

# 1840s Political Cartoons

## “Fight Between the Kentucky Coon & the Tennessee Alligator”



**FIGHT BETWEEN THE KENTUCKY COON & THE TENNESSEE ALLIGATOR**  
1844, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-91362

A woodland fantasy satirizing the prominent figures of the 1844 election campaign. The artist again favors Whig candidate Henry Clay, the "Kentucky Coon," who is shown overwhelming Democrat James K. Polk, the "Tennessee Alligator," in a wrestling contest. Clay exults, "It is no use to try to poke this nondescript "animal" (i.e., Polk) against the Peoples Coon." (Oddly, the head on the alligator here bears little resemblance to the dark horse candidate.) About the forest lurk several other animals with the heads of Democrat and Whig notables. On the right stands John C. Calhoun, as a camel, and Andrew Jackson, as a giraffe. Calhoun carries on his back a cornucopia filled with turnips and declares, "We bring peace and plenty!" Jackson: "Altho I am one of those exalted characters who can "overlook" almost everything, yet I cannot overlook this disaster to our cause!" Several rats scurry past the two Democrats, one of them being Martin Van Buren, who says, "I'm off for Lindenwald, basely deserted by my friends." Lindenwald was the name of Van Buren's estate, whence he retired after losing the Democratic nomination to Polk. To the left incumbent John Tyler, as a rattlesnake, coils around a tree. Tyler, who acceded to the presidency on William Henry Harrison's death, was considered a traitor to the Whig cause. On the ground nearby is a bear, Daniel Webster, who says (referring to Polk), "I'll put my foot on him when you are done, and that will sink him out of sight." Running ahead of Webster is hard-money advocate Thomas Hart Benton, as a boar with a sack of "Mint Drops" on his back. He exclaims, "That Coon does not, evidently belong to our family, but he is a ROARER!" Perched on a branch above is an American eagle with his wings outspread, a common patriotic emblem.

## “The Little Magician Invoked”

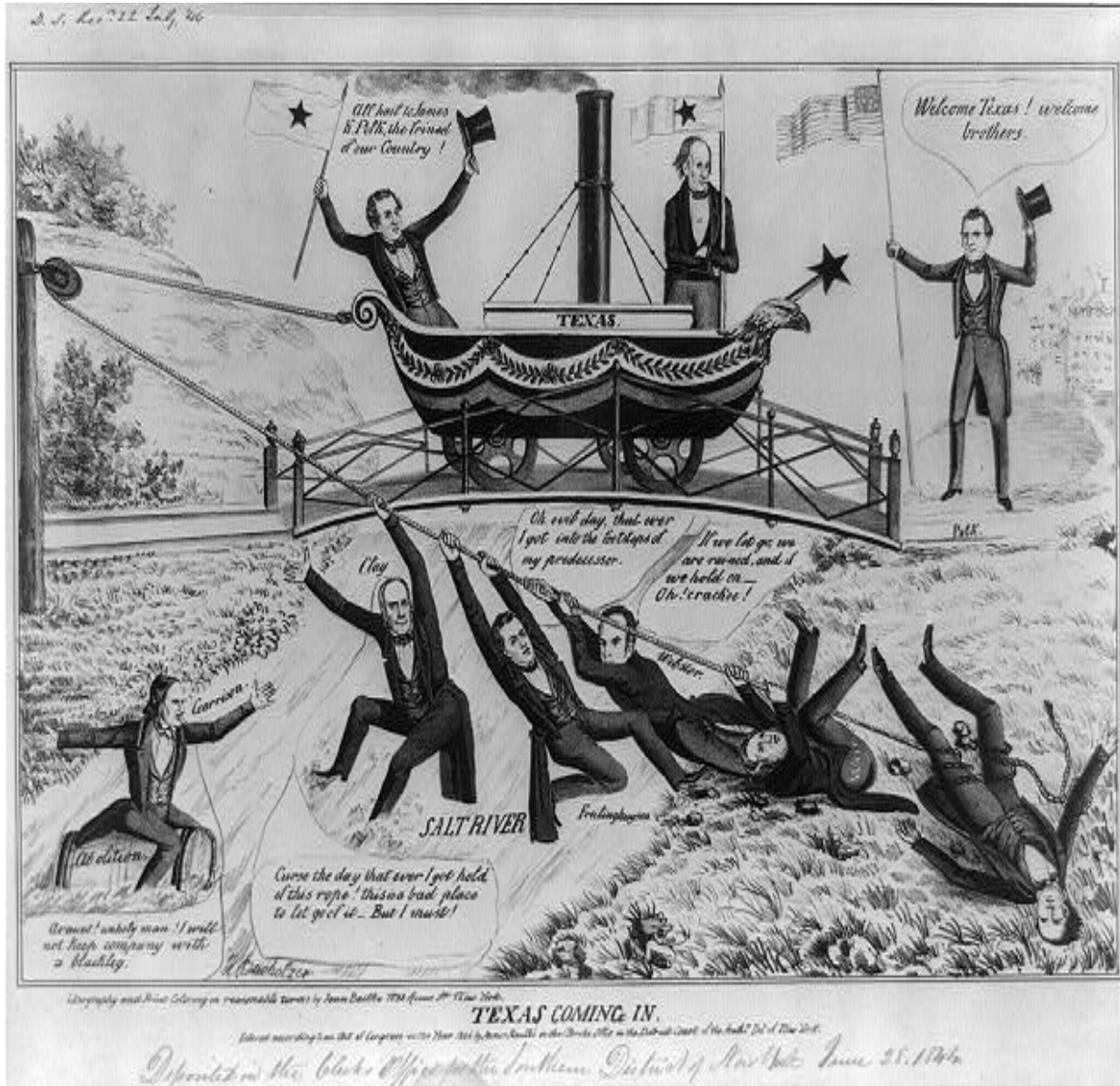


1844, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-91417

Martin Van Buren, known as "the Little Magician" for his remarkable political agility, summons spirits to divine the Democratic or "Loco Foco" prospects for election in 1844. He sits in an astrological circle, conjuring up three imps in the smoke of his pipe, and addresses them: Spirits white and Gray appear! appear! / my call attend! my power revere! / Their destiny the Locos ask / Apply ye to the mighty Task! First spirit: Loco-Focos! desperate Chaps. / Make your speech & draw your Caps! / You've had your day--you've had free scope / And hanged yourselves with your own rope! Second spirit: When Arnold rises form the Tomb / To receive a Traitors doom! / When Yankee Children bear his name / And all are proud of Arnolds Fame! / Then Tyler shall his honors share, / And keep the Presidential chair! Third spirit: When the stars fall from above. / When the Globe shall cease to move, / When flowers grow amid the snow / And Lions fear the timid Roe. / When Lawyers shall refuse a feel / And misers pray for poverty / Till then, you'll find that many folk, / Will never vote for Master Polk! / Till then, they'd swing upon the Gallows / Before they'd vote for Master Dallas! Democratic nominees James K. Polk, wearing the striped trousers associated with the Loco Foco or radical wing of the Democratic party, and George M. Dallas stand at right. Visibly awed, Polk says, "By Heavens! these words remind me of the dream I

had when I first heard of my nomination!" Dallas, fleeing to the right, asserts, "I'll get out of this scrape as quick as possible Texas wont save us!" On the left Andrew Jackson brandishes his cane and threatens, "By the Eternal! you old Hags! if I get hold of you, I'll hang you all up under the 7th section as I did Arbuthnot and Ambiserter!" Alexander Arbuthnot and Robert Ambrister (not "Ambister") were two Englishmen hung by Jackson during the Florida campaign in 1818, for aiding the Seminole Indians in their fight against the general's militia. The act was one which Jackson's political foes invoked throughout his career as evidence of his brutality.

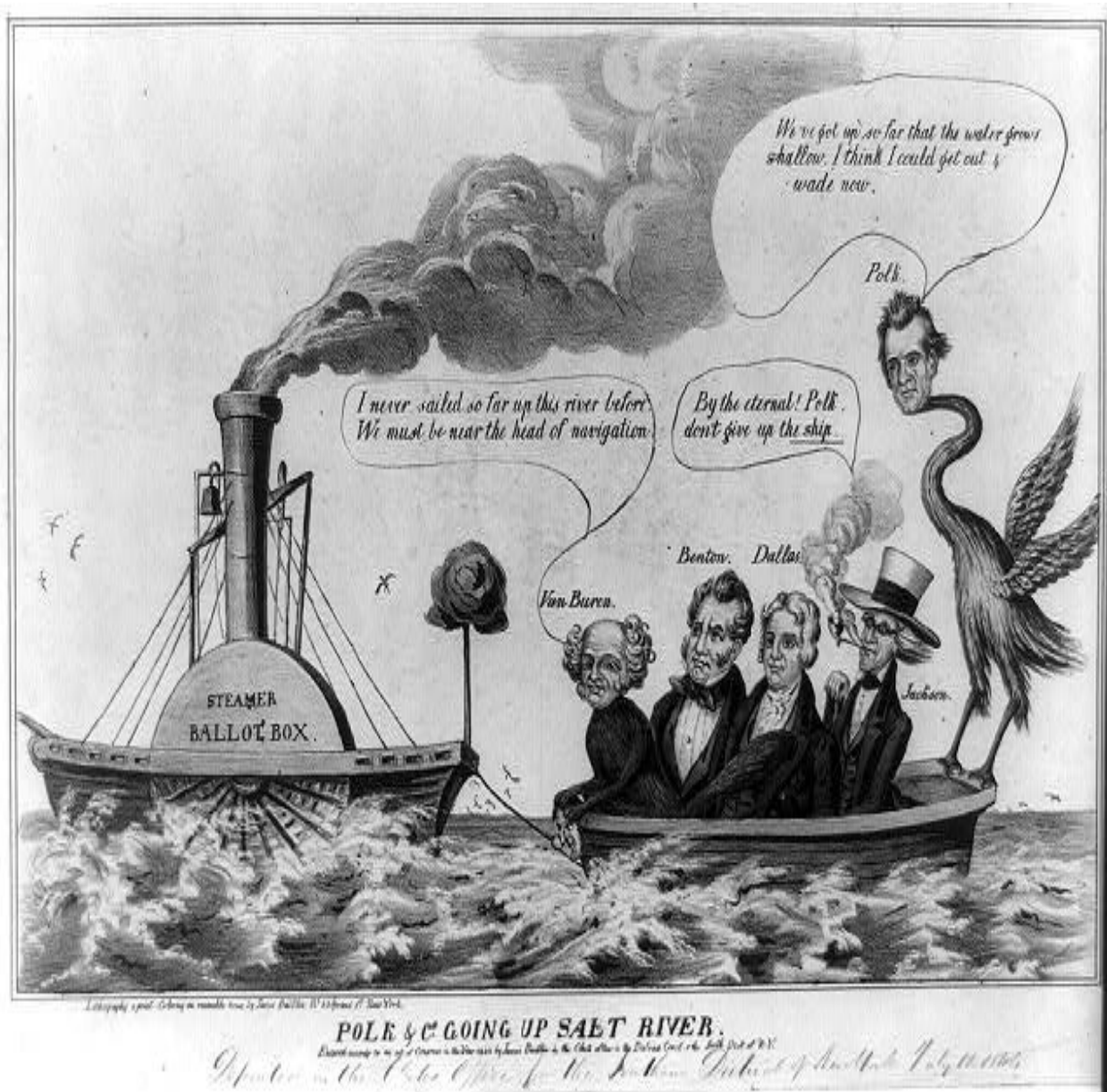
## "Texas Coming In"



1844, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-10802

A pro-Democrat cartoon forecasting the collapse of Whig opposition to the annexation of Texas. James K. Polk, the expansionist candidate, stands at right near a bridge spanning "Salt River." He holds an American flag and hails Texans Stephen Austin (left) and Samuel Houston aboard a wheeled steamboat-like vessel "Texas." Austin, waving the flag of the Lone Star Republic, cries, "All hail to James K. Polk, the frined [sic] of our Country!" The Texas boat has an eagle figurehead and a star on its prow. Below the bridge pandemonium reigns among the foes of annexation. Holding onto a rope attached to "Texas" above, they are dragged into Salt River. Led by Whig presidential nominee Henry Clay, they are (left to right) Theodore Frelinghuysen, Daniel Webster, Henry A. Wise, and an unidentified figure whose legs are tangled in the rope. Clay: "Curse the day that ever I got hold of this rope! this is a bad place to let go of it--But I must!" Frelinghuysen: "Oh evil day, that ever I got into the footsteps of my predecessor." Webster: "If we let go, we are ruined, and if we hold on--Oh! crackee!" Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, straddling a barrel labeled "Abolition" in the river, shouts at Clay, "Avaunt! unholy man! I will not keep company with a blackleg!" referring to the candidate's reputation as a gambler.

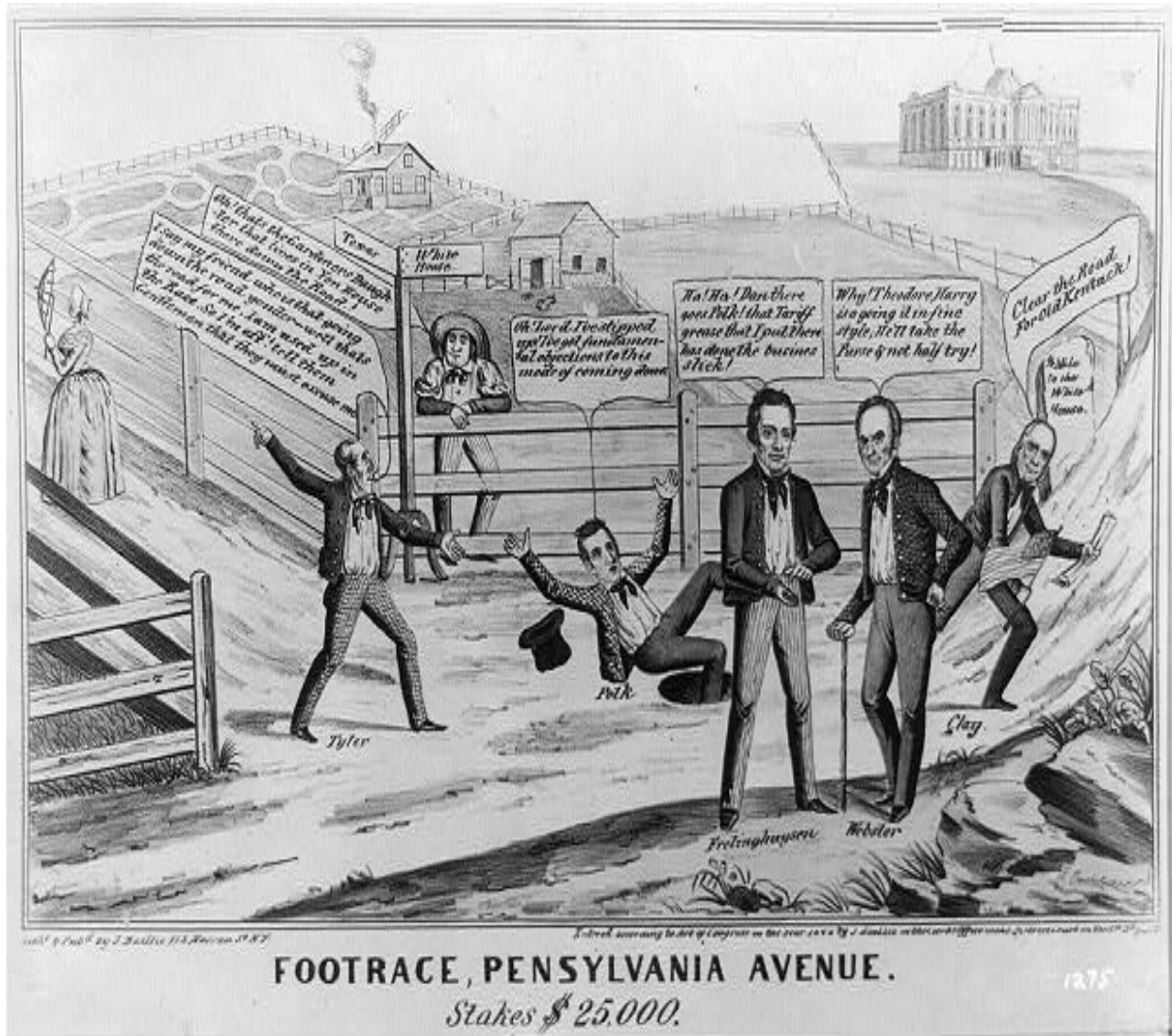
## “Polk & Co. Going up Salt River”



1844, Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-10375

The artist foresees a Democratic defeat in the 1844 presidential election. Party figures Martin Van Buren, Thomas Hart Benton, vice-presidential candidate George M. Dallas, Andrew Jackson, and presidential nominee James K. Polk are in a dinghy towed by the "Steamer Ballot Box" up Salt River toward political defeat. The bow of the dinghy is adorned with the head of presidential incumbent John Tyler. On a staff on the steamer's stern is mounted a large cabbage, a symbol which during the 1840 election campaign represented Whig hopes of retiring Van Buren to his home at Kinderhook "to raise cabbages." Here Van Buren has the body of a fox and Polk that of a long-necked bird, perhaps a goose or a crane. Van Buren: "I never sailed so far up this river before. We must be near the head of navigation." Polk, standing on the stern of the boat: "We've got up so far that the water grows shallow. I think I could get out & wade now." Jackson exclaims: "By the eternal! Polk don't give up the "ship.""

**“Footrace, Pennsylvania Avenue. Stakes \$25,000”**



1844 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-1275

The race for a \$25,000 prize (the president's salary) is a metaphor for the 1844 campaign. The favored contender here is Henry Clay. The other runners are James K. Polk and John Tyler, while commentaries are offered by a farmer, vice presidential candidate Theodore Frelinghuysen, and Whig stalwart Daniel Webster. The print probably appeared before Tyler officially withdrew as a presidential candidate on August 20. Henry Clay is in the lead, about to pass the half-mile marker to the White House. The Capitol appears in the distance. Clay holds an American flag in one hand and a document in the other, and begins to ascend the steeply inclined final stretch. Behind him Democratic nominee James K. Polk stumbles and falls, his foot in a pothole. Clay: "Clear the Road for Old Kentucky!" Polk: "Oh! Lord I've slipped up! I've got fundamental objections to this mode of coming down." Frelinghuysen: "Ha! Ha! Dan there goes Polk! that Tariff grease that I put there has done the business slick!" Support for a tariff was a plank in the Whig platform which was extremely popular in the Northeast. Webster replies: "Why Theodore, Harry [Clay] is a going it in fine style. He'll take the Purse & not half try!" A third contestant, incumbent President John Tyler, notices a woman traveling down another road toward Texas. The woman is elegantly dressed, and holds a parasol which obstructs the view ahead of her. Tyler questions a farmer standing nearby, "I say my friend who is that going down the road yonder . . ." The farmer replies "Oh! that's the Gardeners Daughter that lives in yon house there down the road!" "Well that's the road for me," Tyler continues, "I am used up in the Race. So I'm off! tell them Gentlemen that they must excuse me."

## “Political Game of Brag. Shew of Hands”



### POLITICAL GAME OF BRAG. SHEW OF HANDS.

1848 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-17732

The artist resorts to the familiar metaphor of a card game for the presidential stakes in his rendition of the 1848 contest. The major contenders play a game of "brag" (an early form of poker). Around the table sit six players (left to right): South Carolina senator John Calhoun, Democratic presidential nominee Lewis Cass, Henry Clay, Whig candidate Zachary Taylor, Secretary of State James Buchanan, and President James K. Polk. In the center of the table is the "Presidential Ante." Displaying three aces, former Mexican War general Taylor exclaims, "Three bullets, Clay! Still at my old trade! whenever bullets are to be met I am sure to have a hand with them!" Clay, who holds three low cards behind his back, replies, "I tried my old bluffing game with a contented hand & nothing to brag with but a hand full of hearts! I'm not sorry however that old Zach has won!" Seated to the left Cass laments, "Three braggers, Calhoun, would'n't carry me through!" Calhoun, looking over Cass's shoulder agrees, "No, Cass, the Ante is too high for you! You'll have to play for smaller Stakes!" At the far right end of the table, Polk exclaims, "My knave hand, Buchanan, has lost me the game! I may as well slope!" Buchanan replies, "By Jove! Polk, Old Zach's got the documents! three nannies!" The satire probably appeared shortly after the June Whig convention, at which Taylor was nominated over Henry Clay, and before the emergence of strong third-party candidate Martin Van Buren.

## “The Democratic Funeral of 1848”



1848 Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-8846

Foreseeing political death for the Democrats in the election, the artist imagines a funeral of the party's standard-bearers with a procession of the faithful. Democratic senators (left to right) Sam Houston of Texas, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, (obscured unidentified man), and South Carolina's John Calhoun carry a litter bearing the bodies of Van Buren, as a fox, and Lewis Cass, as a gas balloon (an unflattering play on his last name). Cass expels clouds of gas from his mouth. Benton carries a slip of paper with the words, "Last of the Family Reign." Calhoun carries an iron collar or manacle labeled "Slavery." They are followed by a second group of pallbearers: Ohio Senator William Allen, former Van Buren advisor Amos Kendall, New Hampshire Democratic leader Levi Woodbury, and former general William Worth, who carry a stretcher bearing retiring President Polk (with cloven hooves and a devil's tail). Kendall also carries a document labeled "Latest Despatch" while Worth holds his "Military Comi--- [Commission?]," possibly alluding to his role in the Scott-Pillow controversy. (See "Self-Inflating Pillow," no. 1848-2.) An empty "Sub Treasury" box lies open next to Polk on the stretcher. The Independent or "Sub Treasury" bill was a widely criticized measure passed by the Polk administration in August 1846. All of the mourners wear clerical robes. A tombstone for the newspaper "Washington Union" is at left and a monument "To the Memory of Democracy" at right.