This article is protected by copyright, East Tennessee Historical Society. It is available online for study, scholarship, and research use only.

Suggested Citation:

Smith, Culver H. “Propaganda Technique in the Jackson Campaign of 1828.” The East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications 6 (1934): 44-66.

PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUE IN THE JACKSON CAMPAIGN OF 1828

BY CULVER H. SMITH

In 1822 John Quincy Adams was flirting with the idea of becoming president, but he was not doing much about it. His indifference to a well-conceived campaign exasperated his friends who wished to see him attain that high office. Adams merely quoted Macbeth: "If chance will make me king, why chance may crown me." To which his wise friend Joseph Hopkinson, replied: "But kings are made by politicians and newspapers; and the man who sits down waiting to be crowned, either by chance or just right, will go bareheaded all his life."

Hopkinson, at least, believed that newspapers had come to be an important element in a presidential campaign. Adams was later to realize that Hopkinson was right. Adams was the last of the series of men who became president by way of "safe precedents"—the secretaryship of state. And even his victory of 1824 came through the aid of active politicians, and was not without the support of a press. His defeat in 1828 was encompassed by opposing politicians more crafty than his own, and by an opposition press more extensive in its operations and better organized in its plans than his own publicity machinery which he so much disdained to use.

From the standpoint of the organization of publicity agencies and the distribution of political propaganda the campaign of 1828 was the most remarkable presidential campaign that had ever been waged. The co-ordination of the newspapers in spreading campaign arguments, and the co-operation of the committees of correspondence in supplying the newspapers with the arguments they wanted spread, insured a dissemination of political literature that could not fail to arouse the voters. It is idle to speculate on Jackson's chances of election without the intensive publicity work which attended his campaign; nevertheless, one feels justified in the belief that without such aid Jackson would not have received so great a vote—nor would Adams. Both probably were the beneficiaries of a much larger vote than they would have received had the publicity service been no better organized than it was in the campaign of 1824. About two years after Jackson's election, the *National Journal,* anti-Jackson paper, reviewing the campaign and its results, made the following statement:

> The election of General Jackson to the Presidential Chair was the result of a combination of circumstances as extraordinary as it was unprecedented. All the arts of delusion were employed to mislead the public mind as well in relation to the members of the last Administration, as to his own character and competency to bring about a reform which was supposed to be necessary. Suspicions were whispered every where against the purity of the men who then administered the Government; and when specifications and proofs of mal-practices were demanded, we were told that it was impossible to unveil and expose the depth of the evil as it would be in vain to look for a cure until power should change hands." (Sept. 3, 1830.)

The dissatisfaction resulting from the election of Adams in 1824—the belief that he had frustrated the will of the people, his appointment of Henry Clay, secretary of state, and the belief that Adams and Clay had made a corrupt bargain--resulted in a determined opposition to Adams' re-election. Those who had had their hopes deferred or thwarted began drawing together and making plans for the defeat of Adams four years later. It was to be a ruthless campaign, and no stone was to be left unturned in accomplishing the object. The opponents of Adams became solicitous about securing editors and newspapers for the undertaking. The wisdom of Joseph Hopkinson was not to be lost upon the Jacksonians.

Evidence of the genuine belief in the power of the press to sway public opinion was the effort expended in the campaign of 1828 in the encouragement, production, and distribution of newspapers. All over the country new papers sprang up, increasing in number and activity as the campaign progressed. Many of these lasted but for the season, having found sustenance only in the excitement engendered by the campaign. Prospectuses were issued of many more newspapers that never came into being. Established papers entered into the campaign with a vigor that suggested either abundant patriotism, or concrete encouragement. The political leaders of each side were interested in giving aid to editors who needed it, and whose services were considered important. The administration press charged that the opposition had raised a fund of $50,000 for establishing Jackson newspapers. 1—(*National Journal,* tri-weekly, Mar. 22, 1827.)

---

[1] *National Journal,* tri-weekly, Mar. 22, 1827.

And there is definite evidence that Clay and Webster raised money to subsidize certain papers. 2—(Clay Papers, MSS. in Library of Congress.) The Jacksonians freely charged that Clay distributed the printing patronage in such a way as to secure effective support from the press. The administration may have been trying to emulate Van Buren who, with Clinton, they thought had most of the partisan papers of New York under his control. 3—Ibid., General P. B. Porter to Clay, Oct. 26, 1827.) Van Buren believed in the press, and had actually put himself on record in this matter. "Without a paper," said he, "we may hang our harps on the willows."

Neither side had a preponderance of the country's newspapers in 1828. The *Richmond Enquirer* asserted that the administration had four hundred newspapers in its service (Mar. 1827); while the *National Journal* in the same month grimly declared that "if the establishment of Jackson presses is to be received as good and sufficient evidence of the progress of public opinion in his favor, it will indeed be absurd to oppose his pretensions much longer, for his friends are exhibiting an industry in the establishment of presses, from which we may augur that the country will soon be overrun with them." (Tri-weekly, Mar. 10, 1827.) It is probable, however, that the Jacksonians had more newspapers than the administration party, certainly more editors with the peculiar ability that such a campaign seemed to require.

The newspapers of this period enjoyed special consideration from the government. They were favored by a rapid expansion of the postal facilities, which included the rapid extension of post roads, the acceleration of the service on the most important routes and the increase in the number of postoffices between 1823 and 1828 of about seventy percent. In addition, the newspapers were favored by an extremely low postage rate. At a time when a letter of one sheet required postage of from six to twenty-five cents, depending upon the distance, a newspaper required not over a cent and a half. Indeed, if the newspapers were not carried over one hundred miles, they paid but one cent per copy.

More important than the low postage on newspapers was their free exchange between editors. Every printer of a newspaper could send one paper to each and every other printer of a newspaper within the United States free of charge. In a day when there was no telegraph, and no Associated Press or other news agencies, the free exchange of

---

[2] Clay Papers, MSS. in Library of Congress.

[3] *Ibid.*, General P. B. Porter to Clay, Oct. 26, 1827.

newspapers was of incalculable value, especially to the more remote regions.

It was the free exchange of newspapers between editors that was partly responsible for the pre-eminence of the Washington press in the Jacksonian era. Placed at the seat of government where politicians gathered and policies were formed, the Washington papers were able to carry political news that was at once original and eagerly sought. For much of the country this was the chief, and sometimes the only, way that national news was secured. Even New York and Philadelphia editors were to a surprising extent indebted to the Washington papers for their news of Washington. The provincial editors leaned heavily upon this source of information. For this reason the capital press was able to exert a considerable influence upon provincial opinion. The free exchange of papers was an advantage to both the Washington and the country editors. Not only could each local editor secure the news of national affairs, but the Washington editors, with newspapers from each corner of the Union, could learn the state of local feeling.

Thus in the election of 1828 the Washington newspapers had an importance not enjoyed by their successors of today. In an era when news traveled no swifter than a fast horse, the Washington printers were privileged in securing important news long before their fellow craftsmen could obtain it. And many matters of news were not distributed unless they published it. There were few newspaper correspondents to supply the metropolitan and provincial press direct. Washington was not only the political capital of the nation; it was the news capital also. The editors of the capital press mixed with the politicians, attended the sessions of Congress and gleaned the political gossip. When they wrote, it was with a consciousness of superior knowledge; and the provincial press respected them. Fortunate was a presidential candidate in those days to have a newspaper in the capital city. It is natural to expect then that in the campaign of 1828 Washington should be the center of newspaper and political propaganda activity.

The two chief papers that served the Adams-Clay administration from Washington were the *National Intelligencer* and the *National Journal*. The *National Intelligencer* was a dignified, chaste newspaper, which had been published since 1812 by Joseph Gales and his brother-in-law, W. W. Seaton. It followed the practice of supporting the administration, a policy that usually paid in the form of government printing. It was not, however, primarily a political organ. The *National Journal,* on the other hand, was a political sheet, undisguised, in the service of Adams and Clay. It had been running since 1823, and it now was a daily as well as a weekly, like the *Intelligencer.* It was published by Peter Force, since celebrated as a book collector and publisher of American documents, but the paper was edited by a group of politicians whose identity was not always apparent. The *National Journal* was the leading Adams-Clay paper in the campaign of 1828. In the last few months of the campaign a special paper appeared, called *We the People.* It was in effect an "extra" of the *National Journal,* though Peter Force did not appear to have anything to do with it. It was a mud-slinging weekly of the worst sort, publishing pungent and odorous matter which the more decorous *National Journal* refrained from printing. This paper ended with the campaign.

Outside of Washington the chief administration papers were the *Richmond Whig,* edited by John H. Pleasants, and the *Democratic Press,* edited in Philadelphia by John Binns.

When the Jackson men formed their plans for the campaign of 1828 they were convinced of the importance of maintaining a newspaper organ in Washington. Even Jackson himself believed in having a newspaper there. Whether they regarded such a paper as being indispensable to Jackson's success or not, they at least pointed out that in the campaign of 1824 Jackson had had no newspaper support to speak of while Adams had had. They further observed that Washington was the center of the political activities of the Adams and Clay men, and that it was important to have an alert newspaper at this point to detect "their schemes of power and patronage, their bargain, intrigue and management."

The paper which they established was the *United States' Telegraph.* It emerged in 1826 under the editorship, first of John S. Mehan, and then of Duff Green. It immediately assumed the role of pattern maker for the Jackson press, and eventually earned for itself, from both friend and foe, the acknowledgment of success in securing Jackson's election. After the close of the campaign the *New York Enquirer* asserted that it was to the tone and spirit of the *Telegraph,* "its incessant labors and great circulation in the Western States," that the success of General Jackson was mainly attributable. Even its political enemy, the *National Journal,* paid the *Telegraph* the left hand compliment of saying that it had labored "so to delude and abuse the public judgment, as to make it select General Jackson for President."

Duff Green, the editor, came from Missouri, where he had dabbled in law, politics, and land speculation. He had been born in Kentucky of good Virginia stock. He became identified with the Jackson interest in 1823 when he purchased the *St. Louis Enquirer* and supported the presidential candidacy of Jackson. He went to Washington in the spring of 1826 and purchased the *United States Telegraph* from Meehan with money borrowed from Senator John H. Eaton of Tennessee. He at once took rank as the leading Jackson editor of the country.

Green was not merely an editor; he was a politician. Perhaps it is more descriptive of the man to say that he was a promoter, political objects being one of his favorite pursuits. His later years were filled with promotion schemes, which included, besides publishing projects, railroad building, coal and iron mining, and free trade with England. In the campaign of 1828 he sometimes played the role of personal campaign worker. On his way to Washington from St. Louis in 1826, he called on General Jackson at the Hermitage and offered his aid in restoring friendly relations between him and General Adair. He then sought to enlist the support of some of the politicians and editors of Kentucky for the Jackson ticket. He was not a man to be content with merely printing the news or writing editorials; he carried on an active correspondence with other editors and politicians over the country, gathering and distributing propaganda, and trying to chart the political winds. He was indeed, as he was called, "field general of the Jackson forces," a member of their central committee for the United States, and a leader of the party.

Outside of Washington the most influential Jackson newspaper in the campaign was the *Argus of Western America,* published at Frankfort, Kentucky. Its importance was due in part to the fact that it was the chief Jackson paper in a doubtful state, and in part to the editorship of Amos Kendall, a debt-ridden, Yankee lawyer who became the mouth piece of the debt-ridden "new court" element in that state. Kendall, together with his friend Francis P. Blair, did more than any other Kentuckians to swing that state to Jackson in 1828.

Next to the *Frankfort Argus,* the principal Jackson newspapers outside of Washington in the 1828 campaign were the *Richmond Enquirer,* edited by Thomas Ritchie, the *New Hampshire Patriot,* edited by Isaac Hill, and the *Albany Argus,* edited by Edwin Crosswell and others, but under the supervision of Van Buren himself. Ritchie and Hill were exceedingly vocal editors, making a stir in the campaign on their own account. Each did much for the Jackson cause in his own state. All of these co-operated with the *Telegraph* and the *Frankfort Argus,* and the group taken together presented a formidable front to the anti-Jackson forces.

One of the features of the publicity machinery was the "Committees of Correspondence." These committees assumed the responsibility of preparing campaign documents and distributing literature. Both sides had committees of correspondence, though here again the Jackson side seems to have excelled in both number and activity. They were to be found in every large city; there was a central committee for each state; and there was a national committee in Washington. In some cases the committees of correspondence formed only a part of the campaign machinery, their work being supplemented by committees of "vigilance", while in other cases they assumed all of the functions of local party campaign work, calling meetings, providing ballots, and supervising elections, as well as preparing and distributing propaganda.

These committees usually had their inception in a Jackson meeting, whether it was a meeting of a few party chieftains or a mass rally. After a meeting it was the custom to issue an address "to the people," containing any resolutions which the meeting might have adopted, and setting forth the objectives of the campaign, condemning the opposing candidate and extolling their own, or "replying to the sentiments" of some other committee. The men appointed to draft the address usually became the committee of correspondence. These committees appeared in the campaign of 1824, but they were not as numerous as in the succeeding campaign. In the latter their activity becomes obvious, as is soon perceived by a reading of the newspapers. Their "addresses", "replies", and other documents made up a very large portion of the campaign literature.

The publicity campaign of the Jacksonian opposition opened with the first issue of the *Telegraph* in February, 1826. Calling up the Jeffersonian maxim that in all free countries parties will exist and that they tend toward two grand divisions, the party of the many and the party of the few, the *Telegraph* proclaimed the motto which it carried ever after, "Power is always stealing from the many to the few," and in a lengthy two-column editorial issued its declaration of war upon the administration. From this it became clear that the main targets would be the alleged manipulation of the late presidential election, and the abuse of the patronage, both involving Henry Clay. In

naking a stir in the cam-
for the Jackson cause in
th the *Telegraph* and the
ether presented a formid-

inery was the "Commit-
s assumed the responsi-
id distributing literature.
e, though here again the
h number and activity.
here was a central com-
nal committee in Wash-
respondence formed only
k being supplemented by
ses they assumed all of
, calling meetings, pro-
well as preparing and

on in a Jackson meet-
y chieftains or a mass
ssue an address "to the
ne meeting might have
ne campaign, condemn-
own, or "replying to
he men appointed to
tee of correspondence.
f 1824, but they were
n. In the latter their
by a reading of the
other documents made
ure.

pposition opened with
826. Calling up the
es will exist and that
of the many and the
motto which it carri-
e many to the few,"
declaration of war
clear that the main
ate presidential elec-
ng Henry Clay. In

this manifesto Clay was blamed for throwing the election into the House of Representatives by his perserverance as a candidate for the presidency "against all hopes of success," and he was charged with ignoring the manifest "choice of the people" for his own advantage.

The first issue said nothing about Jackson. It did observe that "it would be a want of candor and frankness not to declare" that it should feel bound, at the proper time, to oppose the re-election of Adams, "even if he had not so strongly indicated a departure from Republican principles, and a reliance upon the improper use of patronage to sustain himself in power. We complain," it continued, "of the manner in which power has been acquired, as well as that in which it has been used, and shall, on both accounts, feel ourselves called upon by the highest obligations of duty, to reject the precedent." Not until late in its first month did the *Telegraph* indicate that Jackson would be its candidate. Then, on February 24, 1826, in its leading editorial, entitled "General Jackson", the lately defeated candidate was set forth as "this firm patriot and unwavering Republican," who "has suffered and performed more for his country than any man now on the public theatre", while he has received less from his country than any prominent public citizen that she had. This was due to the "purity and excellence of the man", which had placed him so far above the corruption of the times that the designing portion of the politicians,"afraid of his virtue and high-mindedness, and of the effect his Republican plainness might produce in the country," were resolved to lose no opportunity to keep him away from any concern with the affairs of the nation. This editorial confined itself to eulogy of Jackson, and did not suggest him as the candidate of the opposition; but the intent was clear. The next use of Jackson's name came on March 8, when the information was published that the Pennsylvania gubernatorial nominating convention four days before had adopted a resolution of confidence in the "patriotism, talents, and inflexible integrity of Gen. Andrew Jackson." The *Telegraph* commented that the 98 to 7 vote for the resolution demonstrated that Pennsylvania was still attached to Jackson, and that the resolution was equivalent to a second nomination for the presidency. 4—(Jackson had been placed in nomination for the Presidency in October, 1825, by the legislature of Tennessee.)

The earliest sustained attack upon the administration was on the question of the proposed Panama Congress. This was opened in the second issue of the *Telegraph,* February 7, 1826, and kept up till

---

[4] Jackson had been placed in nomination for the presidency in October, 1825, by the legislature of Tennessee.

late in the spring after both the Senate and the House had disposed of the question of sending delegates. The *Telegraph* questioned whether participation of the United States in this Congress might not be construed by Spain as an act of hostility to her. It criticized the president for not placing the matter before both houses of Congress in the beginning rather than accepting the invitation and announcing that ministers would be commissioned.

From early February through the spring of 1826 there was scarcely an isssue of the *Telegraph* that did not bruit the question of the Panama Congress. The debates in Congress and the call on the president by the House for more information about the nature of the proposed mission were kept before the readers, and the president's message explaining the purpose and desirability of the Panama Congress was criticized in plain terms. The outstanding speeches in Congress on the subject were also published in full, including Randolph's, MacDuffie's, and Benton's. From some of these speeches, the reader might gain the notion that part of the opposition was founded on the fact that the South American republics had abolished slavery, and on the fear that General Bolivar, "the Genius of Universal Emanicipation", would throw the contagion of emancipation upon the southern border of the United States.[5] But the truth of the matter was that opposition to the mission had been agreed upon by the opponents of the administration because they feared its success would make Clay and Adams popular. The liberation movement in the Spanish countries to the south as well as in Greece had received a great deal of approval and enthusiasm in the United States; at nearly every public banquet, toasts were offered to Greece and to Bolivar. The *Telegraph* suggested the reason for the opposition in a three-column editorial on March 11, in which it raised the question of who was in favor of the Panama mission, and answered that it was Henry Clay. In the newspaper's own words the reasons were: "Mr. Clay is to artful; he is too old a 'manager', and has profited too much by such movements, not to strive for some great distracting question, which, in its great excitement, may give the chances of a second triumph. This is his hope and his only hope—for who in the midst of conflagration, thinks of the lawless robber, whose daring hand applied the consuming fire for the sake of plunder?" In short, it evidenced fear that the Panama question would distract public attention from the points of opposition to Clay, including the charge of his bargain with Adams. There is no better example of the opposition's hysteric fear of Clay, nor of the belief in his political wizardry.

---

[5] See *Telegraph* for March, 9, 1826, reprint from New York *Commercial Advertiser.*

Along with the publicity against the Panama Congress the *Telegraph* carried its opposition to executive patronage. At that time certain newspapers in each state, usually three in number, were selected by the secretary of state to publish the laws of Congress, for which service they were paid a moderate sum. This was a form of executive patronage that aroused the keenest interest among the newspapers. The *Telegraph* was but three days old when this subject was introduced. The occasion was the introduction by Senator Macon of North Carolina of a resolution calling for an investigation of the patronage in the hands of the executive. The *Telegraph* asserted that the great extent of patronage then in the hands of the executive was "calculated to alarm the friends of the country." One portion of the patronage particularly demanded attention, said the *Telegraph*:

> "We refer to that which operates on the press, and which tends to convert this sentinel of freedom into a spy of power... It is in vain to talk of a free press, when the *favor of power* is essential to the support of editors, and the money of the people, by passing through the hands of the Executive, is made to operate as a bribe against liberty. It is a most solemn truth, and should be deeply impressed on every mind, that if liberty shall ever expire in our country, it will die of the poisonous draught of corrupt patronage."

This was to be the tenor of later and frequent passages in the *Telegraph* on the same subject. It was an unjustifiable criticism of the Adams administration, to be sure, but it was effective in focusing attention upon a subject that many men had close to their hearts, men who in the Jackson administration demonstrated that their cant about the patronage of the press was but born of a wish unfulfilled. There was no objection by the editors to the printing of the laws by the newspapers and getting paid for it by the government; it was a much-prized contract—by those who could get it—and it is probable that the editors wished that Congress had been more thoughtful, extending the privilege of printing the laws to more than three papers to a state. As it was, the public printing was a privilege, narrow in its limitations, to be guarded, and to be fought for. Those who had it saw no danger in its enjoyment; those who had it not complained that the blessings of government were not equal in their distribution, and professed a fear that they who granted the privilege might keep themselves in power by the improper manipulation of this form of patronage.

Not patronage, but "corrupt patronage" was the war-cry of the editors of the opposition in 1828; and "corrupt patronage," to be definite, was that distributed by Henry Clay. It is not necessary to debate whether Clay's "corrupt patronage" was actual or fancied; it was necessary to the plans of the outs to make it appear actual, let the facts be what they may. Regardless of what editors who were eager for all the patronage they could get might think, corruption of the press was an effective alarm to excite the voters. "Freedom of the press" was one of those shibboleths of the Declaration of Independence that still endured. It was writ large into the constitutions of the various states, not only those of the original thirteen, but those also of later creation. Some celebrated attempts to throttle the press had served to keep it alive. Could one expect that it would be allowed to die just at a time when the press was enjoying a new burst of glory? "Freedom of the press" enjoyed the advantage over other shibboleths in that it could be popularized through that opinion-forming medium which found this shibboleth at once its best defense, and a means of self-preservation. It had therefore a vitality that carried conviction far and wide to those who, though not directly interested in the press, were made to feel, nevertheless, that their own welfare would be threatened unless the press were kept untrammelled. "Freedom of the press," a term begotten of self-interest, could be made to do service both for the party and for those editors who wanted to get into power. It is not strange, therefore, that in the campaign of 1828 this theme was used for all it was worth. How much it was worth cannot be determined; but the frequency of its use testifies to belief in its potency.

It should be noted that the attacks on the administration for the abuse of the patronage were directed against Adams and Clay. This requires notice inasmuch as the officer having the greatest number of appointments at his disposal was the postmaster general, John McLean. But apparently it was not in the plans of the opposition to attack McLean. The Jacksonians may have had no justification for so doing, or they may have preferred to concentrate their attacks upon Adams and Clay. This, however, lends color to the charge that McLean was secretly working for the Jackson-Calhoun interests. It is noteworthy that on the occasion when the appointment of a postmaster caused a vigorous protest, McLean was not censured. This was the appointment of John P. Erwin to be deputy postmaster at

Nashville in place of Robert B. Curry. Curry was said to have had the support of ten of the eleven members of the Tennessee delegation in Congress and six hundred petitioners, including General Jackson, while Erwin was vigorously opposed. But the appointment of Erwin was explained on the grounds that Adams took the appointment out of the hands of McLean. So Adams was blamed and McLean was excused. Clay's part was not overlooked, for it was pointed out by the opposition papers that Erwin was a relative of Clay, Erwin being the brother of Clay's son-in-law. In fact, the appointment was made, according to their assertion, "To gratify the wishes of that arch juggler, Henry Clay."[6]

The story of the campaign of 1828 cannot be told without reference to the charge of a corrupt bargain between Adams and Clay. The circulation of this charge was the feature of the campaign, and it took the place of a paramount issue. Based upon premises of uncertain foundation, it nevertheless evoked a popular disapproval of Clay that not only helped to defeat the re-election of Adams, but swept away Clay's chances of the presidency. If it be granted that the charge was entirely unwarranted, it becomes thereby not less worthy of consideration, but more so, inasmuch as it exhibits the power of a well-organized Jackson press and other agencies of propaganda.

Green used the charge with the greatest assurance. As soon as he took over the *Telegraph* in the spring of 1826, he declared that he was prepared to demonstrate that "the election of Mr. Adams was the result of a corrupt understanding between the leading parties to it."[7] The term "corrupt understanding" was probably used advisedly. In November he commenced a series of five articles in the *Telegraph*, "To the People of the United States," in which he undertook to develop his thesis that the election was a result of a "corrupt understanding." But in these articles there was no charge of an outright political bargain, merely a lengthy exposition that sought to give the impression of corruption. Green knew at the time these articles appeared that the charge of a direct corrupt bargain between Adams and Clay could not be substantiated. But Green was endowed with a talent that enabled him to enshroud his opponents with the appearance of evil without establishing the concrete evidence of it. Such was the character of the literature on the bargain throughout the campaign, and in spite of all the literature, defensive or offensive, in spite of investigations or near-investigations, the understanding of the average voter was probably no clearer in the end than it was in the beginning of the controversy; but for the purposes of the Jacksonians this was not a wholly undesirable situation for, as one of the leading Jacksonians wrote, it was the "mystery" thrown around it that was largely the reason for considering it a "corrupt bargain."

---

[6] See *Telegraph*, April 20, May 8, 11, 17, Oct. 4, 13, 1826.

[7] *Ibid.*, June 5, 1826.

The Jackson press and politicians had work to do besides that of circulating the bargain charge. The Jackson papers published the reports of the many Jackson meetings and the addresses or circulars of the principal Jackson corresponding committees. But in addition to this the Jackson press devoted considerable space to answering the attacks upon Jackson by the administration newspapers. The latter were severe on Jackson and often nasty. They examined Jackson's domestic relations and scandalized his wife; they condemned him because he sanctioned the execution of six militiamen; they castigated him for lending his name to the bargain charge; they branded him as an illiterate; they exhibited him as a negro trader, as a man lacking in veracity, as one who had been associated with Aaron Burr in his conspiracy, and as an official whose conduct, both as military commander in New Orleans and as civil administrator of Florida, revealed him as a man unqualified for the presidency. All these charges and others were assembled and published during 1828 in *Truth's Advocate and Monthly Anti-Jackson Expositor,* printed in Cincinnati. The last number of this administration handbook, published in October, ended with the following conclusive condemnation of Jackson:

> You know that he is no jurist, no statesman, no politician; that he is destitute of historical, political, or statistical knowledge: that he is unacquainted with the orthography, concord and government of his language. You know that he is a man of no labour, no patience, no investigation, in short, that his whole recommendation is animal fierceness and organic energy. He is wholly unqualified by education habit and temper, for the station of President.

To make such attacks upon the "Old Hero" was to inspire the Jackson editors and the Jackson corresponding committees to greater efforts. It was largely to afford a convenient medium for the statements and documents of the corresponding committees that the *Telegraph Extra* was got out in the form and with the frequency of *Truth's Advocate,* and for the purpose of combating that publication in its own style.

More vexatious for the editor of the *Telegraph* than *Truth's Advocate* was *We The People*, published in Washington. It appeared at the same time that the *Telegraph Extra* appeared, and like the *Extra* was designed as a campaign publication. *We The People* indulged in a more unbridled criticism of Jackson and his followers than the *National Journal*. It was designed to match the *Telegraph* at its worst. It was fond of giving the lie to the declarations of Duff Green, and it called his paper the "Tell-lie-graph." It defied the friends of Jackson to show that he was supported on principles: in the eyes of his friends he was one thing in Pennsylvania, another in New York; a tariffite in Ohio, and an anti-tariffite in South Carolina and Georgia. "Joseph's coat was of a consistent complexion compared to the patchwork of his political robe. . . ." (April 12, 1828). *We The People* also berated Jackson for the vulgar manner in which it alleged he circulated "his contemptible insinuation about unfairness and corruption" after the last election.

> "These charges were first made in stages, steam boats and bar-rooms; places in which none but low and vulgar men would give loose to their feelings; places which no man with just claims to any of the characteristics which belong to a man fitted for the Presidency, would indulge in such language, even if possessed of facts to bear him out in his declarations: places, in which no man whose manners had not been formed with such men as figure at race grounds, cock pits, and gambling tables woud ever have thought of venting his spleen and mortification, at the disappointment experienced." (March 1, 1828.)

We The People attacked the *Telegraph*, "the common-sewer print," for its attempt to create the impression that Adams and Clay were encouraging the anti-Masonic spirit in New York State. (April 12.) It defended the circulation of coffin handbills, saying that the effect of seeing those printed "coffins filled with the militia-men, slaughtered by the order of General Jackson" was such that it proved they ought to be more generally circulated. (April 12).

The Jackson press did not neglect the charges urged against their candidate. Against the accusation that in 1807 he had been an adherent of Aaron Burr in his projected treason they offered the contemporary declarations of Jefferson that Jackson was one of the most useful of those who detected Burr's intentions, and the fact that Jackson had written Governor Claiborne, of Louisiana, at the time declaring his suspicion that a treasonable project was on foot, and suggesting watchfulness on the part of the government. In extenuation of Jackson's high-handed conduct in regard to the city of New Orleans in 1815, his defenders offered his pure motives and his patriotism. If he violated the law, was it not for the preservation of liberty? He broke through the forms of the Constitution, but was it not to save the land? Where would have been the Constitution, and what the law, had the British entered New Orleans? Jefferson was quoted as saying that a strict observance of the written laws is one of the high duties of a good citizen, but not the highest. The laws of necessity, of self-preservation, of saving the country are of higher obligation. Examples were cited from the Revolutionary War of the destruction or confiscation of private property for military necessity, General Washington's course in this matter being given as a precedent. In regard to the execution of the six militia-men the Jackson press pointed out that this was a matter which would never have come up had it not been for the election campaign; that there was never any question about the legality of the execution; that the mutineers had been tried by a regular court-martial composed of their own associates and neighbors, by whom the sentence was imposed; and that General Jackson, who was two hundred miles away, had no reason for feeling that it was his duty to interfere with the execution of the sentence. On the other hand, the effort of the administration party to misrepresent these facts by doggerel monodies, forged letters, and wood-cut monuments, was reproachable, although to be expected; while the fact that a high functionary of the government should condescend to the irregular arrangement of documents, confusing the order of incidents in such a way as to make authorized acts appear unauthorized, was deplorable. It was the editor of the *Baltimore Republican,* Dabney S. Carr, who provided the most satisfactory answer to the militia-mongers. He secured and published the order of Governor Willie Blount of Tennessee on General Jackson for a thousand men from his second division of Tennessee militia for garrison duty in the Creek territory, and also General Jackson's order to his troops in compliance with the governor's. In both orders it was specifically stated that the term of service was to be six months, unless shortened by order of the president of the United States. These documents, and others supplementing these, were the answer to the plea of the deserters that they had been called out for only three months, and having left the army at the end of three months they had fulfilled their term of service. The administration papers had tried to show that the argument of the militia-men was valid, but the papers had carefully refrained from publishing the documents which Carr now brought out.[8]

There were other charges made against Jackson which were held to be false in fact, and unimportant if true. A specimen of these was that Jackson was ignorant of the art of spelling. It was true, ran one of these apologies,[9] "that the old gentleman is culpably negligent, when in haste, about dotting his i's and crossing his t's, and that he is by no means as careful as he might be about beginning his sentences with capital letters." General Jackson was really irregular in his orthography, as much so as Mr. Jefferson or Mr. Everett, and more so than Mr. Adams. But if General Jackson's spelling was sometimes bad, Mr. Adams' hand-writing was seldom good. Against the charge of being illiterate his apologists pointed out that before he entered the army as a soldier he had acquired a knowledge of the Latin language and had made some progress in Greek; that he was for two years a student of law, nine years a practising lawyer, twice a Senator, once a judge, a governor of a territory, and the commander for several years of a military district; that his voluminous correspondence with the departments at Washington, on file there, could be examined as proof against the charge. Those who examined the correspondence would find that his letters were in matter plain, simple, common sense; and in style rapid and clear, never requiring a second reading to discover their meaning. They would find few brilliant metaphors, no Greek quotations, no toilsome and painful struggles after eloquence. "If to state facts precisely and forcibly, to point out the connection between premises and the conclusion to which they tend, and to transfer to others the vivid impress of his own warm feelings: if these be the object of language, then must it be admitted by all who have examined the productions of his pen, that Andrew Jackson writes well and eloquently."

The opponents of Jackson perhaps gained nothing by exhibiting him as a man given to strong language. It was not an age of overmuch piety anyway. Besides, a large portion of the voters of that day would feel that a man possessed of the temperament that occasionally expressed itself in spontaneous "cuss words" was a man they could understand. This gave him an appeal which the less colorful Adams did not have.

---

[8] The documents, and much supporting material copied from the *Baltimore Republican,* were printed in the *Telegraph,* April 25, 1828. Carr was to have his reward when Jackson should become President.

[9] *A Candid View of the Presidential Question,* pamphlet by "A Pennsylvanian" (Phila. August, 1828).

Besides newspapers, campaign literature was distributed in other forms—pamphlets, broadsides, and biographies. John H. Eaton's biography of Jackson was brought out in a third edition, revised and brought up to date for the election. There were many pamphlets printed from time to time and distributed, though the substance of most of these found their way into the newspapers. A form of literature much used by the Adams-Clay party was the broadside or handbill. The best known of this type was the "coffin handbill". It was entitled in bold, black letters "SOME ACCOUNT OF SOME OF THE BLOODY DEEDS OF GENERAL JACKSON". It was a sheet about fifteen by twenty-two inches in dimensions, bearing a broad, black border. At the top of the sheet appeared the black imprint of six coffins, arranged vertically. At the head of them appeared the names of the six militiamen who were shot at Mobile by the orders of the military court-martial and General Jackson. Below the coffins on the sheet was a brief story of the execution of the men, which one would be led to believe was entirely due to General Jackson. Another coffin was printed with a separate story of John Woods, a guard at Fort Strother, who was executed for insubordination. By the side of this was a cut showing Jackson running a sword through the body of Samuel Jackson, on a street of Nashville, with a shocking description appended. There were twelve more black coffins shown in addition to the nine already described, eight of them representing soldiers of the regular army who were allegedly executed near Nashville some time before the execution of the militiamen, and four coffins representing alleged "atrocities" against the Indians in Jackson's Florida campaign. At the bottom of the sheet appeared a letter from Thomas H. Benton, then a political friend of Jackson, written September 10, 1818, describing a fight of Benton and his brother, Jesse, with Jackson, Colonel Coffee and others in Nashville a few days earlier[10]

John Binns, who was convinced, largely by the enemies of Jackson, according to his own confession, that the unfavorable stories about Jackson were true, conceived the coffin handbill as a means to "arrest the public attention and impress the public mind with the injustice and the enormity of the crime of General Jackson, in respect to the shooting of these militia men."[11] He had the handbills issued as supplements to the *Democratic Press,* and a supplement sent with every copy of the daily, tri-weekly, and weekly issues. Several thousands were issued and circulated through the United States.[12] They were also issued for direct distribution as broadsides. They were furnished to the public at the rate of fifty cents a hundred, or five dollars a thousand. One notice in the *Democratic Press* announced a printing of ten thousand.[13] Binns wrote in his *Recollections* (p. 246) many years afterwards that it was doubtful whether there ever was a publication which brought upon its publisher "such active, general, and intense odium" as the coffin handbills brought upon him. They probably lost as many votes as they gained. In addition to the inconsistent and unreliable statements in the handbills, their very looks were more likely to inspire horror of the man who issued them than a repugnance of the successful and popular general whose methods and practices were more in harmony with the mores of his people than Binns suspected. Binns miscalculated. If one of his reasons for featuring the militiaman, John Harris, in the handbill had been to appeal to the Baptists of the South and West, through the fact that Harris was a Baptist preacher, his desired effect was nullified by the portrayal of Harris as a week-kneed and cringing soldier when he faced the prospect of death. Most people in the South and West who read this in all probability retained a suspicion that Harris and the others got what they deserved. In western New York the circulation of the coffin handbills was curtailed by some of the Adams managers themselves.[14]

---

[10] A copy of the coffin handbill may be found in the Library of Congress, Division of Manuscripts, in the collection of Broadsides, vol. 229.

[11] *Recollections of the Life of John Binns,* pp. 245 ff.

Another broadside of somewhat similar nature except for the coffins was called "The Light of Truth". It featured the execution of John Woods, but it included also an account of Jackson's duel with Charles Dickinson, in 1806, in which Jackson killed Dickinson, and the story of Jackson's attempt to "assassinate" Benton in 1818. It is likely that this broadside was designed to horrify the Quakers of Pennsylvania. Ten thousand copies of it were issued by the press of *We The People*.[15] The matter was copied by some papers as newspaper material.

Still other broadsides issued by the Adams adherents were "Facts Concerning the Six Militia Men and General Jackson", a reiteration of material appearing in the coffin handbills, and another entitled "Huzza! For General Jackson!" The latter was a piece of low sarcasm, containing eleven "reasons why General Jackson should be elected President of the United States", the "reason" in each case being an argument against him.[16] John Binns got out still other handbills, one of which was significantly called "Monumental Inscriptions". It was a variation of the coffin handbill, in which an inscription was offered for the men whom General Jackson had put to death, each inscription telling the story in no complimentary terms to Jackson. They came out about three weeks before the general election. In pamphlet form they sold at two and a half dollars a hundred, or eight for twenty-five cents.[17] Jonathan Elliot issued a pamphlet entitled

---

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] *Telegraph,* Sept. 3, 1828.

[14] *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed,* (Boston and New York, 1884), pp.308-09.

[15] See issue for Apr. 26, 1828.

> Official Record from the War Department of the Proceedings of the Court Martial which Tried, and the Orders of General Jackson for Shooting the Six Militiamen, together with Official Letters from the War Department, (Ordered to be printed by Congress) Showing that These American Citizens were Inhumanly and Illegally Massacred.

Green vigorously protested against the attempt to make it appear that this document was ordered by Congress, as well as against the omissions and the juggling which made the pamphlet a gross forgery and falsehood. He also scored the Congressmen who sent out the pamphlet, under their franks, and he published their names when he could obtain them.[18]

But the newspapers were the most important form of political literature. Especially was this true for the Jackson party, partly because of the strength of the party organ at Washington, partly because of the well organized and extensive press with its system of copying from the leading paper. The newspaper "extras", moreover, formed an important element of political literature for both sides. The *Telegraph Extra* was "dedicated to the corresponding committees throughout the Union", according to its own announcement; it was filled with the kind of material that would be useful for argument, for persuasion, or refutation. It was, in short, the party handbook for the year. The price charged was one dollar for the entire number issued. The number as originally planned was thirty-two, though it was increased to thirty-six before the publication ceased, January 24, 1829. This abbreviated form was a considerable advantage to those who did not want to pay ten dollars for the daily *Telegraph,* or five dollars for the tri-semi-weekly. The publishers believed that such a paper would be "more accessible to every citizen". The *Extra* was abundantly used by the Jackson committees for the publication of material got up by them. It was to provide a rival to compete with the *Telegraph Extra* on its own terms that *We the People* was issued by the publishers of the *National Journal* as a weekly extra. It was designed largely for the same purpose, though it did not prove as effective.

---

[16] Examples of these broadsides may be found in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress.
[17] *Telegraph,* Sept. 3, 1828.
[18] *Ibid.,* Apr. 25, May 1, 1828.

The distribution of campaign literature, especially of the *Telegraph*, is one of the interesting phases of the campaign. Of course, one of the regular methods of distribution was by subscription. Of subscribers the *Telegraph* claimed an unusual number for a paper of those days. At the end of the campaign Green claimed that the paper had gained more than twenty thousand subscribers since he had become editor. And this statement was not challenged. The amazing thing is that the postmasters were allowed to take subscriptions for the *Telegraph*. As early as April, 1826, a notice appeared in the *Telegraph* asking for subscriptions and stating that "Remittances are solicited through the Postmaster of the respective offices, who are authorized to give receipts in the name of the Editor."[19] The agents were allowed from a third to a half of the subscription price.[20]

But the subscription method was not the only one used for spreading the *Telegraph*. Additional copies were published and sent out over the country gratis under the postage-saving method of the Congressional frank. With a subscription list of probably not over twenty thousand, the *Telegraph* asserted in the spring of 1828 that it was printing and circulating forty thousand *Telegraphs* a week. And its political enemy, *We the People*, admitted that this might be true, for it found its way into every nook and corner of the United States. (April 12,1828). The same paper charged that the *Telegraph* was circulated under the franks of Congressmen Randolph, Wickliffe, Daniel, Findlay, Stanbury, Kremer, Ingham, Van Horne, Stevenson, and T. P. Moore. (April 26). Moore, a representative from Kentucky, was accused of abusing his franking privilege; 1610 packages of the *Telegraph* were counted at one time by a Kentuckian in the Maysville post office, all under Moore's frank.[21] He was also suspected of over-using his privilege in Indiana. The *Village Register* of Ohio, Indiana, reported a mail passing through that place containing one hundred and twenty free letters and papers from Moore to General John McCarthy of Connersville, Indiana.[22] A letter to *We the People* from Salisbury, North Carolina, complained that the "honorable member from Bunscombe [*sic*] district" had deluged them with the *Telegraph* "by furnishing every individual whose name is on the Jackson committee with a newspaper. About forty of that paper also comes to Mocksville weekly, to persons who do not subscribe." The writer of the letter ended his message with an appeal for "some of the militia documents" with which to counter the Jacksonian propaganda.[23]

---

[19] *Ibid.*, Apr. 22, 1826.

[20] *Ibid.*, Dec. 4 ,1828.

[21] *We the People*, Mar. 22, 1828.

Both sides sent out newspapers as campaign literature, and both sides used the Congressional frank for distributing them; but it appears that the Jackson party outdid the Adams party in these respects. *We the People* asserted that the friends of Jackson distributed twice as many papers and pamphlets as the friends of Adams, and that Pennsylvania, New York, Kentucky, and Ohio had literally been deluged with them. (April 19, 1828). For every bundle the Adams adherents franked, the Jacksonians franked a half-dozen. (*Ibid.*, Mar. 22). Appeals came to the Adams publishers for material. One from Elizabeth Court House, New York, to the editor of the *National Journal*, appealed for a half-dozen copies of the *Journal* and about the same number of the *Intelligencer* for free distribution among a class of men in his neighborhood.[24] A gentleman from Richmond county, New York, sent five dollars to the *National Journal*, and asked for copies of the semi-weekly *Journal*, *We the People*, "and any other efficient and serviceable publication that the money will pay for" up to the state election in November.[25] Francis Johnson, of Bowling Green, Kentucky, an Adams man, wrote to his fellow citizen, John J. Crittenden, in a tone of despair: "This district is lined, fitted, inundated with Ingham's pamphlets, Wickliffe's & Rives' speeches and above all with large packages of the Telegraph, containing some twenty, some more, each in the form of letters enveloped in writing paper...to be directed as the distributors shall judge expedient." There was small hope of keeping up with the Jacksonians. Johnson complained that as their opponents seem to gain the ascendancy, the exertions of many of their friends relaxed. "The Jackson men out do us in industry, and contributions from some quarter. I have to supply about 4 counties at my expense with pam-

---

[22] *Nat. Journal,* June 13, 1828. Moore's service for Duff Green in franking his letters and papers gained him the nickname of "Free Tom Moore".

[23] *We the People,* May 10, 1828.

[24] G. Stow to the Editor of the *Nat. Journal, Peter Force Papers,* Library of Congress MSS.

[25] *Ibid.* J. J. Crocheron to the editor of the *Journal,* Aug. 27, 1828.

ndiana.[22] A letter to
, complained that the
ict" had deluged them
lual whose name is on
ut forty of that paper
ho do not subscribe."
n an appeal for "some
r the Jacksonian pro-

literature, and both
ting them; but it ap-
arty in these respects.
kson distributed twice
of Adams, and that
io had literally been
ry bundle the Adams
lf-dozen. (*Ibid.*, Mar.
for material. One
editor of the *National*
e *Journal* and about
distribution among a
man from Richmond
ational Journal, and
Ve the People, "and
that the money will
[25] Francis Johnson,
wrote to his fellow
ir: "This district is
Wickliffe's & Rives'
Telegraph, contain-
of letters enveloped
tors shall judge ex-
with the Jacksonians.
em to gain the as-
nds relaxed. "The
ibutions from some
expense with pam-

f Green in franking his
Moore".

Force Papers, Library
g. 27, 1828.

---

phlets & paper & it is a heavy burden, but I shall bear up under it as long as I can—the last hope for the world is at stake."[26]

As the campaign wore toward the end the administration press, especially of Washington, betrayed a mixture of desperation and defeatism in its tone. Withal, there was a certain amount of plain disgust that so many people had shown such poor judgment in preferring to the accomplished occupant of the White House a mere "military chieftain," and that they had been swept away with the chorus of "Hurrah for Jackson."

The Jackson papers had an air of sport. They seemed to relish every sally of the enemy for the opportunity it offered to measure their verbal strength with that of the foe. There was victory in their manner as the end of the campaign neared, and a confidence that was justified by the results. They had fought a hard fight; and though they had not been over-squeamish about the ethics employed at times, they felt that the end justified the means; the "people's will" had been vindicated. The valiant would now come into their own.

Jackson won the election by an electoral vote of 178 to 83. The comfortable majority of 95 easily leads to the conclusion that Jackson's victory was overwhelming. It supports the further conclusion, sometimes made, that the election of Jackson was a democratic revolution; that the newly enfranchised masses rose in their might, under the leadership of Jackson, and smote down the aristocratic element represented by John Quincy Adams and his followers. The popular vote does not substantiate such conclusions. There were nearly as many people who voted for Adams as those who voted for Jackson. The latter's total recorded vote was 647,276, while the former's was 508,064. Adams received about forty-four percent of the whole. Both candidates received several times the number that they polled in 1824.

The outstanding fact in the election figures is not Jackson's majority, but the size of the total popular vote. The total vote of 1828 shows an extraordinary increase over that of 1824. And the figures indicate that the increase was not due to the four states which had adopted the popular method of election between these two dates. Nor can the widening of the franchise account for this remarkable increase in the size of the vote, for the franchise was not extended in these four years (except for a change of slight effect in New York).

---

[26] Johnson to Crittenden, Apr. 12, 1828, Crittenden Papers, Lib. of Cong. MSS.

Neither can the normal increase incident to the increase of population account for the difference.

That there was a mighty stirring of the electorate is obvious. The question that presents itself is, why was there so much interest manifested? The easy and simple answer that Jackson was a leader who caught the imagination of the vote-conscious masses at a time when the ideals for which he stood were riding the wave of popular favor is not adequate when confronted by the fact that the man who was supposed to be the antithesis of Jacksonism stood almost as high in the popular favor as Jackson himself. One should not push back the period of Jackson as president, with its attendant concepts, into the period of Jackson as candidate. It can hardly be denied that the campaign of 1828 was exciting, but the thing that made it exciting was the work of the press. There was reason for the interest manifested in the election. The reason is not difficult to apprehend when one takes up the newspapers and pamphlets of the years 1826 to 1828 and projects oneself into the spirit of the campaign—a spirit engendered, organized, and set going by expert politicians and crafty printers.