar.

In subsequent chapters Benton's appeals and approaches to each of the audiences described in this section will be examined in detail.
CHAPTER FOUR

BENTON'S MODES OF PROOF

Introduction

Thomas Hart Benton's slavery speeches contain a mixture of the three traditional modes of proof: logical, emotional, and ethical, but even a superficial examination of these speeches clearly establishes that Benton perceived logical appeals to be far more important than the other two varieties. The most important single characteristic of Benton's rhetoric is the primacy of logical proofs. Benton's personal comments on rhetoric leave no doubt that his reliance upon logical proof arose from a predetermined design and not from accident or ignorance of other devices. In 1840 he wrote:

We live in an age of intelligence and activity, and when the public mind is powerfully directed to objects of utility. In speaking to such a people, I concluded that...I could dispense with all except the facts, and the application of the facts, cemented and enforced with reason...My speeches were stripped of ornament, stinted of phrases, and crowded with material. They were brimful of facts and reasons; and this was a compliment to the intelligence of the age in which I lived. The compliment was not misapplied.1

1Congressional Globe, January, 1840, 26th Cong., 1st. sess., Appendix, 119.
Subsequent topics to be covered in this and other chapters will indicate that the above assessment is not completely accurate, but it does correctly portray the primary position of "facts and reasoning" in all of Benton's speeches.

Most of the contemporary accounts of the period stress Benton's reliance upon logical proofs. Magoon felt that Benton's greatest strength as orator was his ability "to bring to bear upon his subject," as "accumulation of facts."\(^2\) The United States Magazine and Democratic Review commented:

\[\ldots\]

Collier described Benton as a "walking library"; Reavis thought this speeches were characterized by "boldness, logic, and incontrovertible facts;" Judge Scharf remembered Benton's speeches because they were "crammed with figures and blazing with invective;" and Grissom thought Benton's instructive, fact-filled speeches were instrumental in determining the nature of the settlement and development of the West.\(^4\)

Historians and rhetorical critics have rendered similar assess-


\(^3\)Political Portraits with Pen and Pencil, "The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, 1 (October, 1837), 90.

\(^4\)Authority for the above is to be found in L. T. Collier, "Recollections of Thomas Hart Benton," Missouri Historical Review, VIII
ments. Rogers thought Benton was a master of logic and claimed that his analysis of the Dred Scott decision completely demolished Taney's rationale. Meigs noted Benton's extensive and effective use of illustrations and examples and concluded that even his longest speeches merit careful reading because of their content.\(^5\) Mattis provided what is probably the clearest and most accurate description of the central feature of Benton's rhetoric:

"...his great superiority in the logical department of rhetoric lay in the massing of evidence to support the assertions that analysis produced. With scholarly instinct he sought primary sources...Benton went to the fountainhead, which consisted of treaties, geographies, maps, annals of explorers, government reports, and statistical tables, legislative records, diplomatic correspondence, official journals and minutes, speeches letters, memoirs, constitutions, laws and judicial opinions. No pains dismayed him when he wished to equip himself to legislate intelligently or even to track down a single fact...To supplement the research of the library, he could draw upon a reservoir of information acquired at first hand, or from those who had it at first hand.\(^6\)"

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An examination of Benton's slavery speeches employed in this study indicates that roughly 50 to 75 percent of the printed text, depending upon the particular speech, consists of logical arguments, data supporting these arguments, and interpretation and summary.

Benton also employed emotional and ethical appeals but these devices are used much less frequently than logical appeals and consequently consume substantially less of the written texts of the speeches in question. Lewis concluded that Benton employed a substantial number of emotional appeals but that such arguments were used to emphasize and color his logical arguments. As a result a pattern emerged in which "Benton followed his logical arguments with appeals to the emotions." Lewis felt that Benton's pathetic appeals were characterized by highly slanted language used in conjunction with logical appeals. For example, in his struggle against the Bank of the United States Benton argued that the Bank was an economic monopoly with the power to control the entire economy. Benton demonstrates the economic power of the Bank by providing a huge volume of economic data but concludes by referring to the institution as "the sucking vampire," "the hydra-headed monster," "a bloated oligarch," etc. Lewis thought much of Benton's impact during the "bank crisis" resulted from his ability to convince the voters that the Bank constituted a threat to democracy and the economic welfare of the nation.7 Essentially the same pattern can be noted in Benton's

slavery speeches.

It is normal to assume that a supreme egotist such as Benton would make extensive use of ethical or personal proof. The most surprising aspect of Benton's use of ethical proof is that he employed it so infrequently. Both Seelen and Lewis specifically commented on the lack of ethical proof in the speeches they examined. Lewis found Benton's attempts at ethos building limited to attempts to identify himself with "individuals, groups, and causes which he felt bore good will" and to portray himself as a "hardworking legislator who had seriously contemplated the subject under consideration." Benton's attempts to appear as a well-informed legislator again demonstrate his preoccupation with factual content and logical processes.

Attention is now directed toward Benton's utilization of the modes of proof in the slavery speeches selected for evaluation. Greatest stress will be placed upon an examination of Benton's logical proofs in so much as they constitute the heart of his rhetoric and undoubtedly account for much of the effect of the speeches. This writer is aware that numerous devices and models are available to the critic in classifying and analyzing argument. This study will place primary reliance upon the modified Toulmin system of functional analysis as devised by Ehninger and Brockriede. The unique advantages of the system were

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explained by Ehninger and Brockriede in the introduction of their text, *Decision By Debate*:

Traditional Aristotelian logic provides an imperfect description of how men actually reason today in argumentative controversies. A more accurate and useful logic for today may be inferred from the formulations of the contemporary English logician Stephen Toulmin.

Personal and emotional proofs, no less than logical proofs, are relevant to critical decisions. An extension of Toulmin's analysis of argument provides a formula whereby personal, emotional, and logical proofs may be reduced to a common structure and made subject to comparable tests. The debater is thus able to bring all three modes of artistic proof within the framework of critical controversy.9

It is felt that such a model is particularly suited to an examination of Benton's modes of proof in that the model specifically provides for an assessment of the inter-relationship of evidence and argument. The system also forces the critic to seek the underlying principle of logic, motive, or assumption which connects the evidence and the conclusion. In addition, the concepts of reservations and qualifiers specifically require an assessment of the degree of probability which the speaker assumes his claim or conclusion to possess. Diagramatically

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9Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede, *Decision By Debate* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1963), pp. vii-viii. The Ehninger and Brockriede layout of argument is derived from Stephen E. Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958). Much of what Ehninger and Brockriede include in their system is only implied in Toulmin's work, including the application of the model to various forms of logical proof and the entirety of emotional and ethical proof. Ehninger and Brockriede also have significantly modified, and added new elements to, Toulmin's original explanation of argument. For these reasons this writer elected to employ the modified Toulmin system of analysis specifically designed for rhetorical critics.
the model appears as follows:

\[ \text{(E)vidence} \rightarrow \text{(Q)ualifier} \rightarrow \text{Therefore (C)laim} \]

Since \( (W)arrant \)

Unless \( (R)eservations \)

Because \( (B)ackground \)

This system of analysis views argument as a movement from evidence or data presented, through a warrant, to a claim or conclusion. "Data answers the question, what have you got to go on," and is therefore what is generally referred to as evidence. "Claim corresponds to conclusion and warrant is the operational name given to that part of an argument which authorizes the mental leap involved in advancing from evidence to claim." The warrant functions in answering the question, how do you get there (from evidence to claim). Either the claim or evidence may be issued first in an argument. If evidence is offered first "the claim contains or implies therefore." If the claim is issued first it "contains or implies because."

Evidence, warrant, and claim constitute the three essential elements in the unit of proof and are always present either implicitly.
or explicitness in any argument. Three other elements may or may not be present depending upon the requirements of the argument and the audience. Backing or support for the warrant is additional information or credentials that "certify the assumption expressed in the warrant." Backing becomes necessary when the audience is unlikely to accept the warrant as presented. The qualifier is that part of the unit of proof which forces a consideration of probability. The qualifier generally consists of such terms as "certainly," "probably," "presumably," "possibly," etc. The purpose of the qualifier is "to register the degree of force which the maker believes his claim to possess." The reservations require a specific listing and evaluation of situations or conditions "under which the claim will not hold good or will hold good only in a qualified and restricted way. The reservations determine the type of qualifier required.°

It is felt that this format is highly usable in a study which specifically attempts a detailed evaluation of all forms of proof and argument. Such a system is especially applicable to Benton's rhetoric which placed primary stress on argument and marshalled literally dozens of evidence citations in support of each particular argument. The modified Toulmin layout makes it possible to apply the same model and terminology to all three modes of proof. It is obviously impossible to

°The above description of the function of argument is based upon Wayne Brockriede and Douglas Ehninger, "Toulmin on Argument: An Interpretation and Application," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLVI (February, 1960), 44-53. This article provides a much more concise explanation than Decision By Debate.
diagram each of Benton's arguments. Therefore, representative arguments will be diagramed and the remaining crucial arguments will be examined by means of the Toulmin rationale but without specific diagrams of each argument.

Logical Proof

In examining Benton's logical proofs an attempt will be made to: (1) isolate the key arguments constituting his slavery positions; (2) classify these arguments as to type; (3) identify and examine the kinds of supporting evidence employed; (4) evaluate the logical validity of Benton's arguments.

General Techniques

Benton seems to have been sincere in the belief that there was no political or legal basis for the slavery agitation which dominated the political scene from 1844 until the time of his death. In Benton's mind the issue was settled once and forever by the Constitution, court decisions, and past acts of Congress (especially the Missouri Compromise). He believed all parties obligated to obey the law as it existed. Given such a philosophy Benton tended to reduce propositions of policy to propositions of fact. The question was not what slavery policy should be legislated but rather what is the slavery policy. Large segments of all of Benton's slavery speeches deal with explanations and inter-
interpretations of laws and acts in force. In short, he argued that the facts clearly indicated the legal status of slavery and that arguments over policy were unnecessary and in fact smacked of illegality. Later in his career he pointed to the blessings of the Union and predicted grave consequences if the Union were destroyed. Again the propositions were totally factual in nature. The Union provided economic strength and compatibility. This economic power in turn made the United States a world economic and military power. If the Union is divided, the economics of both sections will suffer gravely and the world position of each will decline, leaving them exposed to foreign exploitation. All of these propositions were, in Benton's thinking, capable of proof by incontrovertible facts. There was really no room for probabilities or contingencies in Benton's assessment of slavery and the Union. He saw only blacks and whites with no shades of grey in between and his arguments and conclusions were, therefore, absolute. Benton's slavery position developed progressively between 1844 and 1858. His first break with the South came in response to the Texas question but as new territory was acquired and the issues became more complex and volatile, Benton was forced to expand and adapt his arguments to fit new conditions and issues.
In the course of the debate over the Texas Annexation Bill, Benton advanced the following major propositions:

1. All reasonable citizens wish to see Texas returned to the Union.
2. Southern men, led by John C. Calhoun, were responsible for the loss of Texas in 1819.
3. The slavery issue as it pertains to Texas has already been settled; there is no point to further argument.
4. Calhoun seized on to the Texas question and connected it to slavery in an attempt to promote disunion and enhance his own political power.
5. It is to the advantage of the United States to preserve good will with Mexico.
6. My method of annexation will secure Texas, end the slavery dispute, and maintain good will with Mexico.

Benton recognized that the first proposition was already accepted by all parties to the dispute and that it was unnecessary to provide support.

In developing proposition two Benton's evidence consisted of the reading of a statement recently made by John Quincy Adams on the floor of the House in which Adams placed the blame for the cession of

The above arguments are paraphrased summaries of the most important propositions and data employed by Benton in his Speech on the Annexation of Texas, Delivered In the United States Senate, May 16, 18, and 20, 1844 (Washington: Printed by the Congressional Globe office, 1844); and Speech on the Texas Annexation Bill: A Reply to Mr. McDuffie, Delivered in the United States Senate, June 15, 1844 (Washington: Printed by the Gideon office, 1844). Copies of both these speeches are to be found in the Library of the Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia.
Texas in 1819 "on the majority of Mr. Monroe's cabinet, especially John C. Calhoun." The Adams' pronouncement constituted Benton's only evidence for the allegation. Diagramatically the argument appears:

(E) Adams says that the blame for the cession of Texas in 1819 belongs to "the majority of Mr. Monroe's cabinet, especially Calhoun."

Therefore (C) Southern leaders, especially Calhoun, are responsible for the initial loss of Texas in 1819.

Since (W) (implied) Adams' testimony is credible.

It should be noted that Benton does not consider any potential reservations and provides no qualifier; the conclusion or claim is absolute.

The credibility of the argument rests entirely upon the testimony of Adams who was, himself, the negotiator of the treaty in question.

The units of proof supporting proposition three appear as:

(E) One-half of the territory to be acquired lies in areas where slavery has never existed.

Therefore, (C) slavery should not be introduced into these areas.

Since (W) Slavery should not be established where it does not already exist.
Benton's slavery arguments appear extremely weak as expressed above. The warrants in the first two arguments are controversial, but Benton made no attempt to provide backing or support. In the final, and most crucial argument, he does not even provide a warrant. The connection between evidence and claim is left entirely to the imagination of the listener or reader. It seems that Benton is implying that past precedent should dictate where slavery can or cannot be expanded, but the warrant, and subsequently the entire argument, is unclear.

Benton attempts to establish proposition four by citing examples of inconsistent behavior on Calhoun's part. For example, he claims that Calhoun voted to give away Texas in 1819 but now argues that Texas is so vital that disunion will result if it is not acquired.
Secondly, Calhoun supported a treaty which established a joint British and American force to regulate the slave trade, but now claims that Britain wishes to forge an alliance with Mexico designed to free slaves in Texas. For evidence of these acts Benton again refers to the Adams' statement blaming Calhoun for the treaty of 1819 and cites Calhoun's vote favoring the British-American treaty. Benton goes on to claim that Calhoun is deliberately plotting disunion. Benton's evidence here takes the form of more examples: Calhoun's supporters are inciting the South with the cry of Texas or disunion and Calhoun himself is testifying to the reality of the British-Mexican conspiracy to abolish slavery. Benton then claims that Calhoun's assessment of British intentions are false and trumped-up and cites assurances from the British government that it has no intent to intervene in the Texas slavery dispute. He goes on to cite statistics demonstrating the economic importance of both the United States and Mexico to Britain and claims that it is absurd to assume that Britain would risk this arrangement for all the Texanses in the world. In concluding, Benton weaves all of these secondary arguments into support of his major proposition.
Therefore, (C) The Texas dispute is a disunion plot deliberately initiated by Calhoun.

Calhoun has acted inconsistently in regard to Texas; he has acted inconsistently in assessing foreign relations; he has trumped-up false charges against Britain to scare the United States into annexation; he has rekindled the slavery crisis by tying the issue to Texas; and he has led the South to cry Texas or disunion.

Since (W) (Implied)
Such actions are clear signs of a disunion plot, only a man who is determined to destroy the Union would engage in such acts.

Again, Benton's warrant is weak. Many who were involved with the cession of Texas and the Missouri Compromise had changed their positions, including Benton. However, Calhoun was unable to explain or prove his charges against Britain, and Benton continued to press the argument. The greatest weakness of the series of arguments is that Benton consistently fails to provide backing for his warrants or qualifiers upon his claims.

Benton marshals volumes of economic data to support proposition five. For example he cites statistical evidence demonstrating the importance of the Mexican market in buying United States exports and the reliance of the United States upon Mexico for certain products. Having established his claim that Mexico is economically important Benton moves
to a consequent argument which claims that the ratification of the Annexation Bill would result in war and estrangement from Mexico and thereby a loss of all economic benefits. This series of arguments is clearly developed. The statistical data are impressive and Benton clearly establishes a causal link in the warrant.

Finally in proposition six, Benton argued that his substitute bill would gain Texas but avoid the evils of the Calhoun Annexation Bill. Benton felt a slavery crisis could be averted by splitting slave and non-slave areas. Such a proposal was consistent with Benton's opposition to the expansion of slavery into non-slave areas. It was, however, incidental that this guideline divided the territory equally between the two factions. Benton also argued that his bill would avert war because it provided for a negotiated settlement with Mexico and followed the Texas boundary lines recognized by Mexico (a substantially smaller area of land than provided for by the bill under consideration). Benton's warrant rested upon what was perhaps a naive assumption - that Mexico would be so pleased by legal negotiations and the loss of a smaller parcel of territory that she would peacefully accede to a treaty. In any case Benton was unable to provide any backing indicating that Mexico would agree to such an arrangement. In spite of such weaknesses Benton claimed that his measure would solve these complicated problems without qualification.

The most striking conclusion resulting from an examination of Benton's arguments on Texas is that the arguments certainly do not
appear to be the work of a "master logician." in general the arguments are incomplete, poorly supported, and consequently weak. It should be noted, however, that the Texas debate represents Benton's first repudiation of slavery expansion and his first real recognition of a threat to the Union. During this period his new slavery position was in infancy. A growing sophistication and consistency is evident in subsequent speeches.

**Slavery Resolutions and New Territories**

The legislative climate between 1844 and 1849 was characterized by a constitutional debate over slavery which produced growing antagonism on both sides. The focal point of the controversy was marked by the introduction of the Calhoun Resolutions in late 1847. These resolutions totally denied the right of Congress to legislate upon slavery in the new territories and claimed the right of secession if slavery rights were interfered with legislatively. Benton attacked the resolutions in the Senate and violated a directive from the Missouri Legislature in finally voting against them. All of Benton's major speeches, both in Missouri and in the Senate, were directed toward a consideration of the legal basis of the Calhoun Resolutions. Since the arguments in all of these speeches are similar a general evaluation will be undertaken, rather than a speech by speech evaluation. Benton's logical proofs during 1849-1850 were designed to support the following
main propositions:12

(1) Northern members of Congress, who have long controlled one or both houses, have treated the South fairly in the past and have no intent of abolishing slavery in the states.

Benton consistently attempted to establish this proposition by arguing from generalization. Essentially, he provided a series of examples of legislative acts favorable to slavery, where it already existed, and generalized that these acts were representative of Congressional opinion. Benton generally provided extensive examples in supporting his position but the following specimens illustrate his approach.

Votes of Northern Congressmen:
modified the original Missouri Compromise line to allow the slaveholding Platte Country to remain a part of Missouri; acquired Texas and maintained slavery there; acquired Florida by treaty and sustained the institution of slavery; expanded slave territory by removing the Indians from large parcels of land the South; etc.

Therefore, (C) Northern members of Congress have treated the South fairly and have demonstrated that they have no desire to abolish slavery where it already exists.

Since (W)
These examples are representative of the slavery attitude of Congress.

12Arguments representing the period 1849-1850 were summarized from Speech Delivered at Jefferson City, Missouri, May 26, 1849, Jefferson Inquirer, May 26, 1849; Speech Delivered at Fayette, Missouri, September 1, 1849; (Jefferson City, Missouri: James Lusk, Printer,
In the course of his speeches Benton carefully explained each of the above examples employed as evidence and bolstered them with citations from the debates of Congress, personal recollection, quotations from appropriate treaties, etc. In short, he made every possible effort to insure that his audiences would accept every element of evidence.

(2) **The origin and design of the current slavery agitation is to be found in the activities and ambition of John C. Calhoun.**

In Benton's mind disunion, slavery agitation, and Calhoun were synonymous terms. In each of his speeches, up until Calhoun's death, Benton claimed that Calhoun was almost single-handedly responsible for the slavery crisis. As a consequence Benton devoted large portions of his speeches to a series of sub-propositions aimed at tying, at least a large part of the blame for the crisis to Calhoun. These sub-arguments generally took the following form: (A) The nullification crisis was designed to promote disunion. (B) When nullification failed in the tariff crisis Calhoun applied it to a more volatile issue - slavery. (C) The Southern Address drafted by a conclave of Southern leaders is the same as the nullification doctrine expounded fourteen years before. (D) The Southern Address is the program of the present slave agitation, and the present scheme for a Southern convention, and a Southern con-

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1849); Speech Against Tacking Anything to the California State Admission Bill, Delivered in the United States Senate, April 22, 1850 (Washington: Printed by the Congressional Globe office, 1850); and Anti-Compromise Speech, Delivered in the United States Senate, June 20, 1850 (Washington: Printed by the Congressional Globe office, 1850). Copies of all except the first speech are to be found in the Library of the Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia.
federacy. (E) The Southern Address and the Calhoun Resolutions are the same. Benton attempted to establish each of these points by citing: Calhoun's votes in the Senate, quotations from Calhoun's speeches and writings, press assessments, and testimony of numerous individuals. Literally dozens of pieces of information are offered as support. For example, Benton employed the *Journal of the Senate* in proving that Calhoun voted for a high protective tariff early in his career. He then read a section of one of Calhoun's speeches defending a high protective tariff and concludes by noting Calhoun's total opposition to the Tariff of 1832. Benton then questions the motives behind such a shift by reading a letter from one of Calhoun's fellow South Carolinians who claimed that the real purpose of the nullification crisis was to build disunion sentiment. Finally, Benton read an article from a Charleston newspaper entitled "Crisis" which provided a legal blueprint for secession in 1835. Benton clinches the series of arguments by demonstrating that Calhoun was probably the author of "Crisis."

In the second sub-proposition Benton argues that the methodology and disunion remedy suggested in the "Crisis" article is the basis of the rationale of the *Southern Address*. Benton's evidence for this argument consists of a meticulous plank by plank comparison of the two documents. Having completed a striking comparison Benton claimed that the current agitation, passage of state pro-slavery resolutions, and defense of secession followed precisely the blueprint provided in "Crisis" and later in the *Southern Address*. Again, he relies on
specific comparisons and parallel cases in establishing his claim.
Benton ends his indictment of Calhoun by demonstrating that the *Southern Address* and the Calhoun Resolutions are substantively the same.

Benton carefully moves from evidence to sub-arguments or propositions to the major proposition. Evidently, satisfied that his audiences would accept the secondary claims Benton used these claims as evidence for the proposition. The final phase of the argumentative process appears as:

(E) Calhoun promoted the nullification crisis in an attempt to generate disunion sentiment; he ultimately applied the doctrine of nullification to slavery; he drafted a blueprint for secession as early as 1835; he has reaffirmed this philosophy and blueprint in the *Southern Address* and the Calhoun Resolutions.

Therefore, (C) the origin and design of the current slavery agitation is found in the activities and ambition of John C. Calhoun.

Since

(W) The implied warrant expresses causation, i.e., the activities described in (E) were of significant magnitude to produce (cause) in the slavery crisis.

(3) The Jackson Resolutions passed by the Missouri Legislature are mere copies of the Calhoun Resolutions.

Benton’s primary burden in Missouri in 1849-1850 consisted of offsetting the effects of his denunciation of the Calhoun Resolutions and refusal to obey the instructions of the legislature. As a conse-
quence all of his Missouri speeches include an attempt to tie local agitation to the national pattern already described. Overall, he tried to convince Missouri voters of the existence of a Southern disunion plot headed by Calhoun and that the Jackson Resolutions were a manifestation of that plot. Benton generally issued all of the arguments previously discussed but inserted proposition three. Normally he demonstrated the similarity of the Calhoun and Jackson Resolutions by pointing out parallel provisions and language. Benton connected Calhoun directly to the Jackson Resolutions by quoting correspondence and testimony which indicated that Calhoun's followers were in contact with pro-slavery elements in Missouri. Benton was able to produce at least one letter written by Calhoun in which he advised his Missouri followers that Benton could be defeated if the resolutions passed the legislature and he repudiated them.

(4) **Calhoun's past legislative activities prove that he recognizes the Constitutional right of Congress to either establish or prohibit slavery in the territories.**

Benton presented the following arguments in support of this proposition: (A) Calhoun supported the Missouri Compromise in 1820. (B) In 1848 he voted to amend the Oregon Territorial Bill to provide for the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific. (C) He voted to extend the slavery line of the Ordinance of 1787 into upper Louisiana in the Minnesota Bill. Benton presented voluminous and impressive evidence in support of each argument. His treatment of Calhoun's Missouri Compromise position is representative of the method-
President Monroe's Proclamation of the Missouri Compromise indicates that the President had the complete support of his cabinet (of which Calhoun was a member). Subsequent testimony by Monroe and other members of the cabinet shows that Calhoun supported the group decision, etc. (Benton read directly from each of the sources indicated above).

Since President Monroe and the others cited are trustworthy - reliable sources.

Benton follows the same procedure in establishing the remaining supportive arguments. His evidence consisted of testimony, public records, and the Congressional Globe. Most of the evidence cited was highly specific. For example, in discussing Calhoun's vote on the amendment to the Oregon Bill Benton quoted the "Congressional Globe reporting the vote of Thursday night, August 10, 1848, page 1061." The relationship of the supporting arguments to the main proposition appears diagramatically as:
Calhoun supported the Missouri Compromise in 1820; He voted to amend the Oregon Territorial Bill to provide for the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific; He voted to extend the slavery line of the Ordinance of 1787 into upper Louisiana in the Minnesota Bill.

Since (W) (Implied)
Each of these acts either excluded or institutionalized slavery in specific territorial areas and it is presumed that a legislator sworn to uphold the Constitution would not vote for, or support, an illegal act.

(5) All branches and levels of government have consistently recognized the power of Congress to legislate on the question of slavery.

Benton, again, employs a series of examples and generalizations in support of proposition five. In attempting to prove his contention Benton developed five subordinate arguments: (A) Over a period of sixty years, Congress has exercised the power twelve times. (B) Nine presidents have sanctioned this power by signing and enforcing such territorial bills. (C) The Supreme Court of the United States has upheld the Constitutionality of such Congressional Acts. (D) The General Assembly of Missouri has recognized this power of Congress. (E) The Missouri Supreme Court has also upheld this right of the Federal Congress.
Benton's specific evidence for the above arguments takes the form of precedent citation. He specifically enumerates the slavery provisions of various territorial bills, quotes valous presidents to the legality of such legislation, reads favorable opinions of both the United States and Missouri Supreme Courts, and demonstrates that the Missouri Legislature granted the power of Congress to legislate on slavery in accepting the provisions of the Missouri Compromise. The assumed establishment of these arguments supports the primary proposition in the following argument from generalization:

(E) Congress has exercised its power to regulate slavery in the territories 12 times in the past 60 years; nine presidents have sanctioned this power; The Supreme Court has upheld this power; The general assembly of Missouri has recognized this power of Congress; The Missouri Supreme Court has upheld this right of Congress.

Therefore, (C) All branches and levels of government have recognized the power of Congress to legislate on slavery in the territories.

Since (W) (Implied)
These acts and decisions are representative of the opinions of the Congress, the Presidency, the courts and the Missouri Assembly.
Congress has the power to legislate on slavery but has no slave territory left in which to exercise it. The question has already been settled and the current dispute is about nothing.

In this argument Benton is claiming that past acts of Congress and foreign governments have already resolved the slavery issue in all the territories the United States possesses or is likely to possess. Benton methodically produced volumes of evidence aimed at proving (1) in Louisiana North and West of Missouri, slavery was abolished by Congress in 1820. (2) In the territory North of Wisconsin, now Minnesota, slavery was abolished by the Jefferson Proviso of 1787. (3) In Oregon it was abolished by Congress in 1848. (4) In New Mexico and California it was abolished by the Mexican government in 1829 and reconfirmed in 1837 and 1844. Benton evidently felt that his audience needed to be informed as to the slavery laws of Mexico and consequently read, verbatim, lengthy sections from the Mexican statutes abolishing slavery. Benton’s major argument or proposition therefore appears as:
The United States and Mexico have already enacted laws establishing or prohibiting slavery in all of what is now United States territory. Therefore, (C) the slavery issue is settled; the current arguments are over nothing; Congress has no territorial possessions left in which the question of slavery has not been resolved.

**Since**

(W)

(Implied and unclear)

Slavery laws already enacted should not be changed and slavery cannot be introduced where it has never existed or abolished where it already exists.

The implied warrant for this argument represents what is probably the weakest link in Benton's slavery arguments. He used the same type of argument during the Texas dispute and obviously Congress did establish slavery where it had never existed and in spite of the same Mexican laws. Benton does not even explicitly provide the warrant let alone support for it, and the reasoning is unclear. It would appear to most that if Congress has the power to legislate on slavery it also has the power to repeal or modify a prior law, unless slavery laws are somehow different from other laws. Also, Benton never attempts to explain how, or why, Mexican law was binding on the United States Congress.
(7) The South is moving toward secession.

All of Benton's arguments are tied in one way or another to his contention that an unchecked slavery agitation would lead to disunion. For this argument to have impact it was necessary to demonstrate that secession and disunion were real, rather than philosophical, possibilities. As a consequence Benton always devoted a substantial amount of time to proving that the South would secede if the slavery issue was not settled. For evidence of Southern intent, Benton quoted secession articles carried in the Southern press, disunion toasts offered at public ceremonies, and especially resolutions (similar to the Missouri Jackson Resolutions) passed by Southern legislatures. Benton connected his evidence and claims by asserting that such pronouncements were representative of Southern thought (generalization) and were symptoms or signs of impending secession.

During the Compromise Debate of 1850 Benton continued to press the body of arguments previously examined, but he also developed a new legal argument which attacked the heart of the Compromise - the grouping of various statehood and territorial bills into a broad slavery compromise. Benton's general position is expressed in the proposition:

(8) There is no law, parliamentary rule, or precedent which permits a legislative body to join incongruous bills or measures together.

In evidencing this claim Benton turned to both British and American precedent and testimony. In attempting to prove that such a procedure has never been employed in Parliament Benton quoted: six
complete paragraphs from Hatsell's *Collection of Parliamentary Precedents*, the observations of Lord Chancellor Finch, a speech given by Sir G. Downing a member of the House of Commons, three other speeches given in the House of Commons, the Committee of Ways and Means of the House of Lords, and the *Commentaries* of Sir William Blackstone. Turning to American precedents, Benton quoted Jefferson's *Manual* and House Rule number 43. Benton carefully qualifies each source and relates the series of precedents discussed to the provisions of the valous compromise bills. Broken down into their components the main arguments, an argument from authority supported by an argument from classification (deduction),
appear:

(E) ----------------------------------------------------------
Hatsell, Finch, Downing, other members of Parliament, the Committee of Ways and Means of the House of Lords, Blackstone, Jefferson, and a rule of the House of Representatives all claim that there is no precedent for joining incongruous measures together.

Since
(W) (Implied)
The sources cited are credible and worthy of belief.

and secondly,
The Compromise Bill Contains incongruous measures

Therefore, (C) the compromise should be rejected

Since
(W)
There is no legal precedent for joining incongruous measures.

Benton's argument contains significant assumptions that are not considered - that the Senate is bound by British precedent, the provisions of Jefferson's Manual, and House Rule 43. Evidently, he felt that such connections were obvious to the members of the Senate.

**Kansas-Nebraska**

Benton opposed Douglas' compromise of squatter or popular sovereignty on the grounds that it was contrary to existing solutions to the slavery problem. He argued that the territories belonged to all the states in common and that the only body which could legislate for all the states was Congress. Therefore, individual settlers and territorial legislatures had no power to legislate on slavery. Benton employed the same familiar arguments in establishing the right of Congress to legislate on slavery. In defending the sanctity of prior legislation Benton demonstrated that the Missouri Compromise specifically contained a provision which states that it was intended for perpetuity and was, therefore, not subject to abrogation. Benton
pointed to the hostility and hatred between proslavery and antislavery elements, particularly in the border states, and predicted that legislation of popular sovereignty would produce war when both sides rushed to populate Kansas and Nebraska. Benton’s warrant in establishing the inviolate nature of the Missouri Compromise is weak; it assumes that, once passed, laws should not be altered, but history was soon to demonstrate that Benton’s assumption that North and South would resort to bloodshed to secure new territory was painfully accurate.13

1856-1858

During the last years of his life Benton’s argument assumed a somewhat different character. His position on slavery remained essentially unchanged, but he reviewed his arguments of past years to establish that he was correct in his assessment of the slavery controversy and his opponents wrong. The overall thrust of Benton’s argument was directed toward allaying sectional hostility. In attempting to promote harmony Benton developed the following main proposition:14 (1) President Pierce has been a vacillating, sectional man and has produced greater

13 Arguments dealing with the Kansas-Nebraska question are extracted from Kansas-Nebraska Speech, Delivered in the United States House of Representatives, April 25, 1854 (Washington: Printed by the Congressional Globe office, 1854). Copy is to be found in the Library of the Missouri State Historical Society, Columbia.

14 Arguments representing the period 1856-1858 are taken from Speech Delivered at the Imponent Ratification Meeting in St. Louis, June 21, 1856, Jefferson Inquirer, Jefferson City, Missouri, June 26, 1856; and Speech Delivered at the New England Celebration in New York, December 21, 1856, National Intelligencer, Washington, D. C., December 25, 1856.
sectional hostility. (2) A new man is needed in the presidency who is not connected with the slavery dispute, who can reason with both sides, and who will re-establish the Missouri Compromise provisions. (3) Continued agitation will end in disunion. (4) Disunion would be disastrous to all parties.

Benton attacked Pierce by offering evidence that his pronouncements on the Kansas-Nebraska Act had been inconsistent. He also pointed to the friendship of Pierce and Jefferson Davis and indicated that Davis had pressured the President into signing the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Benton then retraced the history of the dispute in an attempt to show that past compromises had only motivated and encouraged the South to seek other concessions.

The "new man" that Benton wished to elevate to the Presidency was James Buchanan. Benton attempted to demonstrate that Buchanan's obscurity was an advantage in that both sides would have an open mind toward him, but Benton was most impressed with the Pennsylvania Senator because he had been a consistent supporter of the Missouri Compromise. Throughout 1856 Benton supported Buchanan's candidacy arguing that he could best allay sectional contention. In campaigning for Buchanan, Benton opposed the candidacy of his own son-in-law John C. Fremont. Benton argued that he could not support Fremont because he was the candidate of a sectional party and had long taken a strong antislavery stand. Benton's opposition to Fremont must have had a strong effect in convincing his audiences of his sincerity. Diagramatically, this
series of arguments takes the following form:

(E) Pierce changed his mind on the question of Kansas-Nebraska; he was friendly with Davis and came to embrace his viewpoint; he signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act; the act was a dangerous concession to the South and heightened the slavery agitation.

(C) Therefore, Pierce was a vacillating, sectional President.

(W) (Implied) These are the acts characteristic of a vacillating, sectionally influenced man. (Argument from sign)

and

(E) Buchanan has not been identified closely with the slavery controversy; his philosophical position is sound.

(C) Therefore, Buchanan should be elected President.

(W) An unknown, non-controversial man can stand the best chance of securing the good will of both sides and ending the slavery agitation. (Argument from classification of deduction.)
Benton employed a familiar pattern in arguing that continued agitation would produce disunion. For evidence he provide examples of violence produced by the dispute. During this period the border war between Missouri and Kansas constituted his prime example. In Benton's thinking it was only a short step from a border war over slavery to an all out civil war resulting in disunion. Benton also pointed to newspaper articles, proclamations, resolutions, speeches, etc. as clear illustrations of the willingness of the South to secede even at the cost of civil war.

During the lecture tour of 1856-1857 Benton relied more and more on arguments which stressed the disasterous losses disunion would produce. Benton pictured two separate countries weakened economically, militarily, and politically as a result of the separation. For evidence of this claim Benton provided statistical data showing the economic dependence of North and South. Without raw materials produced by the South the northern industrial complex would be severely crippled, and without the northern market the Southern states would be unable to sell their produce. Benton went on to show that the necessity of sustaining and financing two separate military forces would weaken the ability of both nations to defend themselves from European influence. Ultimately the world positions of both countries would decline because of a weakened economic and military position. This section of Benton's speeches were crammed with data dealing with exports-imports, manpower, industrial development of both sides, agricultural production, tax levels, etc. The upshot of this barrage of information was aimed...
at convincing his audiences that both North and South would suffer greatly as a result of separation. The "disadvantages of disunion" constitutes the key theme of Benton's speeches between 1856-1858.

Emotional Proof

An examination of the role of logical proofs in Benton's rhetoric indicate that he clearly believed that "the facts," or what he considered the facts, were the central feature of effective argument. Benton's use of emotional or pathetic appeal was generally directed toward emphasizing his substantive arguments. Such appeals generally do not take the form of arguments at all but rather emotional language cloaking factual information. For example, Benton attempted to heighten the effectiveness of his attacks upon individuals, institutions, and laws by employing terms that would create a derogatory image of that individual, etc., in the minds of his listeners or readers. As a consequence he compared his opponents to "wolves, pole-cats, and vultures;" he often referred to Calhoun as John "Catailine" Calhoun and labeled him a "traitor," "agitator," and "disunionist"; the slavery dispute was a consequence of a "Southern plot," "a foul conjugation of rotten ambitious politicians," and a "wicked, evil conspiracy." As a result of the activities of such individuals "many fine and patriotic people have been manipulated, used, and deceived."

The Calhoun and Jackson Resolutions were always characterized as being
"firebrand," "inflammable," "falsehoods," "designed for a wicked purpose," "omens of evil to come," "designed to create a new agitation," "a threat to the Union," "a revolt against Congress," "a conglomeration of many crimes," "part of a plot to get me out of the Senate," etc.

Benton was especially fond of employing such loaded terminology in introducing or concluding an argument. The following "purple patch" from the Fayette Speech of 1849 is typical:

These resolutions...are false in their facts, incendiary in their temper, disunion in their object, nullification in their essence, high treason in their remedy, and usurpation in their character. They were never passed for instructions, but for crime, and upon conspiracy.15

Benton also employed emotional language to create a favorable image. Jackson was referred to as a near deity, the Union was "divinely inspired and blessed by Heaven", Sam Houston was a "Roman gladiator fighting for the Union", the American Government served as a model and "provided hope for the oppressed peoples of the world," etc.

Benton's extensive use of emotional language represents a very indirect form of pathetic proof. Well developed emotional or motivational arguments generally appear only in the conclusions of Benton's speeches, and even here they are used sparingly. As a general rule Benton employed emotional arguments in attempting to force his audience to make crucial value judgements. Holt Spicer has suggested that the Toulmin rational of argument is a useful device for isolating and comparing different types and levels of value judgements. Spicer's

15Fayette Speech.
thesis is that two opposing value assumptions may both be valid in the
mind of the listener and the question, therefore, becomes one of which
value is most important given the orientation of the listener or
reader.16 Such a viewpoint of argument is particularly well suited
to an examination of Benton's emotional-motivational arguments.
For example, Benton concluded his 1849 Jefferson City Speech with the
following arguments. First:

\[
\begin{align*}
(E) & \quad \text{Slavery is, in itself, a great evil.} \\
\text{Therefore, (C) slavery should be abolished.} \\
(W) & \quad \text{It is immoral to practice that which is evil. We are motivated to avoid things which are evil.}
\end{align*}
\]

But then he presents what is seemingly a contradictory argument:

\[
\begin{align*}
(E) & \quad \text{If slaves are emancipated and are educated they will come to resent and hate their former masters and ultimately racial strife will result.} \\
\text{Therefore, (C) slaves should not be emancipated.} \\
(W) & \quad \text{We are motivated to avoid racial violence.}
\end{align*}
\]

it is quite possible that an audience in the 1840's could accept both of these arguments. The question is simply which motivating factor is strongest. Benton tried to resolve this "conflict of interest" with a third argument:

(E) Slavery poses an evil in our society, but emancipation of slaves would pose an even greater evil.  

Therefore, (C) we should not introduce slavery into areas where it does not now exist, but we should not abolish slavery where it is already established.

Since (W) we are motivated because of moral principles, to avoid participating in evil, but we are also motivated to avoid (a greater evil) generating racial strife.

Benton's lecture tours of 1856-1857 were largely devoted to developing similar arguments in an attempt to get his audiences to make, what he considered, the right value choices. During the extensive tour through New England Benton did not attempt to deny the abolitionists contention that slavery was an evil but tried, rather, to convince his hearers that disunion would produce greater evils. In his defense of the Union Benton appealed to patriotism, tradition, rule of law, fear, etc. The following section from the conclusion to the St. Louis Ratification Speech of 1856 is typical and contains almost the total range of appeals employed by Benton during the final period.
of his career:

Our country is in a deplorable condition. Fraternal affection gone - sectional hate engendered - extreme parties in the ascendant. Violence overspreads the land; we open no paper without seeing blood. The whole country seems to be without government!... Utah is in revolt; New Mexico worse off than under the Spanish vice-royalty; Oregon is carrying on Indian wars for itself; and voluntarily a state - California - is driven to the resource of voluntary associations of citizens for the protection of life, liberty, and property... The people have rightly judged that the authors of the disease are not the physicians to cure it. They have called in a new doctor (Buchanan), and we must help him in the application of all the remedies he shall prescribe.

Citizens: The eyes of Europe and America are upon this election, not as it concerns men but as it concerns the great questions which alarm and agitate the country.

Ethical Proof

It has been noted previously that Benton's speeches prior to the slavery crisis were characterized by a decided lack of ethical or personal proof. However, during the course of the controversy he came to place much greater value on such appeals. Benton's slavery speeches were filled with ethical appeals which stressed the following elements:

(1) He did not blame the people for their opposition to his policies. He argued that they had been deceived and misled and, therefore, his sole purpose was to inform.

(2) During the period of 1844-1850 Benton attempted to enhance his own image by attacking and discrediting his opponents. After 1850 he placed much less reliance upon this tactic.
(3) He consistently tried to associate himself with popular legislation such as land reform, favorable tax reform, western expansion, internal improvements, etc.

(4) He consistently pointed to his close personal relationship with such popular public figures as Jackson and Houston.

(5) Benton generally quoted passages from his past speeches to indicate that he (almost alone) accurately assessed and predicted the ultimate results of the slavery agitation.

(6) He frequently cited his voting record and public pronouncements to prove he had always opposed slavery agitation from all sources, both Northern and Southern.

(7) A significant portion of all of Benton's slavery speeches were devoted to an attempt to connect his legislative activities to peace, justice, territorial expansion, and the harmony of the Union.

The following excerpts illustrate his approach:

Thirty years almost I have been in the Senate and during that time have always been a voter, and often a speaker on this subject of slavery; and commenced with it in my own state. I was politically born out of a slave agitation - out of the Missouri restriction controversy and have an open part on it from the time it began to the present day... I wanted peace from the question at home, and contributed to provide for it, by contributing to put that clause in the Constitution (which sanctioned slavery in an area where it had long been established)... and it is hard that we should now have an agitation imported or transported upon us, to harrass us about slavery, when we have taken such care to keep out agitation.

My votes in Congress have been consistent with my conduct at home - non-interference, no agitation - security to property - and tranquility to the people... I have voted thirty years, avoiding all extremes, and giving satisfaction. The old generation, and the generation that has been born during that time, ought to consider this, so far as to let it stand as evidence of my opinions. But it will not do. Finding nothing in the past to condemn, some people
must go into futurity, to see if anything can be found there and even into my bosom, to see if anything is hid there, which can be condemned. Very good, they shall know my opinions...They may see them in my public acts - in my proposals for the admission of Texas five years ago, in which I proposed to limit the westward extension of slavery - next in my votes upon the Oregon Bill, in which I opposed the introduction of slavery there - and again in my letter to the people of Oregon, in which I declared myself to be no propagandist of slavery. These were public acts!

At Fayette Benton launched his attack upon the Jackson Resolutions by quoting from what he labeled "the patriotic proclamation of President Jackson of 1832 showing his own course with respect to that treason (nullification), and his confident reliance upon the people in putting it down." Benton went on to tell his audience that both his physical and political life was wanted because he would not "trim" his position on slavery.

In 1856 Benton attempted to enhance his image by comparing his speeches to Washington's "Farewell Address". He explained his attitude to be one of a father about to depart calling his children together to stress the necessity of "family love and devotion". He concluded the St. Louis Ratification Speech of 1856 with the following appeal:

The good of the Union alone brings me out. Clouds overhang our foreign relations: sectional hate prevails at home, our own state is the theatre of a great commotion ...Peace is my object - the sunshine of peace over the

17Jefferson City Speech.
state and the Union... I represent the principles of peace - of order, law and justice, at home and abroad. Europe and America knows that fact; and as the election goes, so must be their opinion of the continuance, or cessation, of the present deplorable state of things.

In one of the last speeches of his life Benton delivered a long introduction which touched on all phases of his life and philosophy. In a real sense the New England Celebration Speech was a justification for a political life spanning nearly fifty years. Benton attempted to relate to the Northern audience by providing a detailed account of his mother's influence in building and shaping his character. He related that as a result of his heritage he had refrained from gambling, drinking, and smoking. In a moving portion of the speech Benton pointed to the reasons behind his love of the Union. After carefully examining the spiritual and material blessings of the Union he described the consequences which would accompany dissolution of that Union. Overall, Benton employed all of the devices discussed in this section. He launched into the body of the speech by saying that the Constitution was his platform. He wished to defend the Constitution in "letter as well as spirit." To do so he had condemned nullification and disunion talk from men of the South. New he would urge the people of the North to refrain from all "irritating measures" touching on the institution of slavery in the South. Benton did his best to build his image and exhibit a conciliatory profile but he would not compromise his position in New England any more than he would in Missouri.
As far as the structure of Benton's ethical proofs are concerned a discernable pattern is clearly evident. His evidence consists of references to personal associations, behavior, accomplishments and a record of legislative activities. Benton's conclusions take the form of an implicit assumption that these acts were correct and laudable. The implied warrant is that such activities represent character, courage, insight, etc.

Conclusion

An examination of Benton's logical, emotional, and ethical proofs indicates that he was familiar with, and employed, a wide range of differing appeals. Benton clearly thought logical proofs were most important but employed some emotional appeals and relied heavily upon ethical proof in his public career.

Benton evidently believed that only evidence and argument were necessary in establishing a logical proof. Therefore, Toulmin diagrams of such proofs generally consist only of evidence and claim. The warrants are clear by implication but backing, reservations, and qualifiers play no part in Benton's concept of argument; the conclusion are absolute and express certainty rather than probability.

James C. McCroskey has argued that the concept of warrant must be examined in terms of acceptability to the audience as well as
in terms of logical validity.\(^1\) In short, McCroskey feels that an argument is worthless, irrespective of its logical strength, unless the audience understands and accepts it. The greatest weakness of Benton's argument stems from his inability, or unwillingness to recognize this fact. Benton consistently obscures the clarity of his arguments by failing to provide warrants connecting his evidence and his claims; such connections are left completely to the imagination of the audience. Secondly, Benton employs warrants which were obviously controversial and, therefore, unacceptable to large segments of his audience. Such a situation clearly indicates a need to provide backing in order to secure audience acceptance of these implied and largely unacceptable warrants. But Benton failed to offer any backing for such warrants as: Mexican slavery laws should be followed; once passed, slavery statutes should not be changed; slavery should not be introduced into areas where it does not now exist; etc.

In addition, Benton adds credibility to the charges of his opponents that he was dogmatic and unbending by failing to phrase his arguments in terms of probability rather than absolute proof. Given the complexities of the slavery controversy it seems unlikely that many people were willing to completely accept Benton's unqualified conclusions.

Benton's real strength in argument was his ability to produce

what often appears to be almost overwhelming data to support his arguments. Benton's rhetoric is characterized by an almost child-like faith in what he considered to be "the facts." Such an ability is a tribute to Benton's industry and memory but such factual information could have had greater impact if its relation to conclusions drawn from it had been more clearly developed.

Crucially, it should be noted that Benton's efforts were directed toward hushing the slavery agitation, and a more valid approach probably concerns determining whether he did all he could given his position and intent. The argument that the slavery dispute had already been settled was the only way to avoid further debate and propagandizing on both sides. Any other approach would have automatically rekindled the dispute. By taking a middle road Benton found himself in a position in which his arguments were unacceptable to almost all involved in the dispute.
CHAPTER FIVE

BENTON'S METHOD OF PRESENTATION

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to attempt an evaluation of Thomas Hart Benton's methods of presentation. Specific attention will be directed toward an examination of the nature and role of organization, memory, and delivery in Benton's slavery speeches. The following chapter will be devoted to a consideration of style.

The difficulties encountered in assessing the speaking techniques of an individual long dead are exacerbated, in Benton's case, by widely differing accounts and conclusions provided by the contemporary press, contemporary observers, historians, and rhetorical critics. It is, therefore, necessary to examine and attempt to reconcile some of these differing accounts before specifically analyzing the speeches in question.

Contemporary Press Assessments

The contemporary Missouri press is of limited value in objectively evaluating Benton's method and effectiveness in presentation. Previous chapters have indicated that public opinion toward Benton in Missouri was largely polarized during the period 1844-1858. Since the
local press was politically controlled the same polarization was reflected in newspaper coverage of Benton's speeches. The Missouri voters and newspapers alike quickly divided into pro-Benton and anti-Benton camps. Feeling ran so high that moderate and rational assessment were largely impossible. The traditional labels of Democratic Party, Whig Party, Democratic Press, and Whig Press became totally meaningless. The only meaningful label came to be "pro" or "anti" Benton. There was almost no intercourse between the two opposing camps. Benton himself clearly characterized the totality of division between his supporters and opponents. In his Jefferson City speech on May 26, 1849 he shouted in conclusion, "Now I have them, and between them and me, henceforth and forever, a high wall and a deep ditch! No communication, no compromise, no caucus with them!" As a result of the emotionalism and heat generated by such a division contemporary accounts tend to be either extremely favorable or extremely unfavorable in judging both Benton's politics and rhetoric.

On September 1, 1849 Benton delivered a speech at Fayette, Missouri and the Jefferson Inquirer provided the following evaluation:

It is entirely national and finds its force in that fervid love of country, regardless of self, which gave to the orations of Demosthenes among the ancients, and of Lord Chatham among the moderns, that invincible power and beauty which made them omnipotent in the time delivered, and still entitles them to the homage and admiration of the world.

Fayette was the stronghold of the anti-Benton forces and Benton had received numerous letters threatening his life if he spoke there.
There were several armed men in the audience and at the beginning of the speech Benton was met with boos and groans. In spite of such obstacles the Inquirer concluded:

...In a quarter of an hour the insulter were cowed; all outrage ceased; and the speech for four hours was received with respect and applause...The assemblage present was computed at twelve hundred...and from four fifths to five sixths of the whole assemblage left the college with Senator Benton, crowding around him, and applauding his speech.

The Metropolitan offered a far different account of Benton's speaking:

At one o'clock, Senator Benton began his harangue (speech it was not!) and poured out the slimy filth of his envenomed heart, after the fish-market style of his other performances...whereupon the cry went up, "pull him down - down with Benton."2

The Metropolitan concludes by saying that Senator Benton couldn't find a man who would take his hand after the speech. Obviously the two accounts are completely inconsistent both in terms of the nature and effects of Benton's rhetorical efforts.

In their coverage of the Canvass of 1849 the Inquirer and Metropolitan continued to provide diametrically opposed accounts of Benton's speeches. The Inquirer consistently claimed that Benton's presentations were model orations. On November 24 an article claimed:

Col. B's manner of delivery, deportment, language, all convey an impressive idea of his ability, his courage, his resolution, and the sincerity of his

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1 Jefferson Inquirer, Jefferson City, Missouri, October 6, 1849.
2 The Metropolitan, Jefferson City, Missouri, November 13, 1849.
views. We think, even all his impartial opponents must admit all this in his favor. His tone and manner were slow, distinct, and dignified...(His speech) conveyed an impression that cannot be easily forgotten.\(^3\)

On November 27 the Metropolitan portrayed Benton's speeches as being "disgusting to the ear of every gentleman, disgraceful to a dignified Senator,...and laughable to those who sit by and listen to the ravings of the demented statesman."\(^4\)

Both the Inquirer and Metropolitan were published in Jefferson City, both were controlled by the Democratic Party, both were locally owned. The only obvious difference was their opinion of Benton. An examination of the most important and widely circulated Missouri newspapers of the period indicates that the Inquirer and Metropolitan are representative of other pro-Benton and anti-Benton papers. In general, Benton was either deified or villified; a middle ground simply did not exist.

Assessments of Contemporaries

On the national level, as well as in Missouri, Benton was either loved or hated. Previously examined evidence has indicated that Benton was bitterly opposed by the Southern leadership and the Northern abolitionists. His sole support came from a few moderates in the North

\(^3\)Jefferson Inquirer, Jefferson City, Missouri, November 24, 1849.

\(^4\)The Metropolitan, Jefferson City, Missouri, November 27, 1849.
and old line Jacksonian Democrats in the border states. Benton's
tendency to launch personal attacks upon all who differed with his
specific slavery position resulted in his estrangement from most of
the important political figures of the period. As a result contemporary
evaluations of Benton's speaking and political views are characterized
by the same "black and white" assessments contained in the Missouri
press. The varying images of Benton as a speaker depend totally upon
which memoir, reminiscence, or biographical sketch is employed as
evidence.

Mrs. Jessie Benton Fremont wrote that her father possessed
a strikingly beautiful voice, which was "stentorian..., full, round
and sustained and full of inflections." Senator Henry S. Foote of
Mississippi, who once threatened Benton with a pistol in the Senate
chamber claimed:

Mr. Benton's voice was to the last most harsh
and untunable, his gesticulation was clumsy and
ungraceful; he delighted in the delivery of long and
tedious set discourse... It is not at all unjust to
him to say that he was far more plenteously endowed
with the dictorial spirit than with the gentle graces
of persuasion...6

Both Foote and Fremont are widely quoted in previous biographies and
rhetorical studies and their comments appear to be representative of


the wide discrepancies found in contemporary descriptions of Benton's methods of presentation. It is probable that the truth is to be found somewhere between the extremes.

Biographies - Historians

In general, Benton's biographers are in agreement that he was not a great orator. They are unanimous in the opinion that he falls short of Webster, Clay, and Calhoun as a speaker. Rogers concluded that Benton's voice was often unpleasant because of a "husky quality", that he lacked a knowledge of some fundamental techniques, and suggests that he "confused noise with impressiveness." Rogers felt that he would have been greatly benefited, "if in early youth he could have come under the care of a good teacher of elocution." Roosevelt charges Benton with "cheap pseudo-classicism" and massive disorganization. Melgs comments:

...It cannot be doubted that he reiterated too much, and his speeches were too long; he would often bear upon a subject after it was exhausted, and weary his hearers over matters that they could not see the importance of... Chambers relies heavily upon Benton's speeches and includes liberal quotations from them but offers no substantial assessment of Benton's

rhetoric. Chambers does observe that Benton was, throughout his life, "a prolific word man, with a gaudy and expansive style clothing a factual and argumentative content." The Jacksonian Historian, Claude G. Bowers felt that the "interminable length of his speeches and his diffusive tendencies, served to overshadow his very substantial contributions to the (Senatorial) discussions."

It should be noted that the rhetorical assessments of the above mentioned historians are extremely brief, vague, and lacking in illustration. The usefulness of such evaluations is further limited by the fact that these individuals were not trained in rhetoric. It is possible that they were largely unaware of what was deemed effective rhetoric during the early nineteenth century; at least none make any attempt to provide any standards for evaluation. The study conducted by Dudley J. Bidstrup indicates that Benton's long and diffuse speeches, his use of bitter personal attack on his opponents, his platform demeanor, and his expansive style made him "a truly representative speaker of the period from 1840 to 1860." The important thing to be noted is that many historians have criticized Benton for techniques and tendencies which were, in part, natural elements of the public speaking


of the era.

Rhetorical Critics

Previous rhetorical studies of Benton have consistently dealt with either the period before 1844 or with topics not related specifically to the slavery question. Hunter's studies deal exclusively with various nonslavery related speeches. His main concern was with Benton's speeches dealing with land policy, banking, and transportation.\textsuperscript{13} The studies conducted by Seelen and Lewis deal exclusively with Benton's speeches opposing the Bank of the United States.\textsuperscript{14} Magoon's evaluation of Benton only covers his speaking career up to 1837.\textsuperscript{15} Even the more recent career profiles written by Mattis and Oliver dwell upon Benton's early career, especially his bank and finance speeches.\textsuperscript{16} The only rhetorical critic who has attempted a detailed study dealing with Benton's slavery speeches is Thomas R.


\textsuperscript{16}Norman W. Mattis, "Thomas Hart Benton," \textit{History and Criticism of American Public Address}, III (ed.) William Norwood Brigance and Marie
Lewis and he limits his investigation to the role of invention in Benton's debating techniques as manifested in his anti-Compromise Speech of 1850. The scope of the Lewis study is obviously too narrow to be of much value in assessing the overall nature and effect of Benton's slavery speeches. It is the thesis of this, and the following chapter that Benton's speaking changed substantially as a result of maturity and the slavery dispute. As a result it is felt that the conclusions of previous studies do not totally maintain their validity when applied to Benton's slavery speeches given during the last years of his life. This study will attempt to demonstrate that Benton's speaking improved substantially during the period in question but that in some respects he developed new liabilities as a speaker, and some of the old problems remained.

Francis Blair claimed that prior to 1850 Benton was more effective as a writer than a speaker, but that afterwards the contrary was true. Blair said that Benton retained his general characteristics but "trimmed his speeches of some of their pendency and achieved a directness, force, and simplicity that could be found only in sporadic passages of his earlier efforts." Mattis does not examine Benton's

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slavery speeches but speculates that:

Increasingly after 1845 he was engaged in the task of preserving the Union, and it is perhaps not fanciful to suggest that the greatness and urgency of the work combined with the realization that he was fighting for his political existence to give new life to language.19

Contemporary accounts add credibility to Mattis' speculative remarks. After enumerating the typical negative aspects of Benton's speaking, Magoon observed:

A progressive improvement in his oratory has, however, been very evident within the last few years. He may be said literally, according the well known maxim of Cicero, to have made himself an orator, having had to struggle against natural disadvantages.20

In 1837 The United States Magazine and Democratic Review presented a political portrait of Benton and noted significant recent improvements in his oratory. The article concludes:

We have heard the remark made by one of his friends, for that his best speech will not be delivered for ten years yet to come, and that he will have attained the age at which Cicero achieved his highest triumphs, before he will have brought out all the capacity of eloquence within him...21

Both McClure and Collier, who knew Benton well and heard him speak many times, conclude that his greatest speeches were given during the

19Mattis, "Benton," III, 94.

20Magoon, Living Orators, p. 345.

21"Political Portraits with Pen and Pencil," The United States Magazine and Democratic Review, I (October, 1837), 89.
last years of his life. Even Chambers noted improvement in Benton's rhetoric when he began his slavery crusade. Chambers referred to the Fayette speech as the "apogee of the appeal." It was Benton at his best... (It was) "filled with close, reasoned, specific analysis... Little was given to the domineering and dealing in extraneous personalities that had begun to characterize Benton." Chambers concludes that the speech was "bold and forthright,...,exhaustive, historical, and factual, and yet simple and dramatic. In short it was one of the major propaganda efforts of his life." In the discussion of Benton's St. Louis speech of June 21, 1856 Chambers exclaims:

It was one of the finest campaign efforts in the aging advocate's long career - forthright, full of fire, comprehensive, and yet carefully molded and restrained. Throughout the Missouri Canvass, Benton elaborated his St. Louis theme again and again.

Methodology

In an attempt to overcome the impediments to objective criticism herein discussed primarily reliance will be placed upon those sources that appear to be least colored by emotionalism and personal bias. Stress will be placed upon isolating common themes found in both favor-

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23Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 350, 422.
able and unfavorable comments upon Benton's speaking. Newspaper accounts are so extreme that little reliance will be placed upon them. Citations from previous rhetorical studies will be offered to demonstrate the nature of changes which occurred in Benton's speaking over the years and to identify general speaking tendencies which did not change. However, since it is felt that Benton's slavery rhetoric differs from previous speaking efforts primary methodology will consist of specific first hand observations and conclusions resulting from a careful examination of his most important slavery speeches given between 1844 and 1857. The particular elements of Benton's speaking to be considered in this chapter will relate to assessments of organization, memory, and delivery.

Benton's Organization

Charles F. Hunter concluded his examination of the structure of Benton's speeches with the comment that he could detect "no set arrangement and disposition of ideas." He describes Benton's approach to organization as "diffusive and spread eagle." Mattis felt that:

... The pattern of organization often failed to reveal clearly the analytical foundation or to give the supporting detail its maximum impact...

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The weakness lies in the conception of the whole...25

Seelen claims that, "the structure of the expunging speech is disarmingly simple and appears to have been well organized without calling attention to its arrangement...The transitions are smooth and lend unity to the various arguments."26 Lewis arrived at a similar conclusion: "most of the speeches considered in this study had been well prepared and show a recognizable pattern of structure." Hunter's study examined the earliest portion of Benton's career and the Mattis' monograph attempted an overall career profile but placed great stress upon Benton's earlier speeches. Both Seelen and Lewis relied on later speeches in their studies and suggest that Benton was successful in improving his organization over the years. Let us now consider the nature of Benton's organizational patterns as evidenced in selected slavery speeches.

The Introductions

The introductions to Benton's slavery speeches tend to be extremely brief. In the speeches examined they consumed from one to five relatively short paragraphs. The introduction to the Boonville Speech of 1844 ran slightly over 300 words in length. The introductions to the speeches given in Jefferson City (1849), Fayette (1849),


and the Senate Debate of 1850 (Anti-Compromise Speech) ran 650,300, and 280 words respectively. The Introductions of the other selected speeches fall with the above range.

In terms of content Benton consistently follows a set pattern which includes a statement of the problem or condition which makes the speech necessary, a justification of his right, or qualification, to speak on the question, and a statement of his position on the issue at question. The order of these three elements varies from speech to speech but all are included. The use of these elements in the Fayette Speech clearly demonstrates his procedure.

(1) Statement of the problem or condition necessitating the speech.

A fundamental falsehood, for the most wicked of purposes, pervades this state, and all the slaveholding states, importing that Congress means to abolish slavery in the slave states.

(2) Justification of his right to speak.

I come here for no personal object, but to discharge a great public duty — to destroy a falsehood which alarms and agitates the state, and the union, and threatens its dissolution; and to expose a conspiracy which seeks my overthrow...

(3) Statement of position.

This is untrue and unfounded...They (the members of Congress) are against its (slavery) extension into territories but, with slavery in the states, they have nothing to do; and so declare it on all suitable occasions.27

27 Thomas Hart Benton, Speech Delivered at Fayette, Missouri, September 1, 1849 (Jefferson City, Missouri: James Lusk, Printer, 1849)
In Benton's shorter speeches he also includes a preview of the main topics to be developed in the body of the speech. For example, in the Boonville Speech of 1844 he said he would: explain his Texas votes, demonstrate that John C. Calhoun was responsible for the agitation and consequent crisis, show the Texas question to be a disunion plot hatched by Calhoun to further his own political ambition, and demonstrate that Calhoun's annexation proposal would produce a war with Mexico, while his program of negotiated settlement would both secure Texas and avoid conflict. In his more lengthy speeches Benton simply indicated his general thesis and previewed only the first point to be developed in the body.

Little emotional appeal is to be found in Benton's introductions. In the speeches given in areas favorable to his policies he generally thanked the voters for their confidence and support. He generally sought to build his ethos and establish common ground during that part of the introduction which attempted to establish his right to speak.

Original copy in Missouri State Historical Society Library, Columbia. All subsequent references to the Fayette Speech are based on this text.

Thomas Hart Benton, Speech Delivered at Boonville, Missouri, July 17, 1844, Boonville Observer, August 7, 1844. All subsequent references to the Boonville Speech are based on this text.
The Bodies

The main heads of Benton's slavery addresses are characterized by topical structural patterns. A reading of Benton's speeches convey the impression that he simply picked out and organized his speeches around the topics or elements of the slavery controversy that seemed most controversial or pressing at a given time. However, the specific position of each major topic in the speeches seems to be dictated by cause to effect or effect to cause relationships. In his Fayette Speech Benton developed and discussed four main topics:

I. Past legislative behavior on the part of the non-slaveholding states clearly demonstrate that these states have never desired to abolish slavery in the existing slave states.

II. The origins of such a belief are to be found in the political activities of John C. Calhoun.

III. The current agitation is another phase of Calhoun's design.

IV. The Missouri slavery resolutions are substantially the same as the Calhoun resolutions: What they are is now to be shown.

Benton's analysis of each major heading makes the causal connections abundantly clear. In his mind the falsehood of a Northern abolition plot was created by agitation instigated and headed by Calhoun; the current agitation represented only another phase in Calhoun's design to dissolve the union; and the Jackson (Missouri)
Resolutions were simply a local manifestation of the Calhoun Resolutions. Given his premises Benton could hardly have followed any other pattern of organization.

The same pattern of organization is also found in Benton's Boonville Speech given five years earlier. Employing five topical divisions he argued:

1. Calhoun is responsible for precipitating the Texas crisis.

II. The Texas dispute is another disunion plot hatched by Calhoun.

III. Calhoun's annexation plan would produce a war with Mexico and spread slavery into areas where it is illegal.

IV. (Benton's) annexation plan will prevent both evils of the Calhoun plan.

V. (Benton is) dedicated to law and the Union. Calhoun is dedicated to the destruction of the law and the Union.

Again, the same causal patterns are recognizable. Calhoun generated the slavery question, Texas is a manifestation of a pre-conceived plan, the result of the implementation of his policy would be war and slavery expansion, my program will avoid such evils.

The familiar topical - cause to effect patterns are also evident in Benton's important Senate speeches on slavery. In opposing the Compromise of 1850 he claimed:29

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29Thomas Hart Benton, Anti-Compromise Speech Delivered in the United States Senate, June 20, 1850 (Washington: Published by the Congressional Globe Office, 1850). Original copy is to be found in
I. The argument that the country is in distress, strife, misery, etc. is a falsehood.

II. The belief in this condition is a product of an unnecessary agitation.

III. The Compromise is an unmanageable bill of thirty-nine sections. It denies the right of each state to an individual hearing on the questions of statehood.

IV. The Compromise will only begat more agitation. We have delayed long enough in establishing governments in the territories and in so doing have injured the welfare of the citizens of the territories. California has been made the scapegoat of slavery.

V. Boundary provisions of the Compromise are illegal and will expand slavery.

VI. Slavery is an incurable evil and its expansion should be checked.

Therefore, Benton argued that slavery agitation has produced a false belief that a national crisis existed, this belief is the basis of the Compromise, the Compromise will only begat more agitation, injure the welfare of the territories, and expand slavery; slavery is an incurable evil.

The substructure of Benton's speeches is most frequently divided on the basis of a chronological pattern. Since his slavery arguments are based largely on past acts of Congress, past behavior of Calhoun and his followers, and past judicial interpretations such
a division is implied by the subject matter. One important point contained in almost all of his slavery speeches involves the charge that Calhoun is largely responsible for generating the slavery crisis. In attempting to demonstrate his argument he traces chronologically Calhoun's political activities from beginning to end. In the Anti-Compromise Speech Benton provides a lengthy section detailing the historical precedents pertaining to territorial boundaries and, again, divisions are based on a chronological sequence.

At other times Benton, again, employs topics in breaking down his main arguments. In demonstrating that the non-slaveholding states did not wish to abolish slavery (Fayette Speech) he showed how, in the past, they had been instrumental in expanding it. This was accompanied by subordinate points which simply initiate the headings; the Platte County, Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Indian lands, etc. Again when Benton discusses the Jackson Resolutions, he simply follows the different topics posed by each of the resolutions. Benton was also fond of establishing his arguments by a series of specific examples. At Fayette he argued that the Southern leadership was determined to dissolve the Union and attempted to prove it by quoting and discussing a series of toasts given at a Southern Caucus. In this case the examples themselves constituted the partitions of the main point.

An examination of Benton's slavery speeches indicates that he carefully prepared his speeches, knew where he wanted to lead the
discourse, and carefully partitioned the important elements of each speech.

In addition to the natural divisions of subject matter discussed above, Benton also consistently employed mechanical and verbal clues to indicate his structural patterns to the audience. Benton generally called attention to the fact that he was moving to another argument or point by simple transitory remarks such as: I proceed to these acts, But extend your vision! but this is not all, another view opens before us; I have now to show the origin and design of that accusation; It now becomes necessary to consider; I now proceed to the deliberations of the Southern members of Congress; But enough of this, I now move to; Behold Texas!; etc.

Benton employs the same kinds of verbal clues when concluding a point. He frequently uses such language as: This should be sufficient to prove my point; I have shown you the utter untruth of this accusation; this, then, was the origin of; this is the Southern Address; this is the alarm which I have shown you to be false, etc.

By the consistent use of such transitions and conclusions Benton clearly indicates the progression and relative importance of the main ideas expressed in his speeches.

Benton also attempts to assist the listener or reader by frequently numbering his sub-arguments. In analyzing the content of the Southern Address in the Fayette Speech he breaks it into six parts and
proceeds by simply saying first, second, third, etc. When he turned to a consideration of the Jackson Resolutions he numbered them one through five. Benton was especially fond of this technique when he was summarizing legal documents, speeches, and publications.

It is also apparent that Benton tried to provide tightness and cohesion in his structure by employing repetition and internal summaries. In his Jefferson City Speech he repeated eighteen times that the Jackson Resolutions were the same as the Calhoun Resolutions.\textsuperscript{30} In the Fayette Speech he frequently reminds the Missouri voters that Northern legislators have supported beneficial legislation. In all of Benton's slavery speeches the main themes are drilled into the minds of the listeners by, what is probably excessive, repetition. Benton almost always concludes each major point of a speech with a summary of his sub-contentions. The following extracts illustrate this technique:

\begin{quote}
No citizens! this dogma of no power in Congress to legislate upon the subject of slavery in territories, has no foundation in constitutional law, state or federal; and what makes it pretension more atrocious in this political controversy, is that it has no foundation in our political creed, or any political creed whatever.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

and

\begin{quote}
The (Jackson) Resolutions, taken altogether are false in their facts, incendiary in their temper,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{30}Thomas Hart Benton, Speech Delivered at Jefferson City, Missouri, May 26, 1849, Jefferson Inquirer, May 26, 1849. All subsequent references to the Jefferson City Speech are based on this text.

\textsuperscript{31}Fayette Speech.
nullification in their essence, high treason in their remedy, and usurpation in their character. They were never passed for instructions, but for crime, and upon conspiracy.32

and finally:

Such was the composition of nearly one-half of the whole convention - custom house officers, post office masters, sailorled clerks, packed delegates, straw delegates, political enuchs, members of Congress, district attorneys, federal marshals. The place where they met, and which had been provided by a packed administration committee was worthy of the meeting.33

On the basis of an examination of Benton's slavery speeches it must be concluded that he consciously and consistently attempted to clearly organize his material. It is also the judgement of this writer that Benton's structural patterns are generally clear, easy to follow. However, in spite of general clarity there are elements present in Benton's speeches which add at best partial credibility to general criticisms found in previous studies.

First, Benton's speeches are extremely lengthy and contain vast amounts of supportative and illustrative material. The sheer volume of such material creates the illusion of disorganization. Benton included so much explanation and evidence between various headings that it is easy to lose sight of the original point to which the materials are related. In short, the isolated organizational

32Fayette Speech

33Jefferson City Speech.
skeleton is clear but the relationship of the substance to the structure is often vague. Secondly, Benton's attempt to provide clarity by repetition often has the opposite effect. Extensive repetition of previous arguments often creates uncertainty as to exactly which argument is being considered at a given time. It should be noted, however, that internal summaries and sharp transitions help in minimizing this problem.

Thirdly, Benton couldn't resist including almost everything that had been said or done on a particular question. As a consequence he often includes material that is not clearly germane to the issue under discussion. For example, in a discussion of Calhoun's inconsistent behavior on the questions of tariffs, Internal Improvements, land policy, the spoils system, etc. In another part of the same speech he involves himself in a discussion of the nature of Calhoun's use of language. Benton frequently digressed to include personal anecdotes or stories which have only indirect connection to his argument.

Fourthly, Benton's headings themselves provide potential for confusion in that they often contain multiple issues. Under one heading contained in the Anti-Compromise Speech he includes: (a) the current agitation (b) consequences of delay (c) conditions in the territories and (d) the propriety of extending slavery. At one point in the Boonville Speech he discusses the legal basis for slavery in Mexican Territories and the possibility of a war with Mexico under the
same heading. Obviously, such complex multiple heads made it difficult to follow and apply subsequent supporting material.

Finally Benton often diverts attention from the continuity of his argument by presenting, verbatim, lengthy and technical quotations from letters, the press, and legal documents. In the Jefferson City Address Benton reads one letter from James Monroe which covers an entire page in the written text. Similar citations are to be found in many of Benton's speeches. Such quotations normally deal with a variety of subjects and topics and muddy the organizational patterns.

Benton's weaknesses in organization then tend to relate more to what transpires within a particular division of a speech than to the predetermined organizational pattern.

The Conclusions

Benton's conclusions are even more brief than his introductions, generally consisting of no more than one or two paragraphs. The conclusions contain an appeal to stop the slavery agitation and a warning that disunion will result if the slavery dispute is not quieted. As a general rule Benton also includes a brief summary of his key arguments in the conclusion. In the Jefferson City Speech he claimed that the eyes of the world were on the United States and if democracy failed there it would fall all over the civilized world. In the New England Celebration Address he graphically described the dire consequences
that would result from disunion and civil war. In his appeal against
the Jackson Resolutions he always asked for support in securing a
favorably disposed legislature. In general, then, the conclusions are
categorized by a brief summary, an appeal to tradition and patriotism,
a portrayal of the blessings of the Union and the devastation of dis­
union, and an appeal for support. As in the other two parts of his
speeches Benton's techniques are generally uniform, predictable, and
clearly discernable.

Memory

The one element of Benton's rhetoric upon which critics agree
is the importance of his remarkable memory. Friend and foe alike
credit him with a fantastic ability to recall even very specific data.

In his History of Saint Louis City John T. Scharf commented:

Tom Benton, it is said, could sit at his desk,
after reading upon a subject, and write his speech,
without change or erasure, throwing the numbered
pages on the floor, and without another glance at
the writings would the next day, or the day after,
deriver his speech verbatim, crammed with figures
and blazing with invective.34

As incredible as such an account may appear, Chamber's research sup­
ports it:

34John T. Scharf, History of Saint Louis City and County, from
the Earliest Periods to the Present Day: Including Biographical
Sketches of Representative Men, I (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts and
Co., 1883), 595-6.
Although he generally had a prepared text, he did not read but spoke. He had developed an immense facility...

for writing out a speech carefully and then delivering without reading, without getting it by heart, always following the written speech, even to its very words, but also throwing in additional illustrations to enliven the subject, and all without looking at the text or a note.  

In his examination of Benton's major slavery speeches Chambers observes again and again that he spoke without notes.  

Almost all of the rhetoricians and historians who have examined Benton's career take note of his powers of recall.  

Hunter testifies to the accuracy of Benton's memory. Hunter compared Benton's evidence citations in four speeches scattered over thirty years and concluded that he detected only "a few minor errors which did not substantially effect either the spirit or the letter of the originals."  

It is probably fair to conclude that without such a memory Benton would have been unable to marshall such a volume of specific material in the course of his speeches. Although such ability was an obvious attribute it may also account for his tendency to include too

35Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 411.  
36See Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 422, 424, 431.  
38Hunter, "Four Speeches," p. ii.
much illustrative material and to stray away from the immediate subject and into only vaguely related topics.

Delivery

Appearance

It is largely impossible to understand the nature and effect of Benton's delivery techniques without first noting the speaker's physical makeup which seemed to exercise so strong an influence upon all aspects of his speaking.

Thomas Fagg, describing Benton's dress and general appearance, said "he was the finest looking man on the continent."39 After having witnessed Benton speaking, Daniel Grissom declared:

Many a distinguished person of one kind and another - orator, poet, author, prima donna, tenor, pianist, violinist and so forth - have I seen and heard on the platform...but no one of them all possessed such a personal presence as did "Old Bullion."40

Chambers remarks that Benton's appearance and manner were so striking that visitors to the Senate often asked who he was and compared him to a Roman Senator.41 Other contemporary descriptions testify to the


41Chambers, Old Bullion, pp. 257-8.
impressiveness of Benton's appearance.

Benton was nearly six feet tall, and at the peak of his career weighed approximately 200 pounds. He was a strong built, powerful, broad shouldered, broad chested man, with a "massive forehead, flashing grey eyes, and a sharp aquiline nose." Benton possessed a "pink glowing complexion and when angered his face flushed easily." His hair was coarse, dark, wavy, and he wore sideburns that extended to his chin. The Senator's lips were "drawn close in determined self-possession." He looked out from under high set bushy eyebrows. The following description provided by Charles Dewitt, a representative from New York, is typical of others:

Mr. Benton possesses a fine portly figure - is rather aldermanic - neither tall nor short - has sandy hair - large whiskers - a sloped forehead - a grey eye, that can glance like lightning - full face - regular features - a mouth well formed - tongue quick and voluble - altogether a handsome and a great man...When his indignation is excited the very devil himself could not speak and look more terrible.

Even in old age Benton retained these distinguishing physical

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characteristics. In 1856 during the course of an interview with Benton William Todd remarked that he was "surprised by his erect and youthful appearance." The comment pleased Benton and he said it reminded him of an incident that had occurred during the campaign of the previous summer. He recalled that upon the completion of a speech he heard one of his opponents exclaim, "Good God, we shall have to fight him another twenty years."

During his long political career Benton never modified his style of dress. His mode of dress was so unique and consistent that he could be recognized at a distance just by his clothing. He always wore a "black swallowtail broadcloth coat, black cloth pantaloons, a black or white satin vest, and low cut shoes with white stockings." While in the Senate Chamber, or during a speech he wore, or gestured with, eyeglasses which were attached to his vest by a golden cord. During travel or one of his frequent walks or horseback rides he wore black silk gloves and a wide-brimmed black or white beaver hat. Benton often used the handling of his apparel for dramatic effect. When he arrived at Fayette to speak he was greeted with boos and insults. Undaunted, he "walked slowly and majestically to the stand, faced his audience and slowly and deliberately removed his huge white hat, sat


the hat on a table, "carefully removed his black gloves, dropped the gloves into the hat and adjusted his coat and tie before commencing the speech."\(^{46}\) Gallery visitors consistently commented on Benton's neatness and dignity in dress. One such observer wrote:

Benton always attempts to dress with particular neatness and care...He is a finely attired, pleasant-seeming gentleman...(and conveys an image of) vigor and manhood.\(^{47}\)

**Voice**

Contemporary accounts are generally consistent in their assessments of the prominent aspects of Benton's delivery. Most observers noted a slow, deliberate, varied, and clearly articulated presentation. All agree that his voice was ordinarily powerful, clear, and audible. Benton would often repeat the same word or sentence several times for purposes of emphasis or ridicule and many critics thought his ability to effectively employ such a technique was derived from his use of varied vocal emphasis. John Wentworth said Benton's speeches were "delivered very slowly, so as to make every word audible, when he had a strong point, he would repeat it three times" subtly alternating the emphasis pattern each time.\(^{48}\) Dyer's description provides a simi-

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\(^{46}\)The Union, St. Louis, Missouri, October 9, 1849 and Grissom, Benton, "XVIII, 135.  

\(^{47}\)Edward D. Keyes, Fifty Years' Observation of Men and Events (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1884) pp. 147, 149.  

He spoke with deliberation... when he wanted to torture an opponent he had a way of elevating his voice into a rasping squeal of sarcasm which was intolerably exasperating and sometimes utterly maddening. The word sir was a formidable missile on his tongue, and he brought it into play with a frequency which nothing but his powerful utterance and commanding manner prevented from becoming absurd. He had a way of repeating a sentence or word over and over, with slight variations, which was exceedingly effective.49

At one point in the debate of 1850 Benton introduced five consecutive sentences with the word "twice." In portraying Benton's delivery of this portion of the speech Dyer said, "on every repetition of the word 'twice', his voice struck a higher key and rang out with increased power."50 The Liberty Advance claimed that Benton's voice was "not musical" but clear, powerful, and conversational in tone.51 Other commentaries on his vocal quality characterized it a "gravelly", "stentorian", "husky", hoarse."52

Mrs. Fremont noted that her father was subject to a throat irritation which troubled him all of his life. Evidently, Benton's

49 Oliver Dyer, Great Senators of the United States Forty Years Ago (New York: Robert Bonner and Sons, 1889), pp. 201-3.
50 Dyer, Great Senators, p. 203.
51 The Liberty Advance, Liberty, Missouri, August 16, 1841.
52 See Meigs, Benton, 457; Grissom, "Benton," XVIII 119-24; Todd, "Benton," XXVI, 365; March, Reminiscences, p. 98-9 and Rogers, Benton, p. 328. These studies provide a representative cross-section of opinion as to Benton's voice and delivery.
throat was so sensitive that the delivery of a long speech normally produced profuse bleeding. His daughter said Benton would maintain silence for days prior to a speech to strengthen his throat. Rogers suggests that Benton's "weak throat" was responsible for his poor quality of voice and that he normally became "husky" during the course of a long speech. The evidence seems to indicate that Benton's voice was ordinarily clear, emphatic, varied and easily heard by the members of his audience, but that his vocal quality was impaired by a physiological problem which led some to claim that his voice was unpleasant at times.

Gesture - Movement

Benton's platform procedure generally reflected his aloof, sophisticated, and egocentric personality. As a consequence his gestures and movement on the platform tended to be restrained.

Benton deliberately attempted to avoid physical contact. Grissom said "he had no use for people at close quarters, and avoided contact with them." Grissom demonstrates this trait with the following example:

(During his visits) to St. Louis, he went through hand shaking with his admirers and adherents, with stately courtesy, but it was plain enough that he didn't like it. He seemed to think that his high

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patriotic character and the services he had rendered his country ought to exempt him from the necessity, resting upon smaller men, of maintaining his hold upon the public favor, by affable manners and the usual electioneering arts.\textsuperscript{54}

Grissom thought this same unbending dignity carried over into his platform behavior. He noted that while speaking his movement was limited and his head appeared to be rigidly set upon his body. "If he wanted to see or speak to a person not directly before him, he would move his whole frame around with a studied deliberation and majesty that was overpowering to his enemies and not always agreeable to his friends." Grissom criticizes the statue of Benton located in St. Louis' Lafayette Park because it shows him "with his head bent forward," an attitude he was "never known to exhibit."

Judge Charles Johnson of St. Louis witnessed several of Benton's speeches during 1856 and recorded the following impression of Benton's speaking:

He remained during the greater time in one place, occasionally advancing a step forward or turning and doing the same in a side direction. There was little variety in his pose. His principal gesturing was done with his right hand and arm; his left hand was rarely raised higher than his head.\textsuperscript{55}

The editor of the \textit{Missouri Democrat} provided a similar account in discussing Benton's St. Louis Speech of 1856.

\textsuperscript{54}Grissom, "Benton," XVIII, 142.

He moved little, only occasionally taking a step forward or to one side, or leaning forward slowly and majestically, only occasionally gesturing with his right hand.56

However, other accounts indicate that Benton was capable of much greater physical animation when aroused or angered. One observer who heard Benton in the Compromise Debate of 1850 claimed that when he stated he would "dissect" the committee's bill; "He turned up his coat sleeves," and acted out the procedure of a physician preparing for surgery. The Missouri Democrat noted that when Benton engaged in personal attack or invective he "raised, pointed, and shook his fore-finger; clinched his fist and in a climax brought it down with emphasis."57

Overall, Benton's movement and gestures seem to have been restrained under ordinary circumstances. However, when he became emotionally involved, as he frequently did when speaking on slavery, he became much more animated.

Conclusion

As examination of Benton's slavery addresses indicates that he improved as a speaker during this phase of his career. Many of the

56Missouri Democrat, St. Louis, Missouri, August 3-5, 1856.

57Quoted in Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 366 and Missouri Democrat, St. Louis, Missouri, August 3, 1856.
studies which examined earlier speeches do not totally retain their validity when applied to the "later Benton." It should be noted, however, that Benton's excessively long, complex, fact-crammed speeches often failed to attract or sustain the interest of his listeners. This was especially true of his Senate Speeches. Numerous commentaries indicate that the galleries were largely vacant during Benton's Speeches.\textsuperscript{58} A study of Missouri sources indicates that he was a popular speaker in his home state. Even the Anti-Benton press consistently admitted that he attracted large audiences. Bidstrup feels that the evidence shows that Benton never failed to attract a large number of people to his speeches.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{58}"Political Portraits with Pen and Pencil," I, 89; Magoon, \textit{Living Orators}, p. 346; Todd, "Benton," XXVI, 363; and Seelen, "Expunging Speech", p. 84.

\textsuperscript{59}Bidstrup, "Background," XXXVI, 132-3.
CHAPTER SIX

BENTON'S STYLE

Introduction

Critical assessments of Benton's style are marked by greater consistency than evaluations of his delivery and organization. Both favorable and unfavorable critics seem to agree that style was the weakest component of Benton's rhetoric and tend to point to the same defects. However, significant differences are to be found among critics as to the effects of these stylistic weaknesses upon the ultimate reception and success of Benton's speeches and writings. It is the purpose of this chapter to examine previous studies of Benton's style and to attempt to determine if stylistic tendencies noted by other writers are characteristic of Benton's slavery speeches. Overall, it will be argued that Benton's style, like his delivery and organization, improved substantially during the course of the slavery crisis.

Previous Assessments

Rogers provides the most detailed examination of Benton's style of the biographers. There is no doubt that he felt Benton to
be almost totally inept in this respect. In commenting on Benton's written style he claimed:

As a rule Benton wrote very badly. He never mastered the simplest rules of composition. Sometimes his sentences contain two hundred words, and are so full of dependent clauses that the meaning is vague. He delighted in veiled allusions, and in reading the book (Thirty Years' View), there are times when it is difficult to understand whether he is speaking for himself or not...His fine vein of sentiment was often spoiled by a bungling manner of expression.

Rogers clearly believed that Benton's oral presentations suffered from the same stylistic deficiencies as his writings:

We have seen that Benton was vain of his oratory and without much reason. He spoke incessantly and his set speeches were prepared with great care. Here again we see the faults of his style. He lacked the power of concentration and generally was not lucid...when he let his imagination have free rein, he was likely to wander. He never tired of calling up the history of Greece and Rome for examples and precedents or warnings...when worked up to a high pitch of feeling, Benton was seldom choice in the use of language...

In his conclusion Rogers notes that Benton's speeches are seldom quoted today and suggests the secondary role history has assigned him stems in part from his "fundamental lack of literary style."!

Robert T. Oliver, a rhetorical critic, concurs with Rogers' assessment in claiming that if Benton "had to be judged only on the ability to utter memorable sentences...he would remain submerged"

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amid many of his contemporaries. Oliver felt that Benton's stylistic weaknesses resulted from verbosity, legalistic over-documentation, bursts of temper tantrums, and excessive ornament. In Oliver's opinion Benton's speeches "fail to compare in beauty of language" to the efforts of Webster, Clay, or Lincoln. Other historians and rhetorical critics noted essentially the same problems. Roosevelt thought Benton's style was characterized by "cheap pseudo-classicism." Meigs found his sentence structure awkward, his speeches too long, and his style generally impaired by excessive reiteration. Senator Foote found Benton's style to be a reflection of his egotism, dogmatism, self-important mode of debate, and uncontrollable temper. Magoon and a writer for the United States Magazine criticized Benton for "excessive use of metaphor" and reliance upon a "false taste." Magoon's comments are typical:

His manner is rhetorical, and he is at times too diffuse. He is often singularly happy in his metaphorical illustrations, in which he is very abundant, though he is sometimes hurried, in the flow of his language, into metaphors, which once entangled in them, it is not easy to manage very gracefully... (He has had to) struggle against the apparently natural disadvantages of an incorrect and false taste.

Seelen felt that the one word which best described Benton's style was "grandiloquence" and classified his oratory as "Asiatic." Numerous

2Authority for the above is to be found in Robert T. Oliver, History of Public Speaking in America (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1965), p. 129; Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Hart Benton (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1896), p. 92; William M. Meigs, The Life of Thomas
other writers refer again and again to Benton's excessive use of metaphor, classical references, his diffuseness, and his reliance upon intemperate language when angered. 3

Other writers have provided more favorable assessments of Benton's style. Chamber's comments on the first volume of, Thirty Years' View provide a sharp contrast to those of Rogers:

At best, the book showed insight, intensity, and eloquence—at worst, distortion, dullness, and pomposity. In its 165 chapters, crammed with information and rhetoric, there was substantially more best than worse ... The prose leaned too long, involuted, marching sentences, which probably reflected Benton's reading of Gibbon and Macaulay; but generally the sentences did march. The total effect was vigorous, muscular, and supple, like the style of the author's speeches, but more economical, less argumentative, and moderated. Finally, the sprawling volume was somehow unified by Benton's feeling for the sweep of his era, and by the drive of his personality. 4

As previously indicated, many of Benton's non-rhetorical

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critics relied heavily on Thirty Years' View in evaluating his style. Chambers argues that too many critics have placed too much stress on volume two in arriving at their final conclusions. Chambers notes several reasons why the second volume is not representative of Benton's style. First, Benton's nearly completed draft of the second volume, all of his primary documents, and his library were destroyed in a fire in 1855. As a result he had to start from the beginning in reconstructing the work and without valuable documents. Secondly, Benton's publishers were pushing hard for completion and the aged statesman was suffering from the cancer which would end his life in less than two years. Chambers felt the finished work,

showed signs of Benton's having lost his documents ...and of his hurried, almost harried rewriting. Its chapters were of uneven merit; the space allotted to various portions of the story was out of proportion to their importance or their time span; and an undue number of words was lavished on matters of secondary importance...5

The problems Benton encountered in completing Thirty Years' View may well account for a portion of the criticism directed toward his literary style.

The Mattis study's evaluation of Benton's style closely parallels the Chambers assessment. It concluded:

He lacked precision, grace, economy, and ease; he sometimes seemed to fluctuate between flat pedes-

trianism and bombast; even the minimum essential

5Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 417.
of clarity often eluded him. On the other hand, he had great merits. His expansiveness insured ultimate clarity despite occasional syntactical ambiguity. Contrasts, exclamations, questions, exhortations, illustrations, analogies, repetitions, and restatements helped to liven the dead weight of exhaustive factual evidence and to sustain interest at a high level. The classical allusions...constituted a form of literary adornment more appreciated then than now.6

In general, Mattis felt Benton's style was "spotty". At times Benton was guilty of the worst charges of his critics; at other times he approached true eloquence. Mattis claimed that "at his average level Benton was clear, and at his best he was tough, lively, and pungent."7

The conclusions of Chambers and Mattis seem to suggest that a blanket assessment of Benton's style, beyond isolating central tendencies, is largely impossible. Evidently, Benton's style shifted from time to time and from speech to speech depending on the audience, personal motivation, and the issues at question. Given such a tendency, it seems that each of Benton's speeches, more or less, deserve individual stylistic evaluation.

Previous chapters have indicated that elements of Benton's speaking improved after he became involved with the slavery question. There is evidence which indicates that the general improvements noted in Benton's rhetoric during the last years of his life carried over


7Mattis, "Benton," III, 89.
to his style. Magoon observed:

A progressive improvement...has been very evident within the last few years, his taste being purified from some bad habits of style, by which it (his oratory) was formerly disfigured.8

Frances Blair, one of Benton's closest and oldest friends, thought that Benton's style became much more direct, forceful, and simple after he became involved in the struggle to preserve the Union. Seelen cites examples which indicate that Benton's style was unimpassioned and overly logical during the period of the "bank war" but suggests that in later life his style became more exuberant and was characterized by greater use of wit and humor.9

Contemporary Recollections

Recollections of Benton's contemporaries provide insight into other aspects of his style. Judge Charles Johnson felt that Benton's style on the platform was little different from his style in the Senate.10 Johnson detected the same stylistic devices and techniques in both instances but noted that Benton assumed a more condescending manner and tone when addressing Missouri audiences. The Judge also indicated that Benton chose illustrations and examples familiar to the less educated frontiersman when speaking at home.10 Such stylistic

8Magoon, Living Orators, p. 345.
9Quoted in Mattis, "Benton," III, 94.
10Charles P. Johnson, Personal Recollections of Some of Missouri's Eminent Statesmen and Lawyers (St. Louis, The Legal Publish-
shifts may have seemed minor to Judge Johnson, but they represent a de-
liberate attempt on Benton's past to adjust his style to differing
audiences. McCurdy also detected significant shifts in Benton's style:

Recognizing the effectiveness of these appeals
(based on local events, personalities, etc.) Men
whose education would have permitted more elevated
language employed the language of the common man.
Thomas Hart Benton, who could speak learnedly in
the Senate, chose illustrations from everyday life
when he talked to his constituents on the frontier.\(^\text{11}\)

It seems incongruous that Benton would assume a condescending
tone and attitude while attempting to adapt examples and illustrations
for the benefit of his audiences. None the less, many observers indi-
cate that both elements were parts of Benton's style. Daniel Grissom
felt that Benton considered the members of the Senate his peers and
addressed them accordingly, but evidently felt the typical Missouri
voter was not quite his equal. According to Grissom, Benton refused
to use the traditional term "Fellow Citizens" in addressing his
Missouri audiences, but "addressed them in the formal and condescending
term of 'Citizens'." In addition, Benton shunned personal pronouns
and rarely used the first person. Grissom's account provides a valuable
insight into this aspect of Benton's style and personality:

\(^{11}\)Frances L. McCurdy, Stump, Bar, and Pulpit: Speechmaking
on the Missouri Frontier (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri
When he had occasion to speak of himself, which was often, it was in the third person, and by the formal and courtly title of 'Ben-ton'. The second syllable being pronounced as distinctly as the first without Mr., or Colonel, or any other prefix, giving his audience the impression that, after long and exhaustive deliberation, he had decided definitely and forever that no qualifying or explanatory title was needed to impart anything of dignity or importance to the person who bore that august historic name.12

Benton would never permit himself to be introduced to Missouri audiences, proclaiming that "all Missourians know Benton." Colonel Switzer though Benton's condescending manner and methods so dramatic and dictorial that "the marvel is they were tolerated at all."13

The following excerpts illustrate the manner and tone described above.

Benton opened his Fayette speech with the following sentence:

My Friends - and in that term I comprehend those who come to hear the truth, and to believe it - none others.14

The following portion from a speech given at St. Genevieve on November 5, 1849 demonstrates his habit of referring to himself in the third person:

The softs, rottens, and nullifiers have the shameless hardihood, to accuse Ben-ton of abolitionism! Benton, who lost not less than six thousand dollars to

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14 Thomas Hart Benton, Speech Delivered at Fayette, Missouri, September 1, 1849 (Jefferson City, Missouri: James Lusk, Printer, 1849).
settle the Missouri Compromise in times past!...The Southerners are the real abolitionists, the abolitionists of the whole Union. If some of the rotten politicians had planted as many grains of corn, and tended their crop, as they have told lies against Benton, they could make an independent living, and have no occasion to be hungering after the public crib.

Contemporaries agree that one of the most colorful and dramatic aspects of Benton's style was his frequent use of intemperate language in attacking ideas and individuals opposed to his position. Grissom reported that when Benton became angry "his language and bearing toward an opponent would become violent and provoking beyond endurance."

Magoon noted that "all who have heard Mr. Benton much, know that he habitually bears an imperious aspect, and is not infrequently betrayed by strong feeling into imperious action, in public speech." During the Canvass of 1849 a Missouri democrat wrote to Salmon P. Chase of Ohio that Benton's enemies were calling him a "scoundrel, barnburner, abolitionist, and free soiler, and that Benton was counterattacking "in no unqualified terms." The observer thought it unfortunate that Benton indulged "so much in profanity: it certainly looks very bad, especially so in a statesman." In looking back on the 1849

An original copy in Missouri State Historical Society Library, Columbia. All subsequent references to the Fayette speech are based on this text.


16Authority for the above is to be found in Grissom, "Benton," XVII, 132; Magoon, Living Orators, p. 337 and quotation included in Chambers, Old Bulition, pp. 351-2.
contest Benton's old friend Senator Vest recalled,

Benton came back from Washington, and canvassed the state in a vitriolic campaign, such as has never been known. If any man amongst his opponents had a weak place in his armor, Benton found it and assailed him by name. That he lived through the canvass was a miracle, for the men of the frontier were quick to avenge an insult or a wrong, and there was not a speech made by him in which drawn pistols and knives were not brandished in his face. His personal fearlessness saved his life (for if) there was one quality more prized than another upon the frontier it was insensitivity to personal danger. 17

The accounts examined so far have provided only general assessments of Benton's style covering his total career. Limited references to Benton's slavery speeches have been purely coincidental. Attention is now directed to a specific examination of the stylistic traits of the speeches in question.

Style of Benton's Slavery Speeches

Condescending Tone and Language

Chambers feels that Benton was fully aware of the rising tide of opposition to his policies in Missouri. In so far as the canvass of 1849 is concerned, Chambers argues that Benton knew there was a good chance that he would be defeated. The extensive speaking tour,

17Quoted in Walter B. Stevens, Centennial History of Missouri: One Hundred Years in the Union, 1821–1921, II (St. Louis: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1921), 180.
letters to the press, and Benton's enlistment of an enlarged staff all indicate that he recognized the realities of the situation. After his defeat in 1850 Benton obviously recognized that subsequent political attainments would be difficult. Progressive changes in the style of Benton's speeches between 1844 and 1858 clearly indicate an attempt to eliminate the condescending elements for which he had become noted. It is possible that Benton's recognition of political realities led him to attempt to reduce the distance between him and his constituents.

In his Boonville Speech of July 17, 1844, Benton followed the practice of referring to himself in the third person. He assumed the attitude of a lecturer telling his pupils what was best for them. He consistently addressed his audience as "citizens." In short, the Boonville Speech clearly demonstrates the general traits already noted. When Benton spoke at Jefferson City in 1849 he took a significantly different approach to his audience. He opened by addressing the audience as "citizens," but the term is used infrequently in the remainder of the speech. The speech is filled with personal pronouns and not once does Benton refer to himself in the third person. Overall, the speech is much more informal and personal than the Boonville Speech. Throughout the speech Benton attempts to identify with his audience. For example:

18Chambers, Old Bullion, p. 354.
This fact being established, let us see what that act was...

This brings us to the last winter's work...

Let us see some items of it - a few by way of samples...

We are a part of a Republic...

Liberty is now struggling in ancient empires, and her votaries are looking to us...

...and we, their posterity...to mar this noble work...19

What was "Benton" in previous speeches became "I" or "me" in the Jefferson City Speech. The following passage is typical:

1, therefore, appeal from the instructions I have received, because they are in conflict with instructions already received and obeyed (and)...because they contain unconstitutional expositions of the Constitution which I am sworn to support...They require me to promote disunion ...I appeal to the people - the whole body of the people.20

An examination of Benton's slavery speeches discloses a directness, simplicity, and personal touch not evident in most of his previous speeches.

Personal Attack

In spite of attempts to adapt to his audiences, Benton gave his political enemies no quarter. All of the commentaries of the

19 Thomas Hart Benton, Speech delivered at Jefferson City, Missouri, May 26, 1849, Jefferson Inquirer, May 26, 1849. All subsequent references to the Jefferson City Speech are based on this text.

20 Jefferson City Speech.
period note the bitter personal nature of the Canvass of 1849. Benton traveled across Missouri singling out his enemies, referring to them by name, and questioning their motives and morals as well as their competency. Benton freely employed every profane, colorful, and derogatory term familiar to the Missouri frontiersman. On different occasions Benton referred to his opponents as wolves, polecats, rottens, softs, and political prostitutes. At Fayette Benton characterized his opponents as,

Third rate politicians - packers of caucus's and conventions - turn coats from all parties - Captain Dalgetty's who fight for plunder - new fledged democrats who cannot tell at what political fount they were baptized. Never was there such a confederation of caitiff knaves...21

In the Jefferson City Speech Benton launches a long and bitter attack on Calhoun by questioning the motives behind his political acts:

Mr. Calhoun came into public life to be President of the United States. The weird sisters, in the shape of the old man that taught him grammar, had whispered in his ear - thou shalt be President. Upon that oracular revelation he commenced his political career, and has toiled at its fulfillment for forty years... by putting himself at the head of all the movements which promised advancement in the public favor.22

Near the end of the canvass Benton labeled his foes as "soft and rotten" and concluded with the following analogy:

21Fayette Speech.

22Jefferson City Speech.
It is an inevitable law of the material world, that things that are soft must petrify or putrefy in a certain number of years, and as the softs have not petrified...they are putrified, and are, therefore, plainly the rottens. Woe to the rottens...the dog days are coming, and neither alum, nor salt, nor brandy, nor red-pepper can save them from hasty and utter decomposition.23

Benton said he would follow the advice of his old friend John Randolph in handling his opponents, and would, like the farmer who has hogs to kill, wait and make one job of it. In St. Louis Benton claimed that he would crush his enemies "as an elephant would tread pissants under his feet." In another speech Benton pointed at an opponent present in the audience and shouted, "this man, Blackburn, has no heart; he has only a gizzard, and he has lied on Benton from the bottom of his gizzard to the tip of his tongue."24 While Benton was speaking in Cape Girardeau one of his staunchest opponents walked into the hall; Benton paused and then said:

Tom English wants my seat in the Senate. Now, he would look well in it; men would come into the Senate and pointing to the seat would exclaim, 'what thing is that in Benton's seat?'...He is the rottenest of the rottens...When I kill him next dog days, I won't leave so much as a grease spot; there won't be anything left of him but a little wet place.25

When a portion of Benton's speech was booed at Platte City the Senator

23Jefferson Inquirer, Jefferson City, Missouri, November 24, 1849.


25Metropolitan, Jefferson City, Missouri, November 27, 1849.
exclaimed, "God damn Platte City - God damn it, I wouldn't make another speech here to save it from the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah."26 Similar language and personal attacks are characteristic of Benton's speeches given during 1849.

With exception of the Platte City remark, Benton's attacks were directed largely toward his political opponents and not his general audience. Benton exercised great care in distinguishing between political leaders and specific voters. In general Benton told his audiences that they had been deceived or taken advantage of by the "rotten politicians." In the Jefferson City Speech Benton claimed that many who supported the Jackson Resolutions did so for "innocent and laudable purposes." Benton indicated that his purpose was therefore, to show that the "real purpose" of the "resolutions" was to promote the dissolution of the Union.27 At Fayette Benton told a hostile audience:

Conspiracy hatched the resolutions; fraud passed them; corruption was to enforce them...not content with this and knowing that the resolutions were passed without the knowledge of the people, and must be abhorred by them when found out, and fearing that I might raise an inquiry when I got home, they went to work to forecast and anticipate me...28

It seems evident that Benton carefully attempted to avoid offending

26Stevens, Centennial History, 11, 179.
27Jefferson City Speech.
28Fayette Speech.
his audiences by confining his attacks to political leaders instead of all who might be opposed to his policies. It should also be remembered that personal attack was a part of frontier rhetoric and was expected, in fact appreciated, by the audiences of the period.

**Humor**

It is largely impossible to separate Benton's use of humor from his tendency to wage *ad hominem* attacks. Evidently, many of the Senator's most vicious personal statements were viewed as humorous by his supporters. The contemporary press frequently indicated that laughter or applause followed such pronouncements. The humor employed by Benton in Missouri seems to have been based on wit and invective of the coarsest type. However, some of Benton's speeches provide examples of more pleasant, or at least more sophisticated, forms of humor. In the course of a speech given at Washington, Missouri in 1856, the makeshift speaker's platform gave way. Benton dusted himself off and remarked that "it was his prerogative to break through platforms." On another occasion Benton arrived at a rally soaking wet. He explained that his carriage had "sunk deep into the mud of a river ford" because it was "heavy with a load of Bullion." 29

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29See Missouri Democrat, St. Louis, Missouri, June 28, 1856 and John Oliphant, "Recollections of Benton," Missouri Historical Review, XIV (July, 1920), 434.
At Fayette in 1849 Benton humorously remarked that it was necessary to understand the unusual nature of Calhoun's vocabulary before discussing his policies. Benton then listed several terms used in the Calhoun Resolutions and claimed that Calhoun's usage of these terms represented what amounted to a new or specialized language; for example:

'Aggression' - this has always been considered applicable to lawless acts; here (as employed by Calhoun) it applies to an act of Congress, duly passed by a majority of each house, and approved by a Southern President and his cabinet...

'Encroachment' - This word heretofore has signified a lawless invasion of the rights of another. Now it applies in the vocabulary of Mr. Calhoun as to an act of Congress...

'Abolitionist' - This term, before its new signification, applied to those who denied the right of property in slaves, and who held all slaves entitled to immediate freedom, by force and violence, or by flight... All are now abolitionists who are not nullifiers...

At another point in the same speech Benton observed that only Hancock and John Adams had the honor of being excepted from the amnesty of George, The Third and that he was pleased that only Benton and Houston were honored in like manner by Calhoun, the first. Humorous ridicule was a favorite device of Benton's and similar examples are to be found in most of his speeches.

Benton's Senate and House speeches show much greater restraint and sophistication than his Missouri stump speeches. A reading of

30Fayette Speech.
Benton's Congressional speeches indicates a much lower incidence of personal attack. When Benton did engage in direct attack upon his opponents the references were veiled in subtle allusions, other abstractions, or humor. In Congress Benton's style was largely void of the direct name-calling and obscenity which characterized his Missouri approach. During the Compromise Debate of 1850 Benton brought the Senate down in laughter by comparing Clay's compromise proposals to different varieties of sarsaparilla-root extract. Benton noted that the Compromise Bill was only a conglomerate of separate bills already considered by the Senate:

The same bills were ordinary legislation in the hands of their authors but they become sacred compromises in the hands of their new possessors...the poet tells us a rose will smell as sweet by any other name. This may be true of roses, but not of compromises...The Senator from Illinois brought in three of these bills; they emitted no smell. The Senator from Virginia brought in another of them - no smell in that. The Senator from Missouri, who now speaks brought in the fifth-ditto, no smell about it!

Benton exclaimed he couldn't understand the process by which a bill unsatisfactorily in all its parts suddenly became a magic panacea in the whole. Benton said the reasoning must have been derived from the advertising techniques of two different traveling medicine men both named Townsend and their sarsaparilla root:

They both extracted from the same root, but the extract is a totally different article in the hands of the two doctors. Produced by one, it is a universal panacea: by the other, it is no account, and little less than poison.
Benton read from the label of the "Old" Doctor Townsend's preparation which stated that the product did not have "one thing in common" with a similar product sold by Dr. S. P. Townsend. Benton concluded:

Now all this is perfectly intelligible to me. It shows me precisely how the same root is either to be a poison or a medicine, as it happens to be in the hands of the old or the young doctor... This shows there is virtue in a name when applied to the extract of sarsaparilla root; and there may be equal virtue when applied to a Compromise Bill.31

Benton became angered by the press coverage of the Kansas-Nebraska Debate in 1854. He was particularly upset by what he thought was inaccurate reporting by the Union. In the course of his Kansas-Nebraska Speech, Benton alluded to press coverage of the debate and reminded editors and public printers that they got "their daily bread (and that buttered on both sides,) by our daily printing." Benton then concluded his remarks to the press with a fable:

For that class of intermeddlers I have no parliamentary law to administer, nor any quotation from Burke to apply - nothing but a little fable to read, the value of which, as in all good fables, lies in its moral. It is in French, and entitled, L'ane et don maître which, being done into English signified, The Ass and His Master, and runs thus: 'an ass took it into his head to scare his master, and put on a lion's skin, and went and stood in the path. And as he saw his master coming he commenced roaring he thought, but

31 Thomas Hart Benton, Anti-Compromise Speech, Delivered in the United States Senate, June 20, 1850 (Washington: Published by the Congressional Globe office, 1850). Copy is to be found in Missouri State Historical Society Library, Columbia. All subsequent references to the Anti-Compromise Speech are based on this text.
he only brayed, and the master knew it was his ass; so he went up to him with a cudgel, and beat him nearly to death.'

That is the end of the fable, and the moral of it is, 'a caution to all asses to take care how they undertake to scare their masters.'

When Benton returned to Missouri in 1856 to campaign for the governorship he displayed a conciliatory attitude that must have puzzled friend and foe alike. Benton's speeches were largely void of the personal bitterness, name-calling, and profanity which had marked his previous campaign efforts. Benton's shift in approach was probably a response to the new crisis generated by the slavery dispute. Kansas and Missouri were already engaged in what amounted to civil war; Senator Sumner of Massachusetts had been nearly beaten to death by Representative Brooks of South Carolina following a heated debate; and open talk of secession filled both the North and South. Such dramatic manifestations of sectional hatred produced the final phase of Thomas Hart Benton's public life and the last chapter in his involvement with the slavery question. From 1856 until his death in 1858 Benton attempted to play the role of Peacemaker. The Missouri Canvass of 1856, his literary efforts, and the lecture tours of 1856-1857 were directed toward suppressing the slavery agitation and re-

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32Thomas Hart Benton, Kansas-Nebraska Speech, delivered in the United States House of Representatives, April 25, 1854 (Washington: Published by the Congressional Globe Office, 1854). Copy is to be found in Missouri State Historical Society Library, Columbia. All subsequent references to the Kansas-Nebraska Speech are based on this text.
storing harmony to the Union. Evidently, Benton recognized that his success as peacemaker depended in part upon his ability to provide a personal model to follow. Benton set the tone of the 1856 campaign in his opening speech at St. Louis:

I shall have to make some speeches, but not such as are usually made in such a political canvass. Attacks upon the opposite party, or parties, usually constitute the burden of such speaking; they are proper in other canvasses, but not commendable... (under current circumstances). I shall make no disparaging reference to the parties opposed to me. I shall applaud my own party but say nothing derogatory of others.

Benton's speech was a magnificent plea for all parties to abandon sectional hostility and to restore normal communication and cooperation. Speaking of his personal role and function in resolving the dispute he said,

I take for my text the farewell words of the Father of his country (Washington), addressing his last advice to the children over whom he had watched and guarded, and from whom he was about to be parted forever. A father about to die collects his children about him bestows his paternal benediction upon them – exhorts them to fraternal affection – utters a prayer for their happiness – and resigns his soul to his maker. Uppermost in his thoughts, and deepest in his heart, is the wish for family harmony, and for brotherly and sisterly affection. Peace in the family circle is the last aspiration of his lips – the last pulsation of his bosom. He dies praying for peace among his descendants. 33

33 Thomas Hart Benton, Speech delivered at the St. Louis Ratification Meeting, June 21, 1856, Jefferson Inquirer, Jefferson City, Missouri, June 26, 1856. All subsequent references to the St. Louis Ratification Speech are based on this text.
Chambers felt the St. Louis Ratification Rally Speech was "one of the finest campaign efforts" in Benton's long career. Chambers notes that the speech was "carefully molded and restrained" and that Benton elaborated the same themes in the same manner throughout the campaign. Contemporary press accounts clearly indicate that Benton carefully followed a consistent methodology in 1856. The following assessment was carried in the Jefferson Inquirer:

Col. Benton spoke in Bolivar, Polk County, on the 7th. The speech was the same as the ones delivered in this city and St. Louis, with only slight variation to fit the locality, primarily allusions to Mayor Phelps.

During the winter and spring of 1856 and 1857 Benton took his "appeal for the Union" to the East. He proclaimed that his only purpose was to "pacify the public mind" and "restore fraternal feeling by conciliatory means." Again, the language and argument were similar to those employed in the Missouri Canvass. Benton stressed that both North and South were equally responsible for "the current crisis." He pleaded for reason and restraint on both sides and predicted civil war if the agitation did not cease. Shortly before Christmas of 1856 Benton spoke at the New England Celebration in New York City and told his audience:

I say, in brief and in short, that the two halves of this Union, the North and the South, were made for each other, as much as Adam and Eve were made for each other; and I say accursed be the serpent:and bruised

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35Jefferson Inquirer, Jefferson City, Missouri, July 26, 1856.
be his head who undertakes mischief or division between them! 37

During his lecture tour Benton wrote that he was engaged in "the Union saving business", but confided that his position was "that of friendly independence, wishing for the best, fearing a little." 38

A study of Benton's slavery speeches between 1844 and 1857 reveals a dramatic and significant shift in style. During this period Benton gradually but steadily eliminated language and references which were condescending toward his audiences, came to denounce personal attacks on opponents, and developed a style which was much more personal, pleasant, and conciliatory in its impact. It is probably fair to say that prior to 1850 Benton employed a style which tended to polarize opinion but that after 1850 he came more and more to employ a style designed to conciliate divergent opinion.

Literary Allusions and Devices

Benton's speeches clearly reflect the admiration of the nineteenth century for ornate style and literary allusions. Depending upon which treatises on style is employed it is possible to identify as many as several hundred different literary devices available to

37 Thomas Hart Benton, Speech at the New England Celebration in New York, National Intelligencer, Washington, D. C., December 25, 1856. All subsequent references to the New England Celebration Speech are based on this text.

speakers. It is not possible or necessary, in a study of this scope, to undertake a detailed examination of all the stylistic devices present in Benton's speeches. It is necessary, however, to note the most important, and most frequently employed, devices utilized by Benton during the course of the slavery controversy.

Repetition and restatement were important elements of Benton's style. The previous chapter has indicated that Benton employed these devices in an attempt to clarify the organizational patterns of his long complicated speeches, but Benton employed these devices so consistently and frequently that they also exercised a strong influence upon his style. Most of the critics cited in this chapter criticized Benton for reiterating too much, boring his audience with repetition, and engaging in needless redundancies. There is little doubt that Benton's repetitions produced an awkwardness in his style, but it should be remembered, Norman Mattis observed, "that Benton was a practical political speaker and not a lyric poet." Benton was far more concerned that his arguments were digested and retained than he was that his speeches would become a part of the literature of the period. Benton's speeches might read better if the redundant elements were removed, but it is unlikely that his immediate audiences could have followed the speeches, let alone retained much of the content, without

such devices.

Benton also often used repetition of a word or phrase for dramatic and stylistic impact. He concluded the Anti-Compromise Speech by saying,

California is suffering for want of admission. New Mexico is suffering for want of protection. The public business is suffering for want of attention. The character of Congress is suffering for want of progress in business. It is time to put an end to so many evils.40

In his attack upon the Kansas-Nebraska Act Benton described the doctrine of squatter sovereignty as,

...nonsense...the essence of nonsense,...the quintessence of nonsense,...the five-times distilled essence of political nonsensicality.41

Benton frequently employed such combinations of repetitions and alliteration in composing what he evidently hoped would be a striking sentence or passage.

The extensive use of rhetorical questions is evident in all of Benton's slavery speeches. He consistently employs questions to introduce or conclude important thoughts. In the Fayette Speech of 1849 Benton asked; "How comes this conversion except by an act of Congress?"; "From whence comes this law, and this treaty except by help of Northern votes?"; "My life is wanted, and why?"; and "what

40 AntI-Compromise Speech.
41 Kansas-Nebraska Speech.
conduct? What states? None are named, none can be named.\textsuperscript{42} All of Benton's slavery speeches are, in part, characterized by such questions.

Exhortation and exclamation were also prominent elements of the Benton style. Benton often introduced a point with an exhortation and concluded it with an exclamation, or vice versa. In discussing the English origins of American common law he initiated his argument by exhorting the Senate to "listen to Blackstone" and concluded by exclaiming, "we have made our own parliamentary law...for the admission of new states. Let us abide it!\textsuperscript{43} At Fayette Benton concluded his discussion of one of the Jackson Resolutions by shouting, "It is secession! It is disunion! It is a formation of a Southern Confederacy! It is high treason!" At another point in the same speech, Benton argued that the South was preparing to secede. Benton offered as his evidence a series of articles by Southern leaders carried in a recent issue of a Southern publication. He began, "Behold the Southern Quarterly Review!...Listen to these extracts; they are too

\textsuperscript{42}Fayette Speech.

\textsuperscript{43}Thomas Hart Benton, Anti-Tack Speech, or Speech Against Tacking Anything to the California State Admission Bill, Delivered in the Senate of the United States, April 22, 1850 (Washington: Published by the Congressional Globe Office, 1850). Copy is to be found in Missouri State Historical Society Library, Columbia. All subsequent references to the Anti-Tack Speech are based on this text.
starting to be paraphrased!"44

Benton attempted to provide contrast and balance in his speeches by inserting humorous anecdotes, emotional appeals, vivid descriptions, or other high interest material into long, factual, and tedious passages. After what must have seemed a boring and complicated examination of political maneuvering at the Democratic Presidential Nominating Convention of 1856, Benton offered a striking description of the convention hall and final ballot which provided a sharp contrast to the factual information just concluded:

It was a sort of den, approached by a long narrow passage, barricaded by three doors, each door guarded by armed bullies...This den had no windows by which people could look in, or see, or the light of the sun enter - only a row of glass like a steamboat skylight, thirty-five feet above the floor. It was the nearest representation of the 'black hole' in Calcutta...

The little panes of glass above were hung on pivots, and turned flat to let in air. A rain came in, drove into the den, and to exclude it, the panes were turned up. Smothering! Smothering! was the cry in the den; and the glass had to be turned up again. Over this place was a small box for the admission of spectators, its approach barricaded and guarded, and entrance only obtained upon tickets from the same packed committee; and to whom they gave tickets was seen when the first votes were given for Buchanan - and when each state that voted for him was hissed - even Virginia! and the hissing only stopped by a threat to clear the galleries. Such is the pass to which the nomination of the President is now brought.45

44Fayette Speech.

45St. Louis Ratification Speech.
An examination of Benton's slavery speeches clearly indicates that his favorite literary devices were illustration and the figurative analogy. Benton found the raw material for these devices in the history and literature of Ancient Greece and Rome, the Bible, the history and literature of Britain, and the everyday events of frontier life. No matter what problem vexed the Nation, the Senate, or the state of Missouri Benton could find a parallel or illustration in one of the above mentioned categories.

During the Compromise Debate of 1850 Benton compared Clay's activities and expectations to the mythological marriage feast of Pirithous:

It was an ecstatic moment for the Senator, something like that of the heroic Pirithous when he surveyed the preparations for the nuptial feast - saw the company of all present, the lapithae on couches, the centaurs on their haunches - heard the Io Lymen beginning to resound, and saw the beauteous Hippodamia, about as beauteous I suppose as California, come glittering like a star, and take her stand on his left hand...But, oh! the deceitfulness of human felicity! In an instant the scene was changed = the feast a fight - the wedding festival a mortal combat - the table itself supplying the implements of war!46

At Fayette Benton compared the techniques of John C. Calhoun to those of the Roman conspirator, Cataline. Benton discussed numerous facets of Calhoun's political activities and concluded each with the statement, "the brave Cataline would not have done that." Benton closed this particular portion of the speech with the comment, "

46 Anti-Compromise Speech.
could not be so unjust to the brave Roman conspirator as to compare the cowardly American plotter to him." 47

Benton thought the California provisions of the Compromise of 1850 were analogous to the "scape goat" of the ancient Jews:

. . . In ancient Jerusalem an innocent and helpless animal (was) loaded with sins which were not his own, and was made to die for offences which he had never committed. So of California. She is innocent of all the evils of slavery...yet they are all packed upon her back, and she is sacrificed under the heavy load. 48

Benton was fond of British precedent when discussing legal or historical issues. British common law, the debates of Parliament, judicial decisions, and acts of Parliament provided him with an unlimited source of illustrations and analogies. For example, Benton compared the repressive provisions of the Southern Address to repressive laws imposed during the age of Cromwell. 49

Analogies based upon the Bible and other great literary works are evident in most of Benton's speeches. Benton once questioned Calhoun's political motives by employing the following comparison:

He (Calhoun) expected to succeed Jackson, and that he would only have to wait and serve eight years. That was only one year longer than Jacob had to wait and serve Laban for Rachel. But oh the disappointments in love and politics! Like Jacob, when he woke up, he found it was Leah - a little magician of the North had got into the bed...unlike Jacob, he could not wait...and determined to

47Fayette Speech.

48Anti-Compromise Speech.

49Fayette Speech.
clutch the prize at once.\textsuperscript{50}

In the Fayette Speech Benton alluded to Shakespeare by telling his audience that the undemocratic measures demanded by the South assume "we are all Falstaffs."\textsuperscript{51}

Benton's Missouri stump speeches contain fewer abstractions and are characterized by allusions and illustrations more familiar to the uneducated frontiersman. While speaking at Sarcoxie in 1856 Benton compared his opponents to little prairie hawks that sailed around over the barnyards "seeking little creatures whom they might devour," and said they were "unlike the great American eagle who soars aloft with his eyes on the sun."\textsuperscript{52} During the Canvass of 1849 Benton compared the forthcoming election to hog killing day when the old sows and pigs fighting him would all be killed without fattening.\textsuperscript{53}

The excerpts from Benton's speeches contained in this chapter were selected to illustrate particular aspects of his style. Such a procedure is somewhat misleading for Benton generally used several devices in conjunction to create an overall image or impression. The following extracts from the Kansas-Nebraska Speech provide a clearer picture of Benton's composite style and demonstrates his stylistic

\textsuperscript{50}Jefferson City Speech.

\textsuperscript{51}Fayette Speech.


\textsuperscript{53}Jefferson Inquirer, Jefferson City, Missouri, November 24, 1849.
versatility.

(Benton described the doctrine of popular sovereignty as) ...a silent, secret, limping, halting, creeping, squinting, impish, motion-conceived in the dark—midwifed in a committee room, and sprang upon Congress and the country in the style which Guy Fawkes intended to blow up the Parliament house, with his five hundred barrels of gunpowder, hid in the cellar under the wood...

I object to this shilly-shally, willy-won'ty, don'ty-can'ty style of legislation. It is not legislative. It is not parliamentary. It is not manly. It is not womanly. No woman would talk that way, no shilly-shally in a woman. Nothing of the female gender was ever born young enough, or lived long enough to get befogged in such a quandry as this...(it is) different from good milk in which the cream rises to the top, it here settles to the bottom...54

Conclusion

Benton's slavery speeches indicate that he was familiar with, and in fact employed, a wide range of stylistic devices. Evidence clearly demonstrates a significant shift in Benton's approach to his audiences during the period in question. This shift is characterized primarily, by a more restrained, conciliatory, and personalized style. The real weakness of Benton's style is not so much in the devices employed as in the substantive content of the speeches.

54Kansas-Nebraska Speech.
Benton's speeches were so long, complicated, and overdocumented that the style was often smothered by the argument. Passages that approach stylistic eloquence are lost in the midst of facts, figures, and testimony. Therefore, the claims that Benton's style was spotty and alternately shifted from dryness to bombast are probably just.
CHAPTER SEVEN

BENTON'S RHETORICAL IMPACT

Overall Effectiveness

An overview of Thomas Hart Benton's rhetoric presents us with a portrait of a speaker possessing both great strengths and great weaknesses. Benton labored tirelessly in preparing his speeches. He employed his remarkable energy and memory in ferreting out astounding volumes of factual information which he wove into every speech. An examination of Benton's slavery speeches clearly indicates that he was concerned with structure and organization as well as content. The speeches examined are characterized in part by a careful and obvious attempt to arrange arguments and supports for greatest clarity and effect. Benton partitioned and called attention to his organizational patterns by employing chronological, topical, and cause to effect relationships. He drilled his main arguments into the memory of his audiences by frequent repetition, restatement, exclamation, and clear transitions.

Memory appears to have played a major role in shaping Benton's speech-making. It enabled him to follow preset structural designs and to integrate his vast reservoir of knowledge and experience into
any speaking situation. Benton's striking physical appearance and
dress were also important assets. Contemporary observers stressed
the fact that Benton's bearing and appearance added dramatic impact
to his speeches which favorably impressed immediate audiences.

Benton's vocal quality varied from speech to speech as a
result of a throat ailment; however, most commentaries indicate that
Benton's voice was powerful, clearly understandable, and varied in
spite of an occasional tendency to hoarseness. Apparently Benton's
voice was a positive asset under normal circumstances. Previous
studies note that, as a general rule, Benton's movement on the plat-
form was restrained and limited, but evidence pertaining to the slavery
period alone suggests that his personal involvement and conviction
resulted in a much more alive, animated, and enthusiastic delivery.

Benton's messages indicate he was familiar with a wide range
of stylistic devices and techniques. His slavery speeches reveal a
style characterized in part by intemperate language, exhortation, ex-
clamation, reiteration and restatement, and a wide range of literary
devices. Benton was especially fond of figurative analogies and
literary allusions based upon the history, myths, and literature of
Greece, Rome, and Britain. A comparison of speeches clearly demon-
strates that Benton attempted to adapt his style to fit his varying
audiences. Benton's Senate speeches are more complex, scholarly,
restrained, and pedantic than his Missouri stump speeches. The
Missouri speeches are marked by a reliance upon rhetorical techniques,
Benton's modes of proof are marked by a heavy reliance upon logical appeal. Benton's reputation as a logician rests upon his ability to muster extensive data to support his propositions. Emotional proofs were employed sparingly and normally consisted of loaded language and ad hominen references. Benton's emotional arguments are based upon appeals to tradition, law, peace, justice, and fear. He used emotional language to create a desired image of an opponent, proposal, or activity in the minds of his audiences. Usually emotional appeals are to be found in Benton's conclusions.

During the slavery crisis Benton relied more and more upon appeals designed to enhance his image. He consistently tried to relate his character, reputation and political activities to political heroes of the period, favorable legislation, and the desire for peace, justice, and national harmony.

Benton's greatest liability was over-reliance on his greatest asset - the ability to employ a vast array of facts in support of arguments. It is the opinion of this writer that this one factor accounts in large part for his weaknesses in presentation, style, and argument. First, Benton muddied his organizational patterns by including so much supportive and illustrative material that the main arguments were partially lost or de-emphasized. The isolated organizational patterns of the speeches are clear but the relationship of the substance to the structure is often unclear. The sheer volume of
factual information creates an allusion of disorganization. Secondly, the weakness of Benton's style is not so much related to the techniques employed as in the substantive content of the speeches. The speeches were so long, complicated, and fact-crammed that the style was often smothered by argument and evidence. Thirdly, Benton spent so much time in presenting evidence that he had little time left to explain the logical connection between his evidence and conclusions. As a consequence the audience was left to resolve complicated reasoning patterns and controversial warrants on their own. If Benton had spent more time on analysis and explanation and less on documentation the arguments would probably have been more persuasive.

Benton's personality was also an impediment to his rhetorical effect. His egotism, aloof manner, condescending tone, violent temper, and non-qualified arguments must have produced a negative reaction on the part of many members of his audiences.

Benton apparently worked hard to overcome many of his rhetorical liabilities. Between 1849 and 1858 he eliminated most of the condescending tone and content from his speeches and practiced a much more direct, personal, and conciliatory rhetoric. He tended to replace coarse personal attack with more subtle humor and ridicule. The slavery speeches also indicate that he managed to overcome some of the pendency of his earlier speeches. It is the opinion of this writer that Benton's rhetoric steadily improved, in almost all respects, between 1844 and
1858, but even in his last speeches many dimensions of the old problem remained, especially the problems stemming from excessive reliance upon factual data.

Benton's Impact upon Popular Opinion

By 1850 opinion seems to have polarized in regard to slavery. Benton's unbending claim that the territorial expansion of slavery should be checked and that slavery should be retained where established was unacceptable to all but a handful of moderates. Abolitionists who desired the immediate and total abolition of slavery could not accept the position. Southern men who saw the expansion of slavery as the only way to preserve their interests could not accept it. The proslavery elements who controlled the Democratic Party in Missouri could not accept it. No substantial segment of the population, either nationally or locally could embrace Benton's middle ground. In Benton's mind the preservation of the Union was important enough to submerge all other issues but few people shared this viewpoint. As a result, Benton probably failed to substantially alter opinion during the period in question and it is unlikely that anyone else with a similar platform could have accomplished much more.
Benton’s Place in History

An assessment of Benton’s overall place in history is beyond the scope of this study. Such an assessment necessarily hinges on numerous other considerations not related to the slavery controversy. However, some conclusions as to Benton’s impact upon the course of the slavery dispute are possible. Benton’s slavery speeches may have had minimal effects upon his immediate audiences, but they seem to have had a significant effect upon opinion on the eve of the Civil War, after his death.

The Missouri historians Eugene Violette and Walter Stevens argue that Benton’s speeches and writings were one of the major forces which kept Missouri in the Union. In their opinion Missourians simply did not believe that disunion was a real or immediate possibility until the brink of Civil War was reached in 1860. As a result Benton’s appeals to choose between slavery and disunion did not have an immediate relevant impact. When it became clear that disunion was, in fact, a reality many proslavery Missourians elected to support the Union. Both Violette and Stevens feel that Benton’s years of conditioning the public mind against secession and disunion came to have a significant impact at this point in the crisis.1 John F. Kennedy

provided the following assessment:

But even in death and defeat, Thomas Hart Benton was victorious. For his voice from the past on behalf of the Union was one of the deciding factors that prevented Missouri from yielding to all the desperate efforts to drive her into secession along with her sister slave states.\(^2\)

William C. Todd, one of the organizers of Benton's New England tour, suggested that a similar pattern of influence became obvious in New England prior to the Civil War:

The fear of disunion did not generally prevail at that time (1856-1857) in New England, but was regarded as the dream of croakers and timid women. It had been so long threatened that our ears had become familiar with it. Though the audience respected the views of so aged and honored a statesman, the fact he should be so disturbed by such forebodings seemed to them an indication of his mental decay, and they did not know that he was depicting what was to be fulfilled in their own time with horrors of which no imagination could then have conceived.

Todd concludes by noting that New Englanders developed a much greater appreciation and understanding of Benton in the period following his death and before 1861.\(^3\) It is not unreasonable to assume that Benton may have exercised some influence on the question of secession and disunion in New England as well as in Missouri. In regard to slavery, Benton's place in history rests upon his ability to accurately read

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the flow of events and to predict future developments and consequences. History has vindicated many of Benton's predictions. His assessment of the ultimate effects of the Compromise of 1850 were far more accurate than those of his great contemporaries; his predictions of the results of the Kansas-Nebraska Act were correct in almost every detail; Stephen Douglas staked his political career on a different evaluation of the Kansas-Nebraska situation and destroyed his presidential chances; the common man refused to believe that disunion was possible and was overwhelmed by the rapid course of events culminating in the secession of the Southern states. Two years after Benton's death another Midwesterner became President of the United States and adopted a policy highly similar to the Missouri Senator's.

Contemporary Relevance of Study

It is felt that this examination of Benton's slavery speeches has revealed several considerations meriting the attention of contemporary students of rhetoric. First, Benton's rhetoric provides a strange mixture of strengths and weaknesses which clearly demonstrate the inter-relationship and interdependence of the constituent elements of effective speaking. Benton's speeches are a testimony to the necessity and effectiveness of careful preparation and documentation of deliberative rhetoric. However, these same speeches clearly bear out
the findings of modern scholars which stress the importance of a balanced rhetoric. Benton's effect stems in large part from his ability to marshal examples, illustrations, and other factual information in support of his argument, but his weaknesses find their origin in his excessive dependence upon this one dimension of rhetoric. Overall, excessive data resulted in speeches that were generally too long, organizational patterns that were partially lost, and a style that was seemingly spotty and submerged beneath a morass of facts and figures. Benton's belief that "the facts speak for themselves" produced logical proofs in which the warrants or principles of reasoning connecting "the facts" and the claims are explained poorly or not explained at all. Finally, Benton's arguments consistently assume that the audiences will accept controversial warrants without any attempt to support these underlying assumptions. In short, Benton's rhetorical efforts strikingly emphasize that excessive reliance on one form of proof or one canon of rhetoric generally results in the impairment of an equally important canon.

A study of Benton's slavery speeches clearly demonstrates the power of ethos in political speaking. Benton was so respected and revered by his fellow Missourians that he was sustained in office for three terms with little more than a perfunctory vote. The Missouri electorate was shocked and deeply disturbed by Benton's Texas position in 1844 but returned him to the Senate for another term with a comfortable margin of votes cast by the members of the Missouri Legislature.
Even after articulating a political position on slavery which was diametrically opposed to majority opinion in Missouri it took six years and Benton's total denunciation of the expansion of slavery to produce his defeat. During the years following his defeat Benton continued to be in demand as a lecturer. The evidence seems to indicate that he was sought as a speaker primarily because he was deeply respected as a statesman of courage and principle.

It should also be remembered that political campaigning on the frontier served an entertainment or theatrical function as well as an informative one. Benton's campaign speeches of 1844 and 1849 have been widely criticized by historians and rhetoricians alike for their coarseness and personal attacks upon opponents. It is crucially important to note that such behavior was expected and, in fact, appreciated by the audiences. It appears that political candidates employed such tactics to please and thereby attract audiences to their speeches. In this respect Benton's campaign speeches seem to be typical of his period and locale. It is probably fair to assume that the so-called "mud slinging" tactics employed by some twentieth century campaigners is, in part, a carry-over from the political practices of the nineteenth century frontier. In fact, many Americans still seem to admire an outspoken, blunt, and courageous candidate. Harry Truman was applauded by many for employing some of the same tactics which characterized his Missouri predecessor. More recently George Wallace has attracted substantial support while employing a similar campaign rhetoric.
Many of Benton's liabilities as a speaker originated in his preoccupation with written rhetoric. Benton was generally far more concerned with his vast potential reading audience than with his immediate listening audience. As a consequence he normally employed multiple rhetorical vehicles in attempting to influence public opinion. Benton's speeches were printed and widely circulated, both in Missouri and nationally; he frequently contributed articles to numerous newspapers; and his literary works were intended as instruments of persuasion as well as historical records. The length, volumes of supporting data, and general complexity of Benton's speeches resulted in part from the fact that he wrote then with publication in mind. This being the case, delivery and the immediate audience's response became secondary. In Benton's mind a reader, if not a listener, could take time to reflect, re-read, and thereby digest the massive content of the speeches. Overall, Benton used all available vehicles of persuasion in an attempt to influence the largest number possible. Those who have denounced Benton's handling of his immediate audience have tended to ignore the speaker's overall design and intent.

This study also points up the unreliability of many of the primary sources dealing with a controversial speaker long dead. David Donald, a modern Lincoln historian, bemoaned the fact that history, as it is often written, places too much stress on newspaper sources, speeches, and other period assessments which inevitably result in a
biased or non-objective picture. The same problem was encountered by this writer. It is possible to portray Benton's rhetoric in any light desired, depending upon which primary source or sources are employed. Many secondary sources such as biographies and histories have exacerbated the problem by employing the same slanted information in their treatments. The biggest problem encountered in this study involved attempts to locate and evaluate objective assessments of Benton's speaking. Students who wish to undertake a similar study in the future should become aware of this obstacle to objective criticism.

Finally, it should be noted that any rhetorical critic engaging in such a study will be confronted by rhetorical assessments employing varying standards of criticism. These varying standards range from inaccurate assessments rendered by those who are not skilled or knowledgeable in rhetoric to modern rhetorical critics who insist upon imposing modern criteria of evaluation upon a speaker and period characterized by a different rhetorical emphasis. For example, it is probably unjust, at least in assessing the effects of a speech, to criticize Benton for his lengthy speeches and use of literary allusions since both were characteristic of the rhetoric of his period.

Potential For Further Research

It appears that previous studies have sufficiently examined Benton's deliberative speeches. However, no existing study has under-
taken an assessment of Benton as a ceremonial or epideictic speaker. Benton gave many such speeches and took great pride in them. Shortly before his death he wrote:

There was also a class of speeches, of which he delivered many, which were out of the line of political or legislative discussions; and may be viewed as literary. They were funeral eulogisms which the custom of Congress began to admit...over deceased members. These eulogisms were universally admired and were read over Europe ...and will claim lasting places in biographies.4

Many of Benton's contemporaries comment on Benton's effectiveness as an eulogist; even the highly critical Henry S. Foote claimed that Benton had no equal in this form of speaking.5 A study of Benton as a ceremonial speaker might reveal a rhetorician far different from the "deliberate Benton." Such an examination would also make it possible to determine if the elimination of factual data resulted in an improved style and delivery.

Rhetoricians have tended to conduct studies which focus upon the careers of notable political figures who excelled in the presentation of prepared speeches. In Thirty Years' View Benton refers again and again to the debaters in Congress, men who seldom gave "set speeches" but excelled in extemporaneous responses to other speakers. Benton especially admired the abilities of Senators William B. Giles of


Virginia and John Forsyth of Georgia. He described them as follows:

He (Giles) had that kind of speaking talent... which is so different from set speaking. He was a debater; and was considered by Mr. Randolph to be, in our House of Representatives, what Charles Fox was admitted to be in the British House of Commons: the most accomplished debater which his country had ever seen... Mr. Giles neither read nor studied, but talked incessantly with able men, rather debating with them all the while: and drew from this source of information, and from the ready powers of his mind, the ample means of speaking on every subject the fulness which the occasion required, the quickness which confounds an adversary, and the effect which a lick in time always produces.

Mr. Forsythe was a fine specimen of that kind of speaking which constitutes a debater... He combined the requisites for keen debate—a ready, copious, and easy elocution; ample knowledge of the subject; argument and wit; great power to point a sarcasm, and clearness of perception to take advantage of every misstep of his adversary.6

A study dealing with what Benton termed "the debaters" might well provide a picture of a different type of rhetorical theory and practice during the nineteenth century.

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266
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