

THE CHOICE

The dueling code of honor had been satisfied. Andrew Jackson was wounded but stood his ground. Now he could magnanimously spare his opponent—or kill him. The choice the future president made revealed much about his character and personality.

By **WILLIAM
A. DeGREGORIO**

Gentlemen, are you ready?" Andrew Jackson and Charles Dickinson squared off, facing each other eight paces (about twenty-four feet) apart. Each held a single-shot pistol at his side.

Dickinson, a handsome figure nattily dressed in a short blue coat and gray trousers, calmly replied, "Yes." Jackson, his spare, lanky frame concealed beneath a carelessly buttoned, full-length frock coat, fixed his icy blue eyes on his opponent and awaited the signal.

"Fire!"

Even before that Friday morning, May 30, 1806, news of the duel had swept Nashville. Residents placed bets furiously, with the smart money on Dickinson. At age twenty-seven, he was widely regarded as the best marksman in Tennessee. He was a rising attorney of some repute in the western part of the state, and had prospered by speculating in commodities, land, livestock, and slaves. Dickinson's arrogance and incessant bragging annoyed some, but his wit and charm allowed him to remain quite popular in Nashville.

Jackson, the man who nonetheless challenged this sharpshooter to a duel, had at age thirty-nine already served in both houses of Congress and as a judge in Tennessee's highest court, and held the rank of major general in the Tennessee mili-

tia. He had demonstrated many important leadership qualities—courage, vision, and an ability to motivate others. But there was a darker side to Jackson's character—a side he exposed during the events surrounding his duel with Dickinson.

Of course, those who knew Jackson well were aware that he had a visceral, forceful personality. He was combative, often stubborn, and had an explosive temper. His closest confidant and eventual presidential successor Martin Van Buren marveled at the way Jackson turned his anger on and off like a switch.

Some speculated that Jackson simply showed his temper for effect. Perhaps, but genuine rage often boiled within this rawboned veteran who, having been orphaned by age fourteen, had needed to grow up in a hurry, and who still bore the physical and emotional scars from his boyhood internment in a prisoner of war camp during the Revolution.

Thomas Jefferson observed Jackson regularly during the latter's brief Congressional career and was appalled at his inability to control his temper. "His passions are terrible," Jefferson said of Jackson. "When I was President of the Senate, he was senator, and he could never speak on account of the rashness of his feelings. I have seen him attempt it repeatedly, and as often choke with rage. His passions are,



A disagreement over settlement of a forfeited horse race, meddling by an outsider, and, perhaps, imprudent words besmirching the honor of Andrew Jackson's wife swept Charles Dickinson (above) and Jackson onto a collision course leading to the dueling ground. Although Dickinson was reputedly the best marksman in Tennessee, the dashing twenty-seven-year-old lawyer's aim would prove to be an inch off the mark—enough for Jackson to cheat death and wreak his revenge.

no doubt, cooler now; he has been much tried since I knew him, but he is a dangerous man."

"When Andrew Jackson hated," writes Robert V. Remini, Jackson's principal modern biographer, "it often became grand passion. He could hate with a Biblical fury and would resort to petty and vindictive acts to nurture his hatred and keep it bright and strong and ferocious. He needed revenge. He always struck back."

Especially in defense of his wife's honor.

When Jackson "married" Rachel Donelson Robards in 1791, neither realized that she was still legally wed to another man. Rachel thought she had been divorced, but because of a technicality that Jackson, though a lawyer, had somehow overlooked, the divorce was not yet finalized when she and Andrew exchanged vows. A few years later they discovered the error and were married in a second ceremony, this time legally. But whenever Jackson ran for office or was otherwise in the public spot-

light, his adversaries and the opposition press hurled charges of adultery.

In October 1803, for example, Jackson was the target of a harsh verbal attack by former Tennessee governor John Sevier in a public confrontation on Knoxville's town square. "I know of no great service you have rendered the country," taunted Sevier, "except taking a trip to Natchez with another man's wife." A scuffle punctuated by gunshots ensued between the enraged Jackson and his bitter political rival; during the weeks that followed Jackson repeatedly challenged Sevier to duel and published charges that he was "a base coward and poltroon" who "will basely insult, but has not the courage to repair the wound." The satisfaction with arms that Jackson sought was barely averted at the last minute through the efforts of the two men's seconds.

Tradition credits the Jackson-Dickinson duel to similar circumstances: learning that Dickinson had made irreverent remarks about Rachel, the story goes, Jackson confronted the young lawyer. Dickinson apologized and blamed his loose tongue on too many drinks. Soon thereafter, however, Dickinson repeated the slanders, and escalating tempers eventually led to the dueling ground.

Although no authentic document survives to confirm that Dickinson besmirched the honor of Jackson's wife as legend and some historical accounts maintain, the degree of enmity Jackson felt toward Dickinson suggests this could well have been the case. But the sequence of events leading to the ultimate confrontation between the two men was far more complex than that, and it was set in motion by a wager over a horse race.

An avid horseman, Jackson owned a superb stallion named Truxton. In November 1805 Jackson and two partners arranged a \$2,000 match race between Truxton and Ploughboy, a horse owned by Dickinson's uncle and partner, Captain Joseph Ervin. Ploughboy went lame before the appointed day, however, and Ervin and Dickinson canceled the race, paying Jackson the \$800 forfeit in the form of promissory notes they held. A brief disagree-

ment arose regarding whether the notes paid were the same as those presented when the race had been arranged, but the matter was settled amicably.

That would have been the end of the affair had not a third party—a young lawyer and newcomer to Nashville named Thomas Swann—meddled. Apparently seeking attention and notoriety, Swann incited both Dickinson and Jackson by repeating to each man inflammatory statements supposedly made by the other about the promissory notes. Misunderstandings compounded and tempers flared. Finally, in a letter published in the Nashville newspaper *Impartial Review and Cumberland Repository*, Jackson charged Swann with being a “puppet and lying valet for a worthless, drunken, blackguard scoundrel [sic].” Dickinson, replying publicly in the same newspaper, declared Jackson to be “a worthless scoundrel” and “a paltroon [sic] and a coward.”

Jackson not unexpectedly responded by challenging Dickinson to duel. Although dueling was illegal in Tennessee, Jackson was prepared to defy the law to satisfy his passion. Nevertheless, for propriety's sake he and Dickinson agreed to meet outside of Tennessee—just across the state border in a poplar forest clearing at Harrison's Mills, Kentucky, about thirty-five miles north of Nashville.

The day before the scheduled showdown, Jackson arose at 5 A.M., ate breakfast, and told his wife that he was leaving for a couple of days, adding parenthetically that he might have a bit of trouble to settle with Charles Dickinson. Rachel typically did not press him for details but easily could have surmised his mission. At 6:30 A.M. Jackson met his second in the duel, John Overton, and three other companions in Nashville; together they turned north toward Kentucky.

En route, Jackson was in a serious but talkative mood. Never hesitant to speak his mind on national affairs, Jackson criticized President Thomas Jefferson for not standing up to the British over the issue of impressment on the high seas, calling him “the best Republican in the-

ory and the worst in practice.” He criticized Aaron Burr, ironically in light of events about to unfold, for killing Alexander Hamilton in a duel two years earlier.

Jackson spoke little of his pending duel except to reveal his strategy of letting Dickinson shoot first. Jackson, only a fair shot himself, was aware of Dickinson's reputation as one of Tennessee's best marksmen. Some said Dickinson was capable of shooting apart a piece of string from eight yards away. Jackson reasoned that he had no chance to beat Dickinson to the draw, and that if he were to fire hastily, his aim was sure to be spoiled by the impact of Dickinson's bullet. Jackson was almost certain that he would be hit and believed that his only chance was to survive Dickinson's shot, then take careful aim.

Dickinson, his second, Dr. Hanson Catlett, and a half-dozen friends traveled ahead of the Jackson party in a carnival mood. Before setting off, Dickinson cheerily kissed his wife farewell and reassured her that he would return home safely the following evening. Boasting to all within earshot that he would shoot Jackson handily, he placed hundreds of dollars in wagers on himself in Nashville. Dickinson paused at times during the journey to demonstrate his marksmanship, delighting onlookers, and he repeated his vow to drop Jackson with one shot.

Before noon the Jackson party stopped for refreshments and a few hours' rest. Jackson had not had his usual morning ration of whiskey, wanting to keep a clear head for the business at hand, but did allow himself a single mint julep at the rest stop.

Later, at about 8 P.M., Jackson settled into David Miller's tavern near the site of the duel, displaying none of the jitters one would expect in a man about to put his life on the line. The prospect of the next morning's potentially fatal encounter disturbed neither his appetite nor his sleep. He enjoyed a full-course supper of fried chicken, sweet potatoes, waffles, and coffee. He then went out on the tavern porch to smoke his pipe for a bit and, at 10 P.M., went to bed. He was asleep in ten minutes. Throughout his life, Jackson was supremely confident of his ability to

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face any challenge—even a crack shot like Dickinson. Jackson slept so soundly that night that Overton had trouble rousing him at dawn.

Just after sunrise that morning the duelists stood ready in their positions with the seconds, Overton and Catlett, alert to gun down the opposing principal if either should fire prematurely.

Dickinson had won the toss for position, but because it was too early for the sun to break the horizon, this made little difference. Jackson had chosen the weapons—a pair of his own pistols with nine-inch barrels firing 70-caliber balls. Dickinson, therefore, had his pick of the two. Jackson won the right to have his second give the signal to fire.

Upon Overton's signal to "Fire!," Dickinson instantly raised his pistol and, as expected, got off the first shot. Kicking up dust from Jackson's coat as it entered, the bullet struck him full in the chest. Everyone watching knew that Jackson had been hit. Astonishingly, Jackson did not fall but remained standing, ramrod straight, though the ball had chipped off his breastbone, broken two ribs, plowed through chest muscle, and lodged so close to his heart that it could never be removed.

Jackson raised his left hand to the wound. Blood drained down his left

leg and began to fill his boot, but except for a slight wince Jackson gave no outward appearance of how badly he had been hurt. His lips concealed how tightly he clenched his teeth.

Dickinson, dumfounded to see his gaunt target still erect, stumbled back off his mark and cried out, "Great God, have I missed him?" But he knew his aim had been sure; he had seen the bullet hit. Everyone there had seen it.

"Back to the mark, sir!" ordered Jackson's second, brandishing a gun. Dickinson had no honorable alternative but to return to the mark and await his fate. He was now at Jackson's mercy.

A man in Jackson's situation, if he did not believe himself to be mortally wounded, customarily raised his pistol, aimed it at his disarmed opponent, then pointed it at the sky and fired. Many present, especially Dickinson, no doubt anticipated this magnanimous, though not mandatory, gesture.

While Dickinson stood frozen at the mark, his arms folded across his chest, his eyes fixed on the ground, Jackson raised his pistol, took level aim—and pulled the trigger.

A harmless "click" followed. The hammer had mercifully failed to strike.

Jackson now had a second chance to consider his actions, to remind himself that Dickinson's wife was pregnant. Jackson had been born after his own father's death and so knew from experience the hardship of growing up fatherless on the frontier.

As Dickinson waited helplessly in place, Jackson carefully recocked his pistol and again took deliberate aim at his opponent. And for the second time he pulled the trigger. This time the weapon did not misfire.

The heavy bullet struck Dickinson in the abdomen, penetrating his intestines and leaving a gaping wound. Overton, satisfied that the figure writhing in agony on the ground would not survive the day, hurried over to Jackson and said, "He won't want anything more of you, General."

As the winning team strode off the field, Overton noted Jackson's left boot sloshing with blood and finally realized that his friend had

been seriously wounded. "Oh, I believe that he pinked me," Jackson observed in typical understatement. "I don't want those people to know. Let's move on."

On examining the wound, the duelist's companions concluded that what had apparently saved Jackson was the set of his ill-fitting coat. With the frock hung askew, Dickinson had probably misjudged the location of his opponent's heart. But he had missed it by only an inch.

To those who wondered how Jackson had found the strength to remain standing and shoot Dickinson after having been so severely wounded, Jackson responded, "I should have hit him if he had shot me through the brain!"

Jackson showed no repentance for having shot Dickinson in cold blood. His notion of magnanimity was sending a bottle of wine to his victim and offering his surgeon's services. Dickinson's only comfort in his last hours was the lie friends told him: that Jackson was also on his deathbed, mortally wounded. At

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During the War of 1812 Major General Andrew Jackson gained heroic status for his defense of New Orleans (opposite), and he later went on to serve as governor of the Florida Territory, as a U.S. senator, and, from 1829 to 1837, as U.S. president. But despite his growing fame, "Old Hickory" was never completely able to put behind him his earlier reputation of possessing a temperamental, ruthless, and unforgiving nature. Nor did Jackson ever fully recover from the wound he sustained in his 1806 duel with Charles Dickinson; the bullet remained lodged near his heart for the remainder of his life.

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about 9 P.M. Dickinson asked, "Why did you put out the candles?" and died.

Throughout his career, Jackson never felt restrained to use the minimum force necessary to repel a threat. And in his encounter with Dickinson he felt fully justified in killing a man who had tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to kill him. No further excuse, he believed, was necessary; nor was any forthcoming. Jackson's apologists over the years have maintained that when he shot Dickinson he believed his own wound was fatal. If that is so, Jackson left no record of it.

The episode and the bullet Dickinson fired would haunt Jackson the rest of his life. The full ounce of lead was lodged so close to his heart that doctors never dared to attempt removing it. The bullet immobilized him for weeks. He recovered slowly and thereafter experienced sporadic chest pain that increased in frequency with old age.

Dickinson's funeral was one of the largest ever held in Nashville. A group of more than seventy angry mourners met after the services to petition the *Impartial Review* to run a memorial edition dedicated to Dickinson as an expression of regret for his death. When Jackson heard about this, he sent an angry letter to the editor demanding that the petitioners' names also be printed so that he would know who his enemies were. Confronted with such publicity, twenty-six people withdrew their names from the document, but the remainder, including some community leaders, agreed to take a public stand.

Erwin, the father of Dickinson's pregnant widow, publicly charged that Jackson, by pulling the trigger a second time after the pistol had jammed at half-cock, had violated the agreement governing the duel and therefore killed his opponent dishonorably. This accusation came to nothing, however; Catlett, Dickinson's second, joined Overton in a public statement attesting that the duel had been fought within the terms of the agreement.

Until he subsequently gained

fame as "Old Hickory" during the War of 1812, Jackson remained something of a pariah in western Tennessee. Even after he became a national figure, the duel was occasionally dredged up and cited by political opponents as a good reason why Jackson should be denied public office.

Some saw the episode as part of a pattern of ruthless and belligerent behavior. Jackson's critics pointed out that the Dickinson shooting was not an isolated incident:

- In the 1803 fight previously noted, Jackson used his heavy walking stick to attack former Tennessee governor John Sevier on the steps of the Knoxville courthouse. The two men later met for a duel that was only narrowly averted before shots were exchanged.

- While preparing to defend New Orleans against imminent British attack during the War of 1812, Jackson executed deserters, imposed martial law on the city, dissolved the Louisiana legislature, suppressed free expression, and ignored a federal judge's writ of habeas corpus.

- In 1814 Jackson went gunning for Thomas Hart Benton in Nashville's City Hotel, but was shot in the back by Benton's brother, Jesse. The bullet tore Jackson's left shoulder and greatly reduced the mobility in that arm until the lead was removed nearly twenty years later.

- During the First Seminole War (1816-18), Jackson occupied Spanish Florida without authorization from the administration in Washington, D.C. He also captured, court-martialed, and executed British citizens Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert Ambrister for having incited the Seminoles against the United States. The killings drew a sharp diplomatic rebuke from Britain.

During Jackson's first successful presidential campaign in 1828, the opposition compiled a résumé of brutality, the so-called Coffin Handbill, from such incidents. Under the bold, grim headline "Account of some of the Bloody Deeds of GENERAL JACKSON," it depicted clusters of caskets, eighteen in all, each with the name of an individual killed by Jackson's order and a brief narrative of how that person died.

Despite Jackson's vulnerability on what today is called the character issue, Americans twice elected him

president and he went on to become perhaps the greatest chief executive in the half-century between Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. Jackson was a founder of the modern activist presidency. He was the first to harness the latent powers of the office to implement his programs and thwart the will of the opposition. In so doing he vetoed more bills than all of his predecessors combined.

In the strictest sense, Jackson was the first common man to become president; his predecessors were either Virginia aristocrats or Boston lawyers. He was the first president to represent the interests of the burgeoning West. He destroyed the Bank of the United States, symbol to many of the moneyed interests' exploitation of the working class. And, in a showdown with South Carolina over its claimed right to nullify federal laws within its borders (1832-33), Jackson stood firm and stamped out, at least temporarily, budding secessionist sentiment in the South.

The Dickinson episode, then, revealed some significant character flaws in Jackson, but these did not prove fatal to his presidency. Had voters focused on Jackson's temper and ruthless, unforgiving nature to the exclusion of his courage, integrity, tenacity, and unquestionable leadership ability, the nation would have been denied an outstanding president. ★

William A. DeGregorio is the author of The Complete Book of U.S. Presidents, which was cited as one of the "outstanding reference sources of 1984" by the American Library Association and one of the "best reference books of 1981-85" by the editors of the American Reference Books Annual.

Recommended additional reading: Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Empire, 1767-1821 by Robert V. Remini (Harper and Row, 1977) is a comprehensive narrative of Jackson's life prior to his presidency. The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volume II, 1804-1813, edited by Harold D. Moser, Sharon MacPherson, and Charles F. Bryan, Jr. (University of Tennessee Press, 1984), contains important letters and other documentary materials that shed light on the events and circumstances surrounding the Jackson-Dickinson Duel.

Andrew Jackson and Rhetorical War with the Bank of the United States

By N. Katers

The Second Bank of the United States and the two term presidency of Andrew Jackson present one of the first major battles between populist interests and the elites within American society. The Second Bank was chartered by the federal government in 1816 to act as the only financial institution to function in all of the American states. Its charter members were elected from a larger group of public figures and a smaller group of banking and political elites in private, "back room" meetings. While the idea of the Bank was sophisticated and along the lines of Hamiltonian fiscal policy, it was also controversial in the west and the south because banks were seen as evil and consolidation of political power was seen as antithetical to the American experience.

Nicholas Biddle was president of the Bank during the Jacksonian era and understood not only the role of the Bank in national politics but what its purpose should be in national fiscal policy. This made Biddle appear arrogant and egotistical but what truly concerned the common person about the Bank was its increasing politicization. Biddle retained prominent lawyer and politician Daniel Webster as legal counsel and the Bank supporters were largely in favor of John Quincy Adams for president in 1824 and 1828. This frustrated private bankers at the state and local level who resented the monopolistic control over major financial deals by the federal government and the Second Bank of the United States. The Bank also provided fuel to the fire for the rise of the Democratic Party and their first standard bearer, General Andrew Jackson.

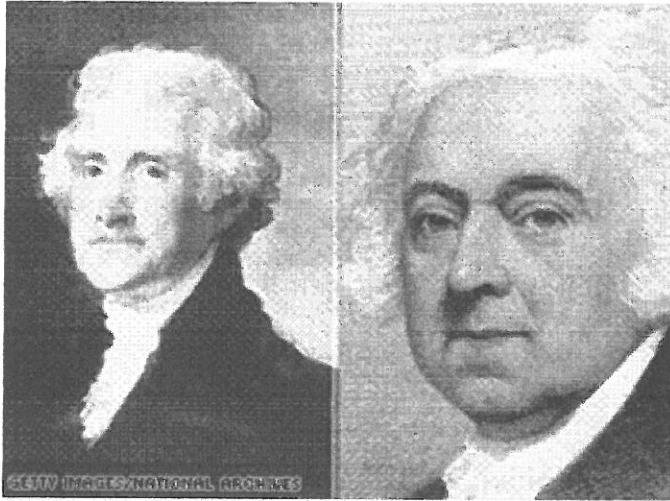
Jackson, maligned by the "corrupt bargain" and Adams' election in 1824, was a Westerner who was burnt by bankers who mishandled loans and nearly bankrupt the war hero upon his return to Tennessee. His anger at the Bank and his populist message were enough to defeat Adams in 1828 and Jackson used the Bank issue to rally support for his 1832 re-election bid. In particular, he used the actions of his presidential foe, Henry Clay, to sink the efforts of the Bank to expand the institution's influence. Clay, as Speaker of the House, tried to get the Bank's charter renewed for another four years and secure the Bank's role in American finances for years to come. However, Jackson was infuriated by Clay's actions and vowed to veto the "Hydra" Bank bill before it could sink its teeth into small communities around the country. The rationale was that the Bank was unconstitutional in its breadth of influence and that it amounted to a government sponsored monopoly. Jackson went through three Treasury secretaries before getting the policy he wanted and received government censure for his actions against the Bank, but this was later expunged. There was plenty of support for the veto in Congress and the public and he easily won re-election in 1832.

The Bank of the United States died a slow death after Jackson's veto. The economic viability of the Bank was made marginal after Jackson's re-election proved that his populist message was far more prevalent than concern over a sound, federal banking system. Nicholas Biddle called for repayment of loans to the bank from throughout the country but the loans were not reconciled and the Bank slowly dwindled to a state bank for Pennsylvania. Jackson won this particular battle but the connection between the Bank's death and the Panic of 1837 is fairly direct, as many of the smaller banks favored by Jackson went belly up when the economy turned.

Founding Fathers' dirty campaigns

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- John Adams and Thomas Jefferson ran negative presidential campaigns
- Adams was labeled a fool, a hypocrite, a criminal, and a tyrant,
- Jefferson was branded a weakling, an atheist, a libertine, and a coward
- Many historians say John Quincy Adams/Andrew Jackson contest the nastiest



CNN August 22, 2008 -- Negative campaigning in America was sired by two lifelong friends, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Back in 1776, the dynamic duo combined powers to help claim America's independence, and they had nothing but love and respect for one another. But by 1800, party politics had so distanced the pair that, for the first and last time in U.S. history, a president found himself running against his vice president.

Things got ugly fast. Jefferson's camp accused President Adams of having a "hideous hermaphroditical character, which has neither the force and firmness of a man, nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman." In return, Adams' men called Vice President Jefferson "a mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed Indian squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father." As the slurs piled on, Adams was labeled a fool, a hypocrite, a criminal, and a tyrant, while Jefferson was branded a weakling, an atheist, a libertine, and a coward. Even Martha Washington succumbed to the propaganda, telling a clergyman that Jefferson was "one of the most detestable of mankind."

Jefferson hires a hatchet man

Back then, presidential candidates didn't actively campaign. In fact, Adams and Jefferson spent much of the election season at their respective homes in Massachusetts and Virginia.

But the key difference between the two politicians was that Jefferson hired a hatchet man named James Callendar to do his smearing for him. Adams, on the other hand, considered

himself above such tactics. To Jefferson's credit, Callendar proved incredibly effective, convincing many Americans that Adams desperately wanted to attack France. Although the claim was completely untrue, voters bought it, and Jefferson stole the election. Jefferson paid a price for his dirty campaign tactics, though. Callendar served jail time for the slander he wrote about Adams, and when he emerged from prison in 1801, he felt Jefferson still owed him.

After Jefferson did little to appease him, Callendar broke a story in 1802 that had only been a rumor until then -- that the President was having an affair with one of his slaves, Sally Hemings. In a series of articles, Callendar claimed that Jefferson had lived with Hemings in France and that she had given birth to five of his children.

The story plagued Jefferson for the rest of his career. And although generations of historians shrugged off the story as part of Callendar's propaganda, DNA testing in 1998 showed a link between Hemings' descendents and the Jefferson family. Just as truth persists, however, so does friendship. Twelve years after the vicious election of 1800, Adams and Jefferson began writing letters to each other and became friends again. They remained pen pals for the rest of their lives and passed away on the same day, July 4, 1826. It was the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

John Quincy Adams gets slapped with elitism

John Adams lived long enough to see his son become president in 1825, but he died before John Quincy Adams lost the presidency to Andrew Jackson in 1828. Fortunately, that meant he didn't have to witness what many historians consider the nastiest contest in American history. The slurs flew back and forth, with John Quincy Adams being labeled a pimp, and Andrew Jackson's wife getting called a slut.

As the election progressed, editorials in the American newspapers read more like bathroom graffiti than political commentary. One paper reported that "General Jackson's mother was a common prostitute, brought to this country by the British soldiers! She afterward married a mulatto man, with whom she had several children, of which number General Jackson is one!"

What got Americans so fired up? For one thing, many voters felt John Quincy Adams should never have been president in the first place. During the election of 1824, Jackson had won the popular vote but not the electoral vote, so the election was decided by the House of Representatives. Henry Clay, one of the other candidates running for president, threw his support behind Adams. To return the favor, Adams promptly made him secretary of state. Jackson's supporters labeled it "The Corrupt Bargain" and spent the next four years calling Adams a usurper.

Beyond getting the short end of the electoral stick, Andrew Jackson managed to connect with voters via his background -- which couldn't have been more different than Adams'. By the time John Quincy was 15, he'd traveled extensively in Europe, mastered several

languages, and worked as a translator in the court of Catherine the Great. Meanwhile, Andrew Jackson had none of those privileges. By 15, he'd been kidnapped and beaten by British soldiers, orphaned, and left to fend for himself on the streets of South Carolina.

Adams was a Harvard-educated diplomat from a prominent New England family. Jackson was a humble war hero from the rural South who'd never learned to spell. He was the first presidential candidate in American history to really sell himself as a man of the people, and the people loved him for it.

Having been denied their candidate in 1824, the masses were up in arms for Jackson four years later. And though his lack of education and political experience terrified many Adams supporters, that argument didn't hold water for the throngs who lined up to cast their votes for "Old Hickory." Ever since Jackson's decisive victory, no presidential candidate has dared take a step toward the White House without first holding hands with the common man.

But losing the 1828 election may have been the best thing to happen to John Quincy Adams. After sulking home to Massachusetts, Adams pulled himself together and ran for Congress, launching an epic phase of his career.

During his 17 years in the House of Representatives, Adams became an abolitionist hero, championing legislation to open the debate on slavery. And in 1841, he famously put his money where his mouth was, when he defended the 39 African captives aboard the slave ship *Amistad* before the U.S. Supreme Court. At a time when all but two of the justices were pro-slavery, Adams won his human rights plea.

DANIEL WEBSTER PLEADS FOR THE UNION (1830)

Daniel Webster, native son of New Hampshire and adopted son of Massachusetts, sprang to the defense of New England and the Union in a running debate with Hayne that lasted two weeks and ranged over many subjects. The crowded Senate galleries thrilled to the eloquence of the two parliamentary gladiators, as the states' rightism of the South clashed head-on with the buoyant nationalism of the North. Webster's main points were that the people and not the states had formed the Constitution of 1787 (here he was historically shaky); that although the people were sovereign, the national government was supreme in its sphere and the state governments were supreme in their spheres; that if each of the twenty-four states could defy the laws of Congress at will, there would be no Union but only "a rope of sand"; and that there was a better solution than nullification if the people disapproved of their fundamental law. What was it? In Webster's magnificent peroration, memorized by countless nineteenth-century schoolchildren, are liberty and Union mutually incompatible? What objective did Webster and Hayne have in common?

If anything be found in the national Constitution, either by original provision or subsequent interpretation, which ought not to be in it, the people know how to get rid of it. If any construction be established, unacceptable to them, so as to become, practically, a part of the Constitution, they will amend it, at their sovereign pleasure. But while the people choose to maintain it as it is—while they are satisfied with it, and refuse to change it—who has given, or who can give, to the state legislatures a right to alter it, either by interference, construction, or otherwise? . . .

I profess, sir, in my career, hitherto, to have kept steadily in view the prosperity and honor of the whole country, and the preservation of our Federal Union. It is to that Union we owe our safety at home and our consideration and dignity abroad. It is to that Union that we are chiefly indebted for whatever makes us most proud of our country.

That Union we reached only by the discipline of our virtues in the severe school of adversity. It had its origin in the necessities of disordered finance, prostrate commerce, and ruined credit. Under its benign influence, these great interests immediately awoke us from the dead and sprang forth with newness of life. Every year of its duration has teemed with fresh proofs of its utility and its blessings; and although our territory has stretched out wider and wider, and our population spread farther and farther, they have not outrun its protection or its benefits. It has been to us all a copious fountain of national, social, and personal happiness.

I have not allowed myself, sir, to look beyond the Union to see what might lie hidden in the dark recess behind. I have not coolly weighed the chances of preserving liberty when the bonds that unite us together shall be broken asunder. I have not accustomed myself to hang over the precipice of disunion to see whether, with my short sight, I can fathom the depth of the abyss below. Nor could I regard him as a safe counselor in the affairs of this government whose thoughts should be mainly bent on considering not how the Union should be best preserved, but how tolerable might be the condition of the people when it shall be broken up and destroyed.

While the Union lasts we have high, exciting, gratifying prospects spread out before us—for us and our children. Beyond that, I seek not to penetrate the veil. God grant that in my day, at least, that curtain may not rise! God grant that, on my vision, never may be opened what lies behind!

When my eyes shall be turned to behold, for the last time, the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on states dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood! Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the gorgeous ensign of the Republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original luster, not a stripe erased or polluted, not a single star obscured, bearing for its motto no such miserable interrogatory as "What is all this worth?" nor those other words of delusion and folly, "Liberty first and Union afterward"; but everywhere, spread all over in characters of living light, blazing on all its ample folds, as they float over the sea and over the land, and in every wind under the whole heavens, that other sentiment, dear to every true American heart—Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable!

The Works of Daniel Webster, 20th ed. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1890), vol. 3, pp. 340-342 (January 26, 1830).

SENATOR ROBERT HAYNE ADVOCATES NULLIFICATION (1830)

The restrictive "Tariff of Abominations" of 1828 had angered the South, especially the South Carolinians, who protested vehemently against an "unconstitutional" tax levied indirectly on them to support "greedy" Yankee manufacturers. An eruption finally occurred in the Senate when Senator Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina--fluent, skillful, and personally attractive--attacked New England's inconsistency, greed, and selfishness, notably during the War of 1812. The only way to resist usurpations by the federal government, Hayne insisted, was for the states to nullify unauthorized acts of Congress, as foreshadowed by Jefferson in the Kentucky Resolutions of 1798-1799. In this preoration of his impressive speech, is Hayne a disunionist? Was he willing to let the Supreme Court rule on the unconstitutionality of acts of Congress?

Thus it will be seen, Mr. President, that the South Carolina doctrine [of nullification] is the [Jeffersonian] Republican doctrine of 1798; that it was first promulgated by the Fathers of the Faith; that it was maintained by Virginia and Kentucky in the worst of times; that it constituted the very pivot on which the political revolution of that day turned; that it embraces the very principles the triumph of which at that time saved the Constitution at its last gasp, and which New England statesmen were not unwilling to adopt [at Hartford in 1814] when they believed themselves to be the victims of unconstitutional legislation.

Sir, as to the doctrine that the federal government is the exclusive judge of the extent as well as the limitations of its powers, it seems to me to be utterly subversive of the sovereignty and independence of the states. It makes but little difference in my estimation whether Congress or the Supreme Court are invested with this power. If the federal government in all or any of its departments is to prescribe the limits of its own authority, and the states are bound to submit to the decision and are not allowed to examine and decide for themselves when the barriers of the Constitution shall be overleaped, this is practically "a government without limitation of powers." The states are at once reduced to mere petty corporations and the people are entirely at your mercy.

I have but one word more to add. In all the efforts that have been made by South Carolina to resist the unconstitutional [tariff] laws which Congress has extended over them, she has kept steadily in view the preservation of the Union by the only means by which she believes it can be long preserved--a firm, manly, and steady resistance against usurpation.

The [tariff] measures of the federal government have, it is true, prostrated her interests, and will soon involve the whole South in irretrievable ruin. But even this evil, great as it is, is not the chief ground of our complaints. It is the principle involved in the contest--a principle which, substituting the discretion of Congress for the limitations of the Constitution, brings the states and the people to the feet of the federal government and leaves them nothing they can call their own.

Sir, if the measures of the federal government were less oppressive, we should still strive against this usurpation. The South is acting on a principle she has always held sacred--resistance to unauthorized taxation.

These, sir, are the principles which induced the immortal [John] Hampden to resist the payment [in 1637] of a tax of twenty shillings [to the English government]. Would twenty shillings have ruined his fortune? No! but the payment of half twenty shillings on the principle on which it was demanded would have made him a slave.

Sir, if in acting on these high motives, if animated by that ardent love of liberty which has always been the most prominent trait in the Southern character, we should be hurried beyond the bounds of a cold and calculating prudence, who is there with one noble and generous sentiment in his bosom that would not be disposed, in the language of Burke, to exclaim, "You must pardon something to the spirit of liberty!"

Register of Debates in Congress (1829-1830), vol. 6, part 1, p. 58 (January 25, 1830).

David Walker's, *Appeal To Colored Citizens of the World*

Excerpts from the *Appeal*

My dearly beloved Brethren and Fellow Citizens.

Having travelled over a considerable portion of these United States, and having, in the course of my travels, taken the most accurate observations of things as they exist -- the result of my observations has warranted the full and unshaken conviction, that we, (coloured people of these United States,) are the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began; and I pray God that none like us ever may live again until time shall be no more. They tell us of the Israelites in Egypt, the Helots in Sparta, and of the Roman Slaves, which last were made up from almost every nation under heaven, whose sufferings under those ancient and heathen nations, were, in comparison with ours, under this enlightened and Christian nation, no more than a cypher -- or, in other words, those heathen nations of antiquity, had but little more among them than the name and form of slavery; while wretchedness and endless miseries were reserved, apparently in a phial, to be poured out upon, our fathers ourselves and our children, by *Christian Americans!* . . .

... I call upon the professing Christians, I call upon the philanthropist, I call upon the very tyrant himself, to show me a page of history, either sacred or profane, on which a verse can be found, which maintains, that the Egyptians heaped the *insupportable insult* upon the children of Israel, by telling them that they were not of the *human family*. Can the whites deny this charge? Have they not, after having reduced us to the deplorable condition of slaves under their feet, held us up as descending originally from the tribes of *Monkeys* or *Orang-Outangs*? O! my God! I appeal to every man of feeling-is not this insupportable? Is it not heaping the most gross insult upon our miseries, because they have got us under their feet and we cannot help ourselves? Oh! pity us we pray thee, Lord Jesus, Master. -- Has Mr. Jefferson declared to the world, that we are inferior to the whites, both in the endowments of our bodies and our minds? It is indeed surprising, that a man of such great learning, combined with such excellent natural parts, should speak so of a set of men in chains. I do not know what to compare it to, unless, like putting one wild deer in an iron cage, where it will be secured, and hold another by the side of the same, then let it go, and expect the one in the cage to run as fast as the one at liberty. So far, my brethren, were the Egyptians from heaping these insults upon their slaves, that Pharaoh's daughter took Moses, a son of Israel for her own, as will appear by the following . . .

But let us review Mr. Jefferson's remarks respecting us some further. Comparing our miserable fathers, with the learned philosophers of Greece, he says: "Yet notwithstanding these and other discouraging circumstances among the Romans, their slaves were often their rarest artists. They excelled too, in science, insomuch as to be usually employed as tutors to their master's children; Epictetus, Terence and Phaedrus, were slaves, -- but they were of the race of whites. It is not their *condition* then, but *nature*, which has produced the distinction." See this, my brethren! ! Do you believe that this assertion is swallowed by millions of the whites? Do you know that Mr. Jefferson was one of as great characters as ever lived among the whites? See his writings for the world, and public labours for the United States of America. Do you believe that the assertions of such a man, will pass away into oblivion unobserved by this people and the world? If you do you are much mistaken-See how the American people treat us -- have we souls in our bodies? Are we

men who have any spirits at all? I know that there are many *swell-bellied* fellows among us, whose greatest object is to fill their stomachs. Such I do not mean -- I am after those who know and feel, that we are MEN, as well as other people; to them, I say, that unless we try to refute Mr. Jefferson's arguments respecting us, we will only establish them . . .

...I must observe to my brethren that at the close of the first Revolution in this country, with Great Britain, there were but thirteen States in the Union, now there are twenty-four, most of which are slave-holding States, and the whites are dragging us around in chains and in handcuffs, to their new States and Territories to work their mines and farms, to enrich them and their children-and millions of them believing firmly that we being a little darker than they, were made by our Creator to be an inheritance to them and their children for ever-the same as a parcel of *brutes*.

Are we MEN! ! -- I ask you, O my brethren I are we MEN? Did our Creator make us to be slaves to dust and ashes like ourselves? Are they not dying worms as well as we? Have they not to make their appearance before the tribunal of Heaven, to answer for the deeds done in the body, as well as we? Have we any other Master but Jesus Christ alone? Is he not their Master as well as ours? -- What right then, have we to obey and call any other Master, but Himself? How we could be so *submissive* to a gang of men, whom we cannot tell whether they are as good as ourselves or not, I never could conceive. However, this is shut up with the Lord, and we cannot precisely tell -- but I declare, we judge men by their works.

The whites have always been an unjust, jealous, unmerciful, avaricious and blood-thirsty set of beings, always seeking after power and authority. . . .

...to my no ordinary astonishment, [a] Reverend gentleman got up and told us (coloured people) that slaves must be obedient to their masters -- must do their duty to their masters or be whipped -- the whip was made for the backs of fools, &c. Here I pause for a moment, to give the world time to consider what was my surprise, to hear such preaching from a minister of my Master, whose very gospel is that of peace and not of blood and whips, as this pretended preacher tried to make us believe. What the American preachers can think of us, I aver this day before my God, I have never been able to define. They have newspapers and monthly periodicals, which they receive in continual succession, but on the pages of which, you will scarcely ever find a paragraph respecting slavery, which is ten thousand times more injurious to this country than all the other evils put together; and which will be the final overthrow of its government, unless something is very speedily done; for their cup is nearly full.-Perhaps they will laugh at or make light of this; but I tell you Americans! that unless you speedily alter your course, *you and your Country are gone!* ! . . .

Do the colonizationists think to send us off without first being reconciled to us? Do they think to bundle us up like brutes and send us off, as they did our brethren of the State of Ohio? Have they not to be reconciled to us, or reconcile us to them, for the cruelties with which they have afflicted our fathers and us? Methinks colonizationists think they have a set of brutes to deal with, sure enough. Do they think to drive us from our country and homes, after having enriched it with our blood and tears, and keep back millions of our dear brethren, sunk in the most barbarous wretchedness, to dig up gold and silver for them and their children? Surely, the Americans must think that we are brutes, as some of them have represented us to be. They think that we do not feel for our brethren, whom they are murdering by the inches, but they are dreadfully deceived.

Modern History Sourcebook:

Harriet Robinson: Lowell Mill Girls

In her autobiography, Harriet Hanson Robinson, the wife of a newspaper editor, provided an account of her earlier life as female factory worker (from the age of ten in 1834 to 1848) in the textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts. Her account explains some of the family dynamics involved, and lets us see the women as active participants in their own lives - for instance in their strike of 1836.

In what follows, I shall confine myself to a description of factory life in Lowell, Massachusetts, from 1832 to 1848, since, with that phase of Early Factory Labor in New England, I am the most familiar—because I was a part of it.

In 1832, Lowell was little more than a factory village. Five "corporations" were started, and the cotton mills belonging to them were building. Help was in great demand and stories were told all over the country of the new factory place, and the high wages that were offered to all classes of workpeople; stories that reached the ears of mechanics' and farmers' sons and gave new life to lonely and dependent women in distant towns and farmhouses Troops of young girls came from different parts of New England, and from Canada, and men were employed to collect them at so much a head, and deliver them at the factories.

...

At the time the Lowell cotton mills were started the caste of the factory girl was the lowest among the employments of women. In England and in France, particularly, great injustice had been done to her real character. She was represented as subjected to influences that must destroy her purity and self-respect. In the eyes of her overseer she was but a brute, a slave, to be beaten, pinched and pushed about. It was to overcome this prejudice that such high wages had been offered to women that they might be induced to become millgirls, in spite of the opprobrium that still clung to this degrading occupation....

The early millgirls were of different ages. Some were not over ten years old; a few were in middle life, but the majority were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. The very young girls were called "doffers." They "doffed," or took off, the full bobbins from the spinningframes, and replaced them with empty ones. These mites worked about fifteen minutes every hour and the rest of the time was their own. When the overseer was kind they were allowed to read, knit, or go outside the millyard to play. They were paid two dollars a week. The working hours of all the girls extended from five o'clock in the morning until seven in the evening, with one half-hour each, for breakfast and dinner. Even the doffers were forced to be on duty nearly fourteen hours a day. This was the greatest hardship in the lives of these children. Several years later a ten-hour law was passed, but not until long after some of these little doffers were old enough to appear before the legislative committee on the subject, and plead, by their presence, for a reduction of the hours of labor.

Those of the millgirls who had homes generally worked from eight to ten months in the year; the rest of the time was spent with parents or friends. A few taught school during the summer months. Their life in the factory was made pleasant to them. In those days there was no need of advocating the doctrine of the proper relation between employer and employed. *Help was too valuable to be ill-treated....*

...

The most prevailing incentive to labor was to secure the means of education for some *male* member of the family. To make a *gentleman* of a brother or a son, to give him a college education, was the dominant thought in the minds of a great many of the better class of millgirls. I have known more than one to give every cent of her wages, month after month, to her brother, that he might get the education necessary to enter some profession. I have known a mother to work years in this way for her boy. I have known women to educate young men by their earnings, who were not sons or relatives. There are many men now living who were helped to an education by the wages of the early millgirls.

It is well to digress here a little, and speak of the influence the possession of money had on the characters of some of these women. We can hardly realize what a change the cotton factory made in the status of the working women. Hitherto woman had always been a money *saving* rather than a money *earning*, member of the community. Her labor could command but small return. If she worked out as servant, or "help," her wages were from 50 cents to \$1 .00 a week; or, if she went from house to house by the day to spin and weave, or do tailoress work, she could get but 75 cents a week and her meals. As teacher, her services were not in demand, and the arts, the professions, and even the trades and industries, were nearly all closed to her.

John O Sullivan, Manifest Destiny (1839)

The American people having derived their origin from many other nations, and the Declaration of National Independence being entirely based on the great principle of human equality, these facts demonstrate at once our disconnected position as regards any other nation; that we have, in reality, but little connection with the past history of any of them, and still less with all antiquity, its glories, or its crimes. On the contrary, our national birth was the beginning of a new history, the formation and progress of an untried political system, which separates us from the past and connects us with the future only; and so far as regards the entire development of the natural rights of man, in moral, political, and national life, we may confidently assume that our country is destined to be the great nation of futurity.

It is so destined, because the principle upon which a nation is organized fixes its destiny, and that of equality is perfect, is universal. It presides in all the operations of the physical world, and it is also the conscious law of the soul -- the self-evident dictates of morality, which accurately defines the duty of man to man, and consequently man's rights as man. Besides, the truthful annals of any nation furnish abundant evidence, that its happiness, its greatness, its duration, were always proportionate to the democratic equality in its system of government. . . .

What friend of human liberty, civilization, and refinement, can cast his view over the past history of the monarchies and aristocracies of antiquity, and not deplore that they ever existed? What philanthropist can contemplate the oppressions, the cruelties, and injustice inflicted by them on the masses of mankind, and not turn with moral horror from the retrospect?

America is destined for better deeds. It is our unparalleled glory that we have no reminiscences of battle fields, but in defence of humanity, of the oppressed of all nations, of the rights of conscience, the rights of personal enfranchisement. Our annals describe no scenes of horrid carnage, where men were led on by hundreds of thousands to slay one another, dupes and victims to emperors, kings, nobles, demons in the human form called heroes. We have had patriots to defend our homes, our liberties, but no aspirants to crowns or thrones; nor have the American people ever suffered themselves to be led on by wicked ambition to depopulate the land, to spread desolation far and wide, that a human being might be placed on a seat of supremacy.

We have no interest in the scenes of antiquity, only as lessons of avoidance of nearly all their examples. The expansive future is our arena, and for our history. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds, beneficent objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past. We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? Providence is with us, and no earthly power can. We point to the everlasting truth on the first page of our national declaration, and we proclaim to the millions of other lands, that "the gates of hell" -- the powers of aristocracy and monarchy -- "shall not prevail against it."

The far-reaching, the boundless future will be the era of American greatness. In its magnificent domain of space and time, the nation of many nations is destined to manifest to mankind the excellence of divine principles; to establish on earth the noblest temple ever dedicated to the worship of the Most High -- the Sacred and the True. Its floor shall be a hemisphere -- its roof the

firmament of the star-studded heavens, and its congregation an Union of many Republics, comprising hundreds of happy millions, calling, owning no man master, but governed by God's natural and moral law of equality, the law of brotherhood -- of "peace and good will amongst men." . . .

Yes, we are the nation of progress, of individual freedom, of universal enfranchisement. Equality of rights is the cynosure of our union of States, the grand exemplar of the correlative equality of individuals; and while truth sheds its effulgence, we cannot retrograde, without dissolving the one and subverting the other. We must onward to the fulfilment of our mission -- to the entire development of the principle of our organization -- freedom of conscience, freedom of person, freedom of trade and business pursuits, universality of freedom and equality. This is our high destiny, and in nature's eternal, inevitable decree of cause and effect we must accomplish it. All this will be our future history, to establish on earth the moral dignity and salvation of man -- the immutable truth and beneficence of God. For this blessed mission to the nations of the world, which are shut out from the life-giving light of truth, has America been chosen; and her high example shall smite unto death the tyranny of kings, hierarchs, and oligarchs, and carry the glad tidings of peace and good will where myriads now endure an existence scarcely more enviable than that of beasts of the field. Who, then, can doubt that our country is destined to be *the great nation* of futurity?

1. President Andrew Jackson Calls for Removal of the Indians, 1830

. . . It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation.

From Andrew Jackson. "Second Annual Message to Congress," December 6, 1830, in J. D. Richardson, ed. *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents* (New York: Bureau of National Literature, 1897), III, 1082-1086.

Two important tribes have accepted the provision made for their removal at the last session of Congress, and it is believed that their example will induce the remaining tribes also to seek the same obvious advantages.

The consequences of a speedy removal will be important to the United States, to individual States, and to the Indians themselves. The pecuniary advantages which it promises to the Government are the least of its recommendations. It puts an end to all possible danger of collision between the authorities of the General and State Governments on account of the Indians. It will place a dense and civilized population in land tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters. By opening the whole territory between Tennessee on the north and Louisiana on the south to the settlement of the whites it will incalculably strengthen the southwestern frontier and render the adjacent States strong enough to repel future invasions without remote aid. It will relieve the whole State of Mississippi and the western part of Alabama of Indian occupancy, and enable those States to advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power. It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites; free them from the power of the States; enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rule institutions; will retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers, and perhaps cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community. These consequences, some of them so certain and the rest so probable, make the complete execution of the plan sanctioned by Congress at their last session an object of much solicitude.

Toward the aborigines of the country ^{→ harsh} no one can indulge a more friendly feeling than myself, or would go further in attempting to reclaim them from their wandering habits and make them a happy, prosperous people. I have endeavored to impress upon them my own solemn convictions of the duties and powers of the General Government in relation to the State authorities. For the justice of the laws passed by the States within the scope of their reserved powers they are not responsible to this Government. As individuals we may entertain and express our opinions of their acts, but as a Government we have as little right to control them as we have to prescribe laws for other nations. . . . ^{→ Jackson extolling states' right}

Humanity has often wept over the fate of the aborigines of this country, and Philanthropy has been long busily employed in devising means to avert it, but its progress has never for a moment been arrested, and one by one have many powerful tribes disappeared from the earth. . . . Philanthropy could not wish to see this continent restored to the condition in which it was found by our forefathers. What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms, embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?

The present policy of the Government is but a continuation of the same progressive change by a milder process. The tribes which occupied the countries now constituting the Eastern States were annihilated or have melted away to make room for the whites. The waves of population and civilization are rolling to the westward, and we now propose to acquire the countries occupied by the red men of the South and West by a fair exchange, and, at the expense of the United States, to send

them to a land where their existence may be prolonged and perhaps made perpetual. Doubtless it will be painful to leave the graves of their fathers; but what do they more than our ancestors did or than our children are now doing? To better their condition in an unknown land our forefathers left all that was dear in earthly objects. . . .

↳ compares Indians leaving island to Europeans coming to America to make better life
... Rightly considered, the policy of the General Government toward the red man is not only liberal, but generous. He is unwilling to submit to the laws of the States and mingle with their population. To save him from this alternative, or perhaps utter annihilation, the General Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense of his removal and settlement. . . .

May we not hope, therefore, that all good citizens, and none more zealously than those who think the Indians oppressed by subjection to the laws of the States, will unite in attempting to open the eyes of those children of the forest to their true condition, and by a speedy removal to relieve them from all the evils, real or imaginary, present or prospective, with which they may be supposed to be threatened. . . .

Mr. Crockett *goes to* Washington

His motto was "Be always sure you're right—Then Go Ahead." As a U.S. congressman, though, frontiersman David Crockett learned that such sentiments didn't count for much in the cutthroat world of politics.

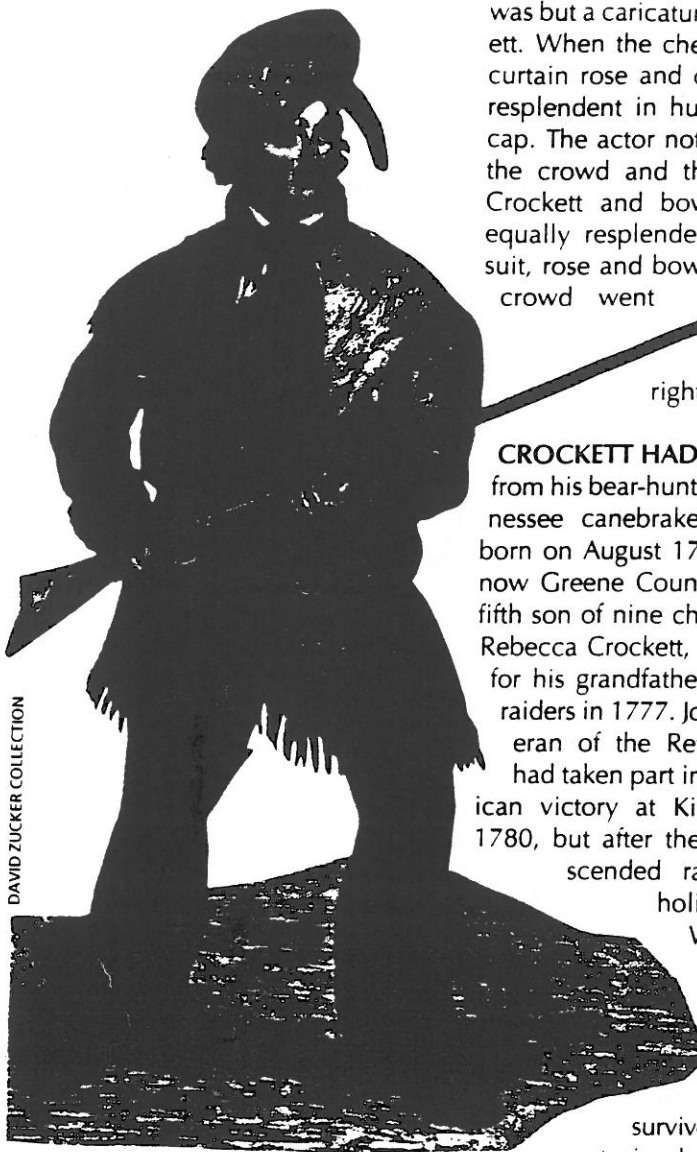
In December of 1833 Colonel David Crockett of Tennessee, recently elected to his third term in the House of Representatives, went to the theater in Washington. The colonel did not necessarily approve of theaters and stage acting. "I have heard some things in them that was a little too tough for good women and modest men," he declared, "although it is said that high people don't mind such things." While Crockett certainly did not classify himself among the "high people," he was nevertheless most anxious to view actor James Hackett's performance as Colonel Nimrod Wildfire in *The Lion of the West*.

Hackett, a noted comedic actor, had offered a prize in 1830 for a new play that would portray a distinctly American character. Frontier America was fast be-

coming all the rage in literary circles, and the frontiersman—once disdained by the guardians of American culture as a dangerous symbol of low breeding and anarchy—was now idealized as the very essence of the evolving American character. James K. Paulding, future secretary of the

by
**Paul
Andrew
Hutton**

navy in the Van Buren administration, capitalized on this interest to win Hackett's prize with his play, *The Lion of the West*. Paulding asked a friend for help "by furnishing me with a few sketches, short stories, and incidents of Kentucky or Tennessee manners, and especially some of their peculiar phrases and comparisons. If you can add, or invent, a few ludicrous scenes of Col. Crockett at Washington, you will be sure of my everlasting gratitude." The writer then produced the bluster-



Previous page: An engraving of David Crockett from 1835 includes his famous motto. The likeness was taken from the last portrait painted of Crockett before his death at the Alamo in 1836. Above: James Hackett played the Crockett-like Colonel Nimrod Wildfire in the successful play *The Lion of the West*. The caption on this engraving read, "Come back, stranger or I'll plug you like a watermillion!"

ing yet common-sensical Colonel Nimrod Wildfire.

It was a grand evening. The theater manager escorted Crockett through the overflowing audience to his reserved seat. The crowd roared their cheers when they saw him, for all knew that Hackett's Nimrod Wildfire

was but a caricature of Colonel Crockett. When the cheering subsided the curtain rose and out strode Hackett, resplendent in hunting shirt and fur cap. The actor noted the applause of the crowd and then turned toward Crockett and bowed. The colonel, equally resplendent in his best city suit, rose and bowed right back. The crowd went

wild as legend met reality right before their eyes.

CROCKETT HAD COME a long way from his bear-hunting days in the Tennessee canebrakes, where he was born on August 17, 1786, in what is now Greene County, Tennessee. The fifth son of nine children of John and Rebecca Crockett, David was named for his grandfather, killed by Indian raiders in 1777. John Crockett, a veteran of the Revolutionary Army, had taken part in the crucial American victory at King's Mountain in 1780, but after the war, he had descended rapidly into alcoholism and poverty.

When David was only 12, his father sold him into indentured servitude, and the boy learned to survive by his wits and a contagiously gregarious nature.

The young Crockett obtained a total of six months' schooling, which still gave him an advantage over most of his peers in the backwoods. Marrying a local beauty, Mary (Polly) Finley, in 1806, he took up sharecropping on rented land but failed to prosper. "In this time we had two sons, and I found I was better at increasing my family than my fortune," he later wrote with the understated good humor that made him famous. Crockett moved his family westward in 1811 in the first of a series of migrations that took him across the entire length of Tennessee. Crockett proved more adept at hunting than farming, soon winning a formidable reputation as a marksman and hunter. He claimed to have killed 105 bears in one season alone, providing essential food for his family and neighbors as

well as a marketable cash crop in skins.

In September 1813 Crockett marched off with other young Tennessee men to battle the Alabama Creek Indians, for as he later wrote, his "dander was up, and nothing but war could bring it right again." The ghastly Fort Mims massacre in Alabama, in which the Creeks killed some 500 soldiers and settlers, had horrified him. He was convinced, as were the other volunteers, that "my countrymen had been murdered, and I knew that the next thing would be, that the Indians would be scalping the women and children all about there, if we didn't put a stop to it." He quickly learned otherwise.

On November 3, 1813, Crockett participated in a brutal slaughter at the Creek town of Tallusahatchee. "We shot them like dogs," he grimly related, "and then set the house on fire, and burned it up with the 46 warriors in it." More than 200 Creek men, women, and children were killed. He continued to scout for the army, later participating in the key battle at Talladega, but his heart was no longer in this work.

Crockett missed General Andrew Jackson's decisive victory over the Creeks at Horseshoe Bend in March 1814 but returned to march with Jackson's forces against the British at Pensacola. From there he scouted against British-armed Indians in the Florida swamps while Jackson hurried westward to glory at New Orleans. Sergeant Crockett was discharged on March 27, 1815. "This closed my career as a warrior, and I am glad of it," he later remarked.

When Crockett returned from the Creek War, he met with what he forever considered "the hardest trial which ever falls to the lot of man," when his beloved Polly died in the summer of 1815. While devastated, he remained a practical and resourceful man. He had three small children to care for, so he promptly began to scout the countryside for a new wife. He followed a hot trail to the "snug little farm" of a young widow, Elizabeth Patton, whose husband had been killed in the Creek War. Not only was her farm considerably more impressive than his own, she was well connected to a prominent North Carolina family. As Crockett put it, "I soon began to pay my re-

spect. to her in real good earnest; but I was as sly about it as a fox when he is going to rob a hen-roost." They were married on May 22, 1816.

Soon after the wedding Crockett moved his family, which now included Elizabeth's two children as well as his three (together they would add four more), to Shoal Creek, Lawrence County, in west central Tennessee. There Crockett began his political career, first as magistrate, then as justice of the peace, and in 1818 as elected

him to the voters. His simple and direct campaign style fitted perfectly to an era where political meetings opened with a barbecue and ended with a dance—with the candidate expected to buy drinks all around. While Crockett campaigned, Elizabeth worked the farm, raised the children, and provided the cash to support her husband's political career.

Elizabeth also sewed her husband a large buckskin hunting-shirt with two great pockets. "In one I would carry a

large company he said to me. 'Well, Colonel, I suppose we shall have a radical change of the judiciary at the next session of the Legislature.' 'Very likely, sir,' says I, and I put out quicker, for I was afraid some one would ask me

colonel of the 57th Militia Regiment. Finally, in 1821 Crockett put himself forward as a candidate to represent Hickman and Lawrence counties in the state assembly.

The frontiersman was a natural for the rough-and-tumble world of backwoods electioneering. His equal measures of common sense and honesty, combined with a fabulous sense of self-effacing good humor, endeared

great big twist of tobacco, and the other my bottle of liquor," Crockett declared, "for I knowed when I met a man and offered him a dram, he would throw out his quid of tobacco to take one, and after he had taken his horn, I would out with my twist and give him another chaw. And in this way he would not be worse off than when I found him; and I would be sure to leave him in a first-rate good humour." This simple but exceedingly practical political style worked wonders.

Crockett won the election, and while in Pulaski on his way to join the state assembly in Murfreesborough, he first encountered a man who would have a great influence on his political fortunes. James K. Polk, newly selected clerk of the Tennessee Senate, was nine years younger than Crockett and from a wealthy family. Stern, taciturn, and humorless, the future president served in the state legislature alongside Crockett during 1823-1825 and their relationship was quite cordial. "I was in Pulaski, where I met with Colonel Polk," Crockett later remarked, "and in a



Above: Introduced in 1835, the folksy *Crockett Almanac* helped establish its namesake's reputation. **Left:** A wood engraving from a posthumous edition of Crockett's autobiography shows the congressional candidate literally making a stump speech.

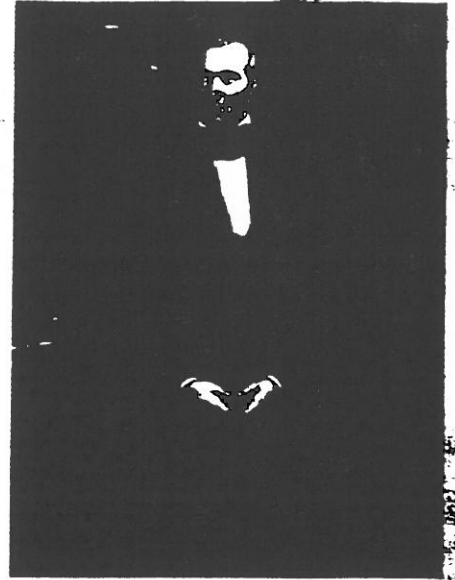
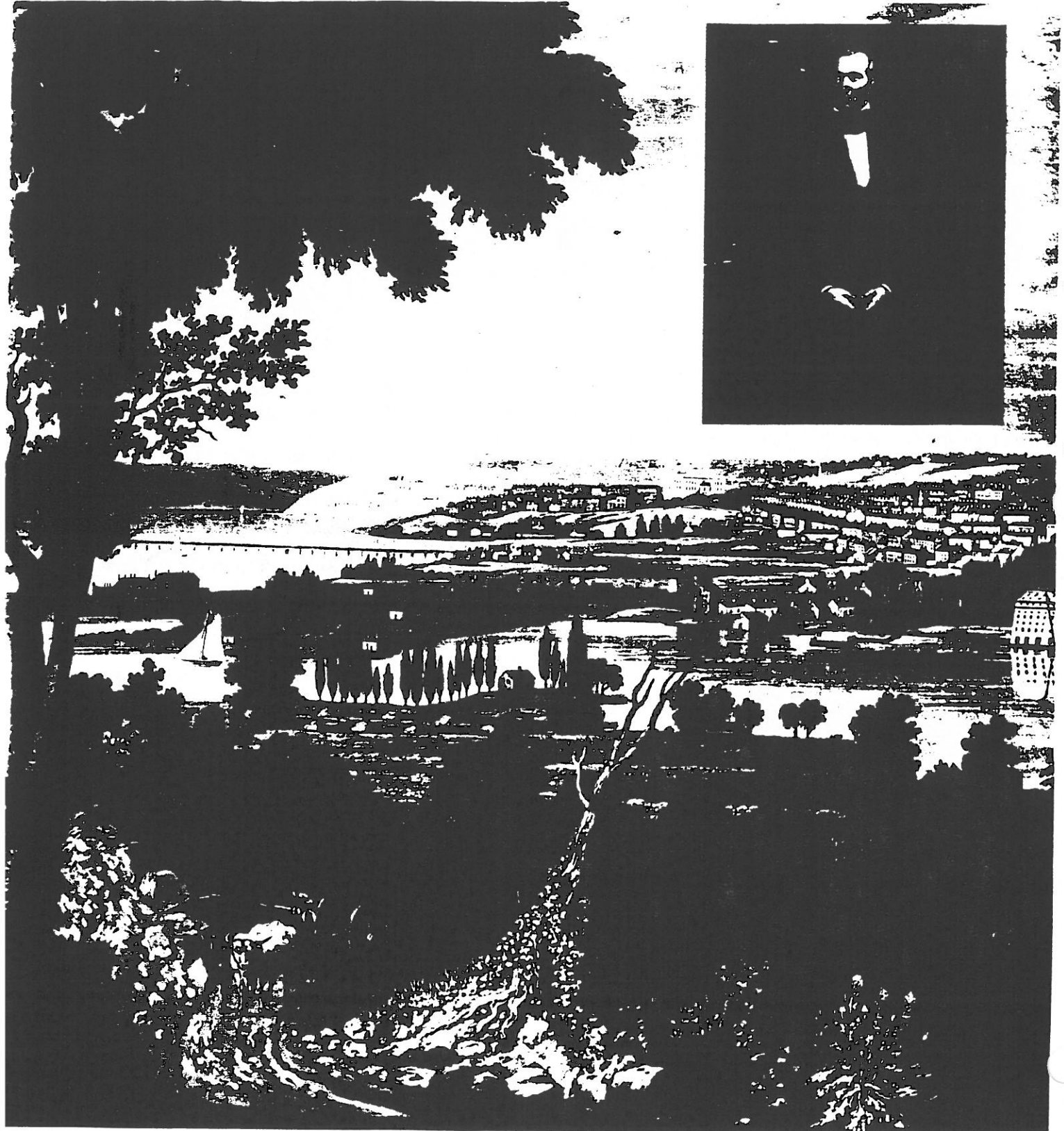
what the judiciary was; and if I knowed I wish I may be shot. I don't indeed believe I had ever before heard that there was any such thing in all nature; but still I was not willing that the people there should know how ignorant I was about it."

When the legislature joined in session Crockett was challenged by a more direct assault on his qualifications for office. During the opening days of the session Crockett, ill at ease and awkward, rose to speak. In response to his speech a fellow representative alluded to him as "the gentleman from the cane," which brought laughter from the other legislators. Humiliated, Crockett sought out his tormentor to thrash an apology out of him. The

colleague properly noted that such direct action was not acceptable under the rules of the legislature. This forced Crockett to resort to a remedy that never failed him: humor. The following day he appeared with a cambric ruffle, so common among the so-called gentlemen of the day, attached to his rough-hewn hunting shirt. When

Crockett rose to speak—his rifle disdainfully displayed—the entire House convulsed with laughter, totally discrediting the other congressman's pretensions. Thereafter the "gentleman from the cane" appellation became a badge of honor, and Crockett was recognized as one of the most celebrated members of the legislature.

Nature interrupted Crockett's legislative sojourn when a flood on Shoal Creek swept away his grist mill and distillery. He hurried home to find his finances in ruin. Elizabeth stood firm, urging him to make the best of a bad situation and pay off their debts at whatever cost. In September 1822 Crockett moved his family west to new



lands he had explored in the Obion River country of northwestern Tennessee. These were rich hunting grounds reshaped by the great earthquake of 1811 and still called "the shakes." There, in a simple log cabin, the Crocketts made their new home.

It did not take him long, however, to return to the political arena, and he ran

successfully for the state legislature in 1823 as the representative of four West Tennessee counties. His opponent was Dr. William Butler, a leading citizen of the area and a kinsman by marriage to Andrew Jackson. Crockett portrayed Butler as an aristocrat out of touch with the pioneer settlers of the western country. He often told voters of his vis-

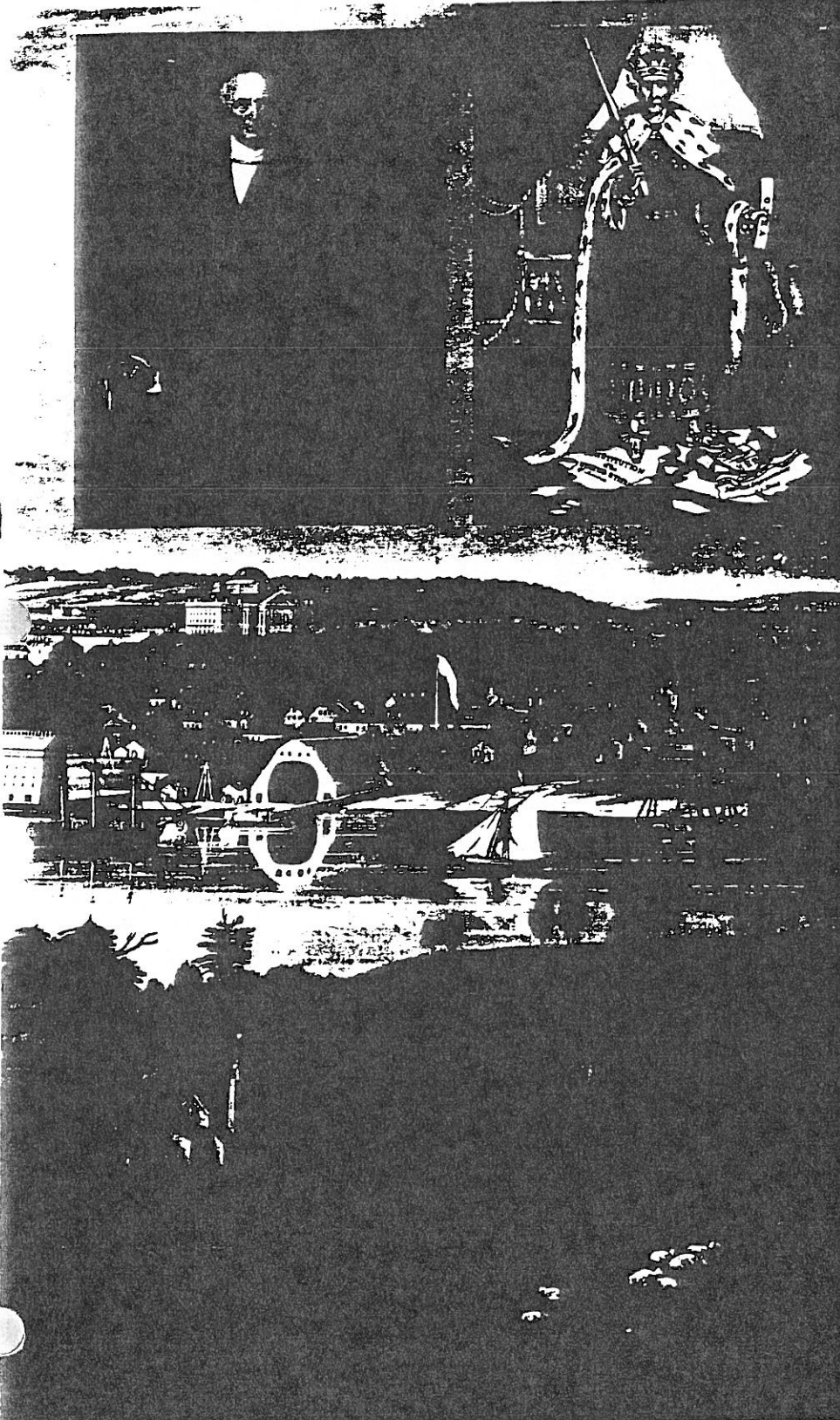
it to Butler's fine home and of the lush carpet on the floor that so contrasted with the bearskins used for rugs in his dirt-floored cabin.

In the legislature he won high marks for his strong defense of squatters' rights in the western country. His effort to ensure that the impoverished settlers could purchase at a reasonable price the land they had cleared and settled became the central cause of his political career.

A wealthy friend, Memphis mayor Marcus Winchester, encouraged Crockett to run for Congress. His opponents were the incumbent Colonel Adam Alexander, a man of considerable means and influence, and General William Arnold, described by Crockett as a "major-general in the militia" and an "attorney-general at the law." Both men were formidable opponents, but Crockett had his own war and legislative records to go on, and his fund of humorous stories. After Crockett defeated Alexander and Arnold by a substantial margin, the *Nashville Republican* reported that he was on his way to Washington City and that the folks there had best watch out, for the new congressman could "wade the Mississippi, carry a steamboat on his back, [and] whip his weight in wildcats," or any man in Congress for that matter.

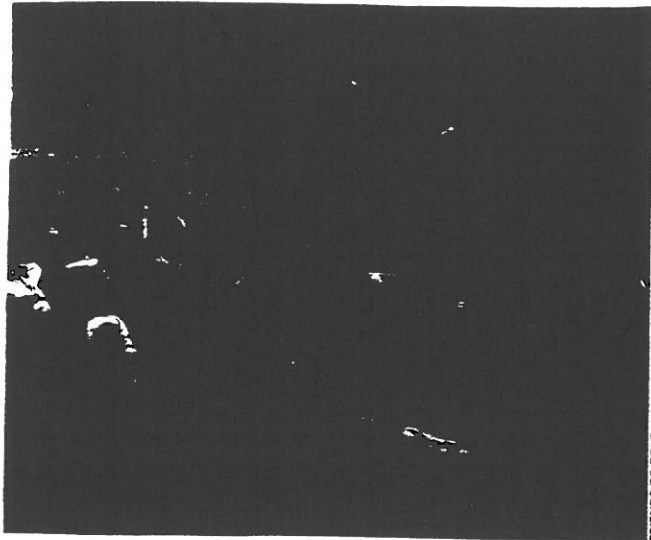
Crockett's former commander, Andrew Jackson, had run for president in 1824, a close contest decided by the House of Representatives. After the

Left: This view of Washington by Norwegian painter Peder Anderson depicts the city as Crockett would have known it. Insets, left to right: Future president James Polk and Crockett clashed over the passage of the Tennessee Vacant Land Bill. Martin Van Buren was being groomed to succeed President Andrew Jackson, and an 1835 satirical biography of "the Little Magician" falsely named Crockett as its author. President Andrew Jackson was often attacked as an autocratic ruler, as in this 1832 cartoon. Although Crockett began his congressional career as a Jackson supporter, he began speaking out against the president's policies, and the two men became bitter enemies.



ALL INSETS: THE GRANGER COLLECTION

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THE ALAMO

THE ALAMO

David Crockett arrived in Texas in January 1836, fresh from a failed run for reelection to the United States Congress.

Crockett, then 49, came to Texas with about a dozen of his fellow Tennesseans and sided with the mainly Anglo-American settlers of Texas in their struggle to gain independence from Mexico.

Crockett and his men joined the Texan forces in San Antonio, and on Febru-

Left: In *Fall of the Alamo*, Robert Jenkins Onderdonk depicted Crockett wielding his rifle in a last-ditch fight against Mexican soldiers closing in on the Alamo's defenders. **Right:** Today the Alamo mission church is a popular attraction in San Antonio, Texas.

ary 8, took up positions inside the walls of the Alamo, a former Spanish mission turned fortress. Mexican forces—esti-

mated to be about 4,000 men—led by General Antonio López de Santa Anna arrived in San Antonio on February 23, but the Alamo defenders held them off for 13 days. During lulls in the fighting Crockett entertained the men inside the Alamo with tunes from his fiddle. Music of a different sort echoed over the compound at dawn on March 6 when Mexican forces began their final assault. Santa Anna ordered buglers to play the

House picked John Quincy Adams, Jackson claimed a “corrupt bargain” between Adams and Henry Clay of Kentucky had cost him the victory. As Jackson’s political rival in the West, Clay became interested in this new congressman from Tennessee. James Erwin, Clay’s son-in-law, had met Crockett in Nashville and sent a full report. “Colonel Crockett is perhaps the most illiterate Man, that you have ever met in Congress Hall,” Erwin wrote to the secretary of state. “He is not only illiterate but he is rough & uncouth, talks much & loudly, and is by far, more in his proper place, when hunting a Bear, in a Cane Break, than he will be in the Capital.” Yet, noted Erwin, Crockett was “independent and fearless & has a popularity at home that is unaccountable. He is the only

man that I now know in Tennessee that could openly oppose Genl. Jackson in his District & be elected to Congress.”

After he arrived in Washington to take his seat in the 20th Congress, Crockett created a sensation and provided wonderful copy for the press. Anti-Jackson newspapers portrayed the colonel as a hopeless country bumpkin devoid of manners, refinement, or education and warned that the government would be overrun with such creatures should Jackson be elected president in 1828. Such criticism only endeared Crockett all the more to the voters back home.

Crockett emerged as a symbol of the dawning “Age of the Common Man.” His generation, the first to face the future without the guidance of the Republic’s Founding Fathers, looked to the frontier

for the regenerative values once associated with the revolutionary generation. Westerners like Crockett were the flag bearers of a “Manifest Destiny” reaffirming that this new generation was the master of both the environment and its own future. The rise of the West—along with men like Jackson, Clay, Sam Houston, and Crockett—represented the triumph of American democracy and a final rejection of decadent European values of class and aristocracy.

Although identified with Jackson (who would win the presidential election in 1828), Crockett grew increasingly restive under the rigid control that James K. Polk—elected to Congress as a Jacksonian democrat in 1825—exerted over the Jacksonians in the House. The frontiersman found the business of being a congressman hard work.

"Deguello," an ancient tune promising no mercy for any captured defenders. Despite a constant bombardment of cannon and rifle fire, waves of blue-coated Mexican soldiers poured over the Alamo's breached walls and overpowered the approximately 135 Alamo defenders. By 7:00 A.M. all of the Alamo's occupants except the women and children, a prisoner, and William B. Travis's slave, Joe, lay dead. Mexican losses were estimated at more than 600. Less than six weeks later, General Sam Houston and his men defeated the larger Mexican force and captured Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto. Houston's victory ended Mexico's effort to subdue Texas and brought about its independence.

Today the 4.2-acre Alamo complex—which includes the church, the Long Barrack Museum, and library—sits on Alamo Plaza in the heart of downtown San Antonio, surrounded by high-rise hotels and department stores. Nearly three million people visit each year says Dr. Richard Bruce Winders, the Alamo's historian and curator. "I have been pleasantly surprised by the number of foreign visitors who come here know-

ing the basic outline of the Alamo story," he says. "It is an event that has universal appeal."

Five different gates permit access to the mission grounds, but many people prefer to first enter through the church. "For most visitors, the old mission church is the 'Alamo,'" says Winders. Artifacts on display inside the dimly lit building include Crockett's buckskin vest, Travis's ring, and a flintlock rifle from the battle. A side room contains flags representing the home states or countries of each defender.

"More traces of the Alamo of 1836, although hidden by a modern urban landscape, can still be found, if one knows where to look," Winders says. A large portion of the battle took place in what is now the Alamo Plaza, which roughly retains the outline of the interior of the old mission and fort. A commemorative plaque marks the spot where the

Low Barrack once stood, which served as the entrance to the compound and the quarters of James Bowie. Paving stones in the plaza indicate the section of the fort defended by Crockett and the Tennessee volunteers. But the north wall "where William B. Travis was killed, now lies under the U.S. Post Office Building," Dr. Winders comments.

Perhaps the most poignant reminder of Crockett is the cenotaph on the edge of Alamo Plaza. Designed by Italian-born sculptor Pompeo Coppini, it honors those who sacrificed their lives here. At the head of the ranks of larger-than-life anonymous figures, the four recognized leaders of the Texan fighters are depicted in Georgia Marble, with James Bonham and James Bowie on the east side, William B. Travis and David Crockett on the west. In death, as in life, Crockett stands tall.

—Cynthia Myers

VISITOR INFORMATION

The Alamo is situated at 300 Alamo Plaza, San Antonio, Texas. Hours are 9:00-5:00 Monday to Saturday and 10:00-5:30 on Sunday. It is closed on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Admission is free. For more information, call (210) 225-1391 or visit www.thealamo.org.

"There's too much talk," he grumbled. "Many men seem to be proud they can say so much about nothing. Their tongues keep working, whether they've got any grist to grind or not." He soon drifted from the Jackson camp over the question of squatters' rights in the western country, rightly convinced that Jackson and Polk were far more concerned with looking after the interests of the slave-owning planters and large land-speculating interests. He finally broke completely with Jackson over the hotly debated question of Indian Removal, the policy of forcing Indians to resettle in the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi.

Since Crockett was the representative of the western-most congressional district in the nation and an undisputed symbol of the frontier, his opposition to

Indian Removal proved highly embarrassing to the Jackson administration. Crockett's position on this issue reflected his high sense of honor and principle. He had long been disgusted by the Jacksonians' pork-barrel projects and partisan political machinations, but until now he had still resided uncomfortably in their camp. This time, he could not go against his heart on Indian Removal even though he knew almost all of his western colleagues and constituents favored it. The memory of the massacre at Tallusahatchee haunted him, and he disdained the advice of others, as well as good common sense, and engaged in a forlorn quest for justice. His political career suffered greatly, but his reputation in a later time has prospered mightily.

The great westerner, the famed Indi-

an fighter, the man from Jackson's own state, spoke boldly against removal on May 19, 1830. His stand cost him his job, for the Jackson and Polk forces worked diligently and successfully to defeat his reelection bid. They hand-picked Crockett's opponent, lawyer and judge William Fitzgerald, and sent speakers and handbills into the district to work against the frontiersman. Crockett suspected fraud at the polls and contested the election, which he lost by 586 votes. The colonel bitterly declared, "I have not got a collar round my neck marked my dog with the name Andrew Jackson on it. Because I would not take the collar round my neck I was hurled from their party."

For the two years after this defeat he bided his time, hunting bears, mending his political fences back home, and

watching the astonishing growth of his legend in the East.

CROCKETT RAN FOR Congress again in 1833, for a second time against William Fitzgerald, but this time the frontiersman won. By then Crockett had become more famous than ever and more clearly allied with Jackson's enemies. Eastern audiences had been applauding *The Lion of the West* since its April 1831 New York premiere. An anonymously authored biography titled *Life and Adventures of Colonel David Crockett of West Tennessee*, published in Cincinnati in 1833, was republished in both New York and London within a year. Amazed at the book's success, Crockett decided to write his own account. Assisted by a friend, Kentucky congressman Thomas Chilton, Crockett began writing in 1833. Clearly influenced by Benjamin Franklin's classic autobiography, the book became an instant bestseller when published the following year. Like Franklin's book, it was very much the success story of a self-made man, but it also offered a skillful and often hard-edged account of western life. With equal amounts of fabulous hunting tales, delightful frontier humor, and acerbic political blustering, the book did much to cement Crockett's status as an authentic American hero. It also gave the world his motto: "Be always sure you're right—Then Go Ahead!"

Crockett promoted the book on a grand eastern tour arranged by the Whigs, a new political party that had risen in reaction to Jackson. Despite the fact that they shared few common interests with Crockett, the Whigs now worked studiously to build his image, hoping to use him as their own authentic log-cabin westerner to beat Jackson at his symbolic game. Their flattery so turned Crockett's head that he actually came to believe their loose talk of running him for president. In 1835 he allowed his name to be attached to two Whig ghost-written books: an account of his eastern tour that at least used his actual speeches, and a bitterly partisan biography of Jackson's vice president, Martin Van Buren, that he had no hand in producing. Also in 1835 came the first of nearly 50 Crockett almanacs.

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Once again the debt to Ben Franklin seemed obvious, for *Davy Crockett's Almanack, of Wild Sports of the West, and Life in the Backwoods 1835* emerged as a direct descendant of *Poor Richard's*. Originating in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, the booklets mixed predictions on wind and weather with Crockett hunting stories and western tales. Expanding on Crockett's own writings, the almanacs created the image of a tall-tale trickster and comic superman celebrating both the virtues of the common man and the expansionist impulse. These little publications proved enormously popular, ensuring Crockett a rare immortality while further defining the emerging national character.

Despite his increasing fame Crockett made no progress in Congress with his persistent attempts to pass the Tennessee Vacant Land Bill—his effort to protect squatters' rights. He refused to compromise with Polk, who was willing to set a price for the land that was too high for the pioneers to pay. Crockett's contention that the government ought to "at least occasionally, legislate for the poor" met with studied indifference from both his Democrat and Whig colleagues. The ever-efficient Polk, now the Speaker of the House, blocked him at every turn, convinced

that the bill would boost Crockett's popularity in the West. "I have no other feelings towards Col. Crockett than those of pity for his folly," Polk declared. President Andrew Jackson's words were even blunter, demanding that Tennessee rise "from her degraded attitude of abandoning principle to sustain men who have apostatised from the republican fold." The president made it clear to all that he wanted "Davy Crockett & Co., hurled as they ought, from the confidence of the people." What Andrew Jackson wanted in Tennessee he usually got.

Crockett's 1835 reelection campaign was bitter, for Jackson's forces devoted all their resources to defeating the colonel. This time they picked lawyer and war hero Adam Huntsman to run against Crockett. The incumbent hurt his own chances by spending more time being a celebrity and touring the East than working to get his land bill passed. As a result, Crockett lost by 252 votes.

Deeply embittered by the results, Crockett told his constituents that they might all go to hell and he would go to Texas, and he did just that. He departed Memphis for Texas in November 1835 and by February 1836 had reached San Antonio de Bexar. He was now a private soldier in the Texas rebel army, holding the crumbling ruins of a Spanish mission called the Alamo. Within a month Crockett was dead, along with all his compatriots, but from the ashes of the funeral pyre onto which his mutilated body was thrown ascended a legend of epic proportions.

Crockett's death at the Alamo ensured that he would be remembered as an American hero. Yet often lost in the legend is the simple man from the backwoods who fought for the rights of the underprivileged and dispossessed of the nation. 🗳️

Paul Andrew Hutton teaches history at the University of New Mexico. His 1998 American History article on the Rough Riders received the Western Heritage Award as best article of the year from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City. He is writing a biography of David Crockett to be published by the University of Oklahoma Press.