

Nashville Republican Report of the Carthage Celebration

Andrew Jackson

Commentary

Although his protective tariff was enacted, Clay failed to win the presidential election of 1824. Of more long-term significance, especially to future campaign rhetoric, was the manner in which the election was conducted. As early as 1796, the parties recognized the need to keep their supporters in the electoral college from splitting their votes. The nomination of candidates by congressional caucuses became an accepted practice; however, objections were loud against "King Caucus" (a rhetorically apt term in republican America) when Monroe was selected in 1816. Anticipating the death of the caucus system, the Tennessee legislature nominated Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) a year before the election of 1824. The caucus of Democratic-Republican congressmen, which nominated William Crawford, was so thinly attended that other State legislatures followed Tennessee's example. Clay and John Q. Adams were added to the list of candidates. Jackson won a plurality of electoral votes but his lack of a majority threw the election into the House of Representatives, where Clay supported the victorious Adams.

Jackson's supporters alleged that the "popular will" had been "thwarted." When Adams appointed Clay secretary of state (a post that Adams and his two predecessors had occupied immediately prior to becoming president), Jacksonians complained of a "corrupt bargain." They did more than merely complain. They realigned the party system by forming local parties that used various labels, including "Jacksonian," "Jacksonian Democrat," "Jacksonian Republican" and "Democrat"—the last of which was especially popular because of its egalitarian overtones.

Jacksonians also subsidized partisan political newspapers, which never tired of telling readers how the corrupt bargain had thwarted the public will. After seizing control of the House in 1826, Jacksonian congressmen introduced a bill to have a painting of the Battle of New Orleans put in the Capitol Building rotunda, and they introduced a Retrenchment Resolution, which called for economy in government. As legislation, such measures were

trivial, but they enabled congressmen to glorify Jackson for saving the nation at New Orleans and to portray Adams as a wasteful and unscrupulous spender of the taxpayers' hard-earned dollars. The congressional debates were reported in Jacksonian newspapers (in appropriately biased fashion), and they laid a solid rhetorical base for the presidential election of 1828.

President Adams, stubbornly clinging to the outdated view that parties were bad, refused to organize one of his own. Thus the Jacksonians had a tremendous advantage when the election of 1828 arrived. They were ready for a campaign featuring character assassination and image-building. Adams was portrayed as a corrupt aristocrat who was the tool of wealthy bankers and other special interests. Jacksonians emphasized that Adams had spent much of his career in the castles and drawing rooms of Europe (and forgot to mention that he had served brilliantly as a diplomat). Jackson, in sharp contrast, was a True American, a Common Man, a dirt farmer who believed in hard work, thrift and other agrarian virtues. He was a military hero, who had joined the militia as a mere boy during the Revolution, been a heroic Indian fighter and was the Hero of New Orleans (but forgot to mention his limited political experience).

Jacksonians diffused their rhetoric through the partisan press. They also utilized a new medium of communication that was well adapted to their egalitarian rhetoric: the local political rally which featured a stump speech. The term *stump speech* was something of a misnomer, because the speeches were usually delivered from a platform, but it had a folksy touch in a day when the vast majority of Americans were farmers who cut trees to clear the land and used the wood for fuel and timber.

The Common Man adhered to the old myth that "the office seeks the man" by remaining secluded in his elegant mansion on his large Tennessee estate. One occasion permitted him to give a short, supposedly non-partisan speech. It was a local Fourth of July celebration near his home. Such celebrations were extremely popular not only because it was an age of intense patriotism, but also because many Americans, especially those in the West, lived on isolated farms and welcomed communal activities. Astute to the rhetorical potential of identifying partisanship with non-partisan celebrations, the *Nashville Republican's* account of the ceremony was reprinted in numerous Jacksonian papers, including the leading one (located in the nation's capital), the *United States Telegraph*, from which the following is reproduced. The report appeared on p. 3 in the July 28, 1828 issue of the semi-weekly edition and is taken from the paper which is housed at the American Antiquarian Society.

Newspaper Report of the Carthage Celebration (Including a Speech by Andrew Jackson)

The Fourth of July was celebrated in Carthage, highly creditable to the patriotism and hospitality of the citizens of that place.

Gen. Jackson and his company, Governor Houston, the Revolutionary Soldiers of that vicinity, and some others, were invited guetts [sic].

At the distance of eight miles, the General and his company were met by ten gentlemen from Carthage, deputed by the Committee of Arrangements, who accompanied our distinguished guests to the bank of the Cumberland.

On their arrival, they were saluted from the opposite shore, by a handsome discharge of artillery and musketry.

The General having crossed the river, was received and introduced by Col. Robert Allen, the President of the day. Here a line of citizens were formed on each side, extending about a half mile in distance; thro' which the General and his company were escorted by Col. Don C[.] Dixon's company of volunteers, a number of our citizens, and a handsome band of music. This scene was truly interesting, for in this march were to be found many of our grey headed-fathers [sic] of the revolution, following on, besides thousands of others, from the youthful patriot to the time beaten and decrepit sire on the verge of the grave — all was respectful and solemn.

The General reached his lodgings, the house of Mr. William Allen, kindly and handsom[e]ly furnished by the owner, for his reception.

About 11 o'clock the General and company were conducted to a platform, erected near the court house, fronted by a beautiful arbor, under which were seated a large assembly of ladies, and about three thousand spectators.

The scene here was more impressive than all beside — the General having reached the platform, he was introduced by Col. Allen to the few revolutionary heroes assembled there; as our distinguished guest would take them by the hand, their hearts heaved with gratitude and their eyes were filled with the tears of affection — what situation could man be placed in that would inspire him with nobler and higher emotions? — better this, than the heartless devotion of millions of sycophants and flatterers.

This ceremony over — Col. A.W. Overton addressed the General in a very feeling and eloquent manner, to which the General replied. The Rev. Mr. Dillard offered up to the throne of all goodness an appropriate prayer, and Jonathan Pickett, Esq. read the Declaration of American Independence. — After a patriotic air from a fine band of music, the hour of twelve having arrived, Dixon Allen, Esq. delivered an eloquent oration in commemoration of our national birth day.

At about two o'clock, the company moved out to the dinner table situated under a beautiful natural harbour, in the edge of the town, where a sumptuous repast was furnished by Mr. John Morris. Between five and six hundred persons sat down to dinner, where all was cheerfulness and harmony, and no jarring sound was heard, to mar the enjoyments of the day. The toasts were all drank with great order and decorum, and too much praise cannot be bestowed on Maj. David Burford, and James D. Allen, Esq. the marshalls of the day, for their assiduous attention. The whole celebration was closed by a splendid Ball in the evening, at which the General attended, where he was greeted by the smiles of about one hundred of our most interesting ladies.

Col. A.W. Overton's Address

GENERAL: — You have been invited by the citizens of Smith county to unite with them, in the celebration of this day — you have accepted the invitation, and now honor them with your presence.

Give me leave, Sir, in the name of your friends here assembled, and in *behalf of your fellow-citizens of Smith county, (whose humble organ I am,)* to tender you their unfeigned congratulations, and to assure you of a sincere, and cordial welcome among them.

It is not in the abject spirit of adulation, nor in the fulsome language of flattery, that we desire to hail your presence among us. No, Sir, such a degraded offering would be rebuked by the spirit that rules this memorable anniversary. These living monuments of our revolutionary glory, would scorn such vile degeneracy, and the exalted patriotism of our honored guest, would disdain such servility in his countrymen: but as freemen, proud of their independence, rejoicing in the event that announced it to the world, we hail you with the animated welcome of gratitude as its most illustrious preserver.

We delight to contemplate you as the youthful hero who mingled with patriotic ardor, in that glorious struggle which redeemed this land from British domination. We trace you with unfeigned satisfaction, through the successive variety of civil employments to which you have been called, by the voice of your country, and in which you have displayed the warmest and most enlightened zeal for her interest. We remember, with the liveliest sensibility, that when savage massacre had drenched our defenceless frontier with the blood of its citizens — when invasion hovered around our country, in its darkest and most fearful form, you have rushed to the scene of danger, and, by an energy and skill, unparalleled in the annals of warfare, achieved our deliverance from the desolation of the storm.

Around you, General, are many of those brave spirits, who shared, with you, the toils, the danger and the glories of your eventful career — many of your "brethren in arms." Many of your old associates in peace. They have known you long, they have known you intimately, and they proclaim you, with a united voice, a patriot, a *statesman* and *benefactor*, worthy of the warmest gratitude, and highest honours. But the high testimonials you have given of your love of country, your devotion to its interest, its honor and glory, h[a]ve not shielded your reputation from the calumny and detraction of your enemies. — The venal, the vulgar and the vile have lavished it upon you, in the most unfeeling and relentless manner. Even the sanctuary of your fire-side has been invaded — the happiness and comforts of your domestic and private relation have not been spared. It is a calumny unmanly in its motives, unnatural in its objects, an[d] unworthy in its means. It has not, it cannot prevail. Innocence will vindicate itself, and guilt draw down its own condemnation. Truth will triumph; and the authors of such falsehood will feel its dreadful recoil in the infamy, to which the justice of mankind will consign them — and your name, General, shall go down to posterity, doubly hallowed by the severity of its trials.

General Jackson's Reply

Sir — Permit me to offer you my sincere thanks for the complimentary terms in which, as the organ of my fellow citizens of Smith county, you are pleased to greet my arrival amongst them.

I accepted their polite invitation to celebrate with them this day as a neighbor and friend, conscious that in thus manifesting his respect for the birth of liberty, he could not be charged with a desire to court popular favor, nor they with a disposition to gratify a spirit so unworthy. No Sir, the patriotism displayed by many h[e]r[e] [in] this assembly, during the last war, would not bear the imputation and I trust will never authorize it by any act of servility whether to an old commander, or to any other citizen.

I am truly grateful, sir, for the good opinion of my fellow citizens. Obtained without a sacrifice of conscience, and without a violation of the interests of the country, it is the greatest of all earthly rewards, and as such do I regard that which you have so eloquently expressed. Unbiassed [sic] by the hopes of office, and animated by an ardent devotion to the inestimable blessings of liberty, it must consign to infamy the authors of the present system of calumny, and uniting with the great stream of public opinion, cannot fail to bear down the machinations of the demagogue, and bring back the government to its original simplicity. In the advancement of this object, be assured, sir, that I shall bear with patience, the attacks of my enemies, and if it shall be my destiny to be made the instrument in the hands of Providence, by which it is to be affected, I shall rather be humbled than elated by the possession of so high a trust.