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Patriot Slaveholder: Andrew Jackson and the Winter of Secession

By Aaron Scott Crawford*



On December 10, 1860, Charles Sumner rose to address the Senate of a crumbling United States. After growing sectionalism, the dissolution of the Union looked not only possible but imminent. For years the Massachusetts senator had exploited sectional tensions, and now many expected him to fan the flames of disharmony. South Carolina stood at the brink of secession, ready to defend slavery and resist the newly elected president, Abraham Lincoln. Standing in the brand-new Senate chamber, Sumner fired historical ammunition against secession. He held a yellowed document high above his head and soon entered its contents into the Senate record. Sumner read from the document: "I have had a laborious task here, but nullification is dead; and its actors and couriers will only be remembered by the people to be execrated for their wicked designs to sever and destroy the only good government on the globe." Then Sumner revealed the letter's author: a president, a slaveholder, and the most polarizing figure of the antebellum period—Andrew Jackson.¹

Nearly thirty years earlier Jackson wrote the letter to the Reverend Andrew J. Crawford, as South Carolina attempted to nullify federal tariff laws. Sumner referred to "Old Hickory" as a "prophet," and used Jackson's words to blunt the swelling sentiment of secession: "These are the words of a patriot slaveholder of Tennessee and they are directly applicable to the present hour," he declared. Looking on, Jefferson Davis and his fellow southerners appeared stunned. By juxtaposing Jackson's fierce loyalty to the Union and his life as a slaveholder, Sumner cast secession as the height of disloyalty. One reporter noted that the southerners appeared as if they had

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¹ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., December 11, 1860, 32; *The Crisis* (Columbus, Ohio), March, 7, 1861; *Vermont Patriot*, December 22, 1860.

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Andrew Jackson followed. Congress followed. Jackson's image as historians have examined the secession debate how opposite factions Secessionists and Union Jackson in their efforts chart the course of the

In antebellum popular audiences. The great political weight Jackson had not enough factions found Old part of the discourse of secession created played an important Jackson. For those with figure with great might president, Old Hickory with idealized democracy imitate, and extrapolate

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² *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., December 31, 1860. The reaction in Washington corresponded.

³ Four major historical works on the war. In *The Age of Jackson*, anti-slavery Democrat Francis Preston Blair provided evidence. Eric FONER's *The Civil War* (New York, 1965) while being only a first step to join the Republic. J. Mills Thornton's *Roots of the South* (Baton Rouge, 1978) Jackson's true political tradition. These works on American political culture.

⁴ Paul A. Shackel, ed., *The American Cultural* (New York, 2001), 1-3; Michael Perman, *American Cultures* (New York, 1999), 1-3.



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a "bucket of cold water" splashed on their faces. When Sumner concluded his speech, no southern senator even muttered a response.²

Andrew Jackson as idea and image emerged during the debate that followed. Congressmen, senators, generals, and presidents employed Jackson's image as a weapon for both secession and Union. Although historians have examined how the Jacksonian political movement influenced the secession debate during the winter of 1860-1861, few have explained how opposite factions recalled Jackson's words and image during the crisis. Secessionists and Unionists developed very different ideas about Andrew Jackson in their effort to connect the past to their present crisis, and help chart the course of the future.³

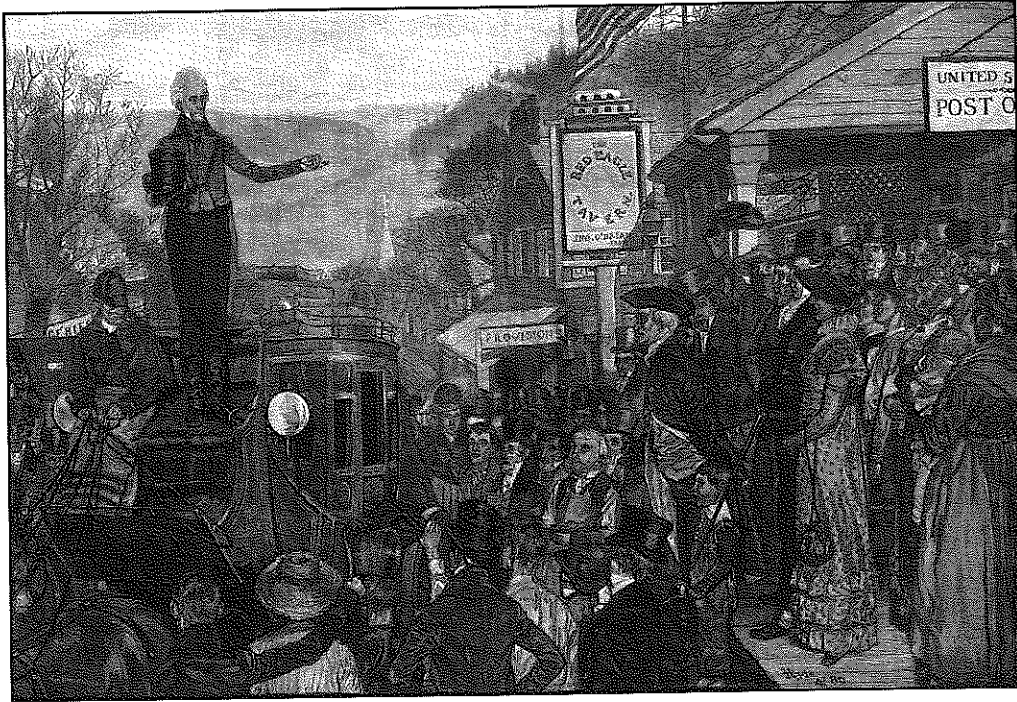
In antebellum America, a culture of commemoration appealed to popular audiences. The idea that the past was the guide to the future held great political weight. The sometimes mixed policies and rhetoric of Andrew Jackson had not ended with his 1845 death. Instead, differing political factions found Old Hickory's image and past proclamations to be a fitting part of the discourse during the secession crisis. Supporters and detractors of secession created opposing images of Jackson. Memory and imagination played an important role in how politicians of the 1860s chose to interpret Jackson. For those who never knew Jackson, he became an imagined political figure with great might and heft, while for those who had worked with the president, Old Hickory represented a remembered and respected politician with idealized democratic qualities. Both groups ventured to emulate, imitate, and extrapolate Jackson's image for their own purposes.⁴

In the early 1860s, Jackson's name became a metaphor for force. The historical image of Andrew Jackson appealed to those who either believed that the federal government could hold the Union together by coercion, or that it would remain irretrievably broken. Each side wielded, studied,

² *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., December 11, 1860, 32; *The Liberator*, December 31, 1860. The reaction of the southern senators was the recollection of the *New York Post's* Washington correspondent.

³ Four major historical works considered the question of Jackson's followers in the coming of the war. In *The Age of Jackson* (New York, 1945), Arthur Schlesinger Jr. viewed the wayward anti-slavery Democrats as the core of the Republican Party. For Schlesinger the conversion of Francis Preston Blair from Jacksonian partisan to "Lincoln confidant" was the primary evidence. Eric Foner's *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970) argued that displaced Jacksonian Democrats were important while being only a fraction of the party. These men, the largest group of Democrats to join the Republicans, believed that they represented the true heirs of Jackson himself. J. Mills Thornton's monumental *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978) argued that the men who pushed for secession considered themselves Jackson's true political heirs. More recently Sean Wilentz's *The Rise of American Democracy: From Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York, 2005) placed Jackson and Lincoln in the same democratic tradition. These works, however, offer few examples of how Jackson's image emerged in American political consciousness.

⁴ Paul A. Shackel, ed., *Myth, Memory, and the Making of the American Landscape* (Gainesville, 2001), 1-3; Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Cultures* (New York, 1991), 63.



Andrew Jackson appealed to many audiences during his political career and that popularity continued for decades following his death. On the eve of the Civil War, politicians, journalists, and general audiences reexamined Jackson's words, deeds, and reactions to the nullification crisis of the 1830s for insights on how to remedy the secession crisis of the early 1860s. "Politics in Olden Time," hand-colored lithograph by Howard Pyle, from Harper's Weekly, March 12, 1881, from the University of Tennessee Special Collections.

and distorted the historical Jackson for political and ideological gain. As congressmen gazed toward the chief executive for direction, Jackson often remained in focus. With a prostrated James Buchanan helpless in his final weeks as president, friend and foe alike looked for action. Buchanan and his successor, Abraham Lincoln, were often compared with Old Hickory. In the end, only Lincoln embraced Jackson's devotion to the Union.

The secession crisis of 1860-1861 marked the most perilous challenge to the federal Union since the nullification crisis. By November 1831, disgruntled South Carolinians attempted to nullify or reject the federal tariff laws, which they argued had exacerbated their state's economic woes. Encouraged by John C. Calhoun's theories of state sovereignty and nullification, the state's leaders believed their ultimate recourse was to resist federal law. In Washington, Jackson led a chorus of disgust against such ideas and announced that this type of challenge to federal authority

could end in disaster. At the beginning and the end of the Secession itself had been a protest for over thirty years. The tariff endangered New England manufacturers perhaps even more than the mention of secession.

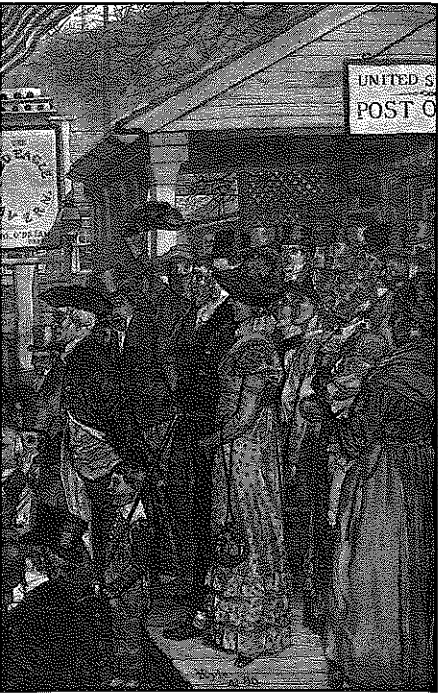
South Carolina was not alone in its debate about the nature of the Union, but was bound by a more pragmatic than federal investment in more money in the hands of the president. On the one hand, to remove the Cherokee to assist or limit re-

For Jackson, the Union was unworkable. "Our Union is open. Pick it up in pieces," he commented.⁶ For his part, the world and a president. His service as a young general at the national level led him to rise above his own presidency forced by the Union. He remained committed to civil war and bloodshed in the country," Jackson

⁵ Richard E. Ellis, *The Crisis* (New York, 1965), *Compromise of 1833*, *Rebellious Son: James*, *Nineteenth Century* 5.

⁶ *Life and Times of George Washington Jackson* to Joel R. Pritchard, Spencer Bassett (Wilmington, 1968).

⁷ Robert Remini, *Andrew Jackson: Old Hickory's Life*, and *The Course of American Democracy* in his devotion to



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could end in disaster. Many Americans believed that nullification was only the beginning and that secession lurked as South Carolina's ultimate goal. Secession itself had resided in the fringes of the American political psyche for over thirty years. In 1798, Thomas Jefferson had created an ideological justification for it in the Kentucky Resolutions. In 1814, the New England merchants at the Hartford Convention introduced the idea of secession to protest the war with Great Britain. In both cases other events calmed the tide of secession arguments. But in late 1832, the crisis was much more serious. The tariff endangered the intricate and delicate economic balance between New England manufacturing and the production of cotton in the South. But perhaps even more important than national economic interdependence, the mention of secession raised the issue of federal authority over states.⁵

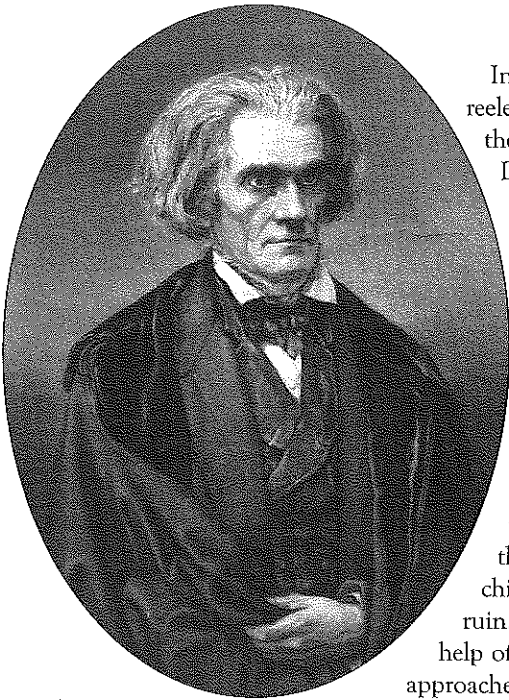
South Carolina's actions forced President Jackson to confront questions about the nature of the Union. Jackson believed in the sanctity of the states, but was bound by a deep faith in Union. As president, Old Hickory proved more pragmatic than anyone at the time would have expected. He opposed federal investment in explicitly local internal improvements, while investing more money in truly national public works programs than any previous president. On the other hand, Jackson sided with Georgia in its effort to remove the Cherokee Indians from their lands, refusing to use federal power to assist or limit removal.

For Jackson, nullification made the very idea of a political Union unworkable. "Our country will be like a bag of meal with both ends open. Pick it up in the middle or endwise, and it will run out," Jackson commented.⁶ For him the United States harbored the promise of liberty for the world and a promise that could only survive through a union of states. His service as a young soldier of the American Revolution and commanding general at the nation's greatest victory at the Battle of New Orleans forced him to rise above simple devotion to state. The nullification crisis during his presidency forced him to express his view of the American Union. While he remained committed to states' rights, the logic of nullification "leads directly to civil war and bloodshed and deserves the execration of every friend of the country," Jackson wrote.⁷

⁵ Richard E. Ellis, *The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States' Rights and the Nullification Crisis* (New York, 1987), 91-93, 160-65; Merrill Peterson, *The Olive Branch and the Sword: The Compromise of 1833* (Baton Rouge, 1982), 1, 94; William K. Bolt, "Founding Father and Rebellious Son: James Madison, John C. Calhoun and the Use of Precedents," *American Nineteenth Century* 5 (2004): 15, 17-18.

⁶ *Life and Times of Gen. Sam Dale: The Mississippi Partisan* (New York, 1860), 178; Andrew Jackson to Joel R. Poinsett, December 2, 1832, in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, ed. John Spencer Bassett (Washington, D.C., 1929), 4:493.

⁷ Robert Remini, Jackson's most important modern biographer, set the tone for understanding Old Hickory's behavior during the nullification crisis. In chapter two of *Andrew Jackson and The Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845* (New York, 1984), Remini explored the composition and intent of the nullification proclamation. Remini's Jackson was immovable in his devotion to Union. Other biographers and historians have carefully demonstrated



South Carolinian John C. Calhoun argued against federal authority during the early 1830s and threatened secession for his state. Secessionists and Unionists of the early 1860s studied Calhoun's challenge to Andrew Jackson in order to find ideological and historical precedents for their causes. Steel engraving, from the University of Tennessee Special Collections.

the 1860s with some guidance about the rights of the states and the power of the federal government. Many congressmen idealized Jackson's threats of

Jackson's deep antipathy toward secession. See also, H.W. Brands, *Andrew Jackson* (New York, 2005), 475-480; Sean Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson* (New York, 2005), 95-98; Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York, 2008), 58, 183-4. For a more nuanced exploration of Jackson's attitudes toward states' rights, nullification, and secession, see Ellis, *Union at Risk*. Ellis skillfully dissected Jackson's political and philosophical views to reveal a pragmatic leader who, although devoted to Union, never really had a grasp on what that Union's relationship should be with the states. Donald B. Cole, *The Presidency of Andrew Jackson* (Lawrence, KS, 1993) revealed that the deeply frustrated president's stance on nullification and secession was milder than many realized.

⁸ A *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D.C., 1896), 2:641, 652; Remini, *Jackson and the Course of American Democracy*, 29-30; Ellis, *Union at Risk*, 176.

In December 1832, only a month after his reelection, Jackson articulated his ideas about the Union in a nullification proclamation. Designed to startle the South Carolinian nullifiers, the document became an explicit statement of his beliefs. In this document, Jackson announced, like no president before, that God especially favored the "sacred" American Union. Jackson lectured the South Carolina troublemakers as if they were unruly children: "let me not only admonish you, as the First Magistrate of our common country, not to incur the penalty of its laws, but use the influence that a father would over his children whom he saw rushing to certain ruin." The document, composed with the help of Secretary of State Edward Livingston, approached the crisis with an intellectual and philosophical viewpoint. The threat of military action came from Jackson's Force Bill message of January 16, 1833. In early March, Congress passed the Force Bill giving President Jackson authority to use military force to end nullification. Although Jackson was enraged by the nullifiers, his correspondence displayed a measured response. Yet his response remained unequivocal—federal law must be executed in every state, even if he had to enforce it as head of the Army.⁸

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force to end the emergency, ignoring the compromise that peacefully ended the crisis. Of course in 1833, the belligerent South Carolina stood alone as its southern neighbors watched from the sidelines. That crisis ended when Jackson and his nemeses Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun agreed to compromise on tariff rates, thus diffusing the situation. Clay pacified South Carolinians by crafting a bill that gradually lowered tariff rates. Although Jackson hoped to punish the nullifiers of South Carolina, he acquiesced and signed Clay's bill. Jackson, Clay, and Calhoun, all heirs of the Revolutionary generation, had looked to their predecessors for answers to their political crisis. Calhoun believed that he followed the true principles of Jefferson and James Madison as expressed in their 1798 Kentucky and Virginia resolutions. Jackson and Clay had actually sought the input of Madison who opposed the concept of nullification and, like Jackson, believed that the maneuver sheltered secret motives. South Carolina hoped to "create a disgust with the Union, and then to open a way out of it," Madison wrote. With the prospect of conflict looming, these three pillars of antebellum politics ultimately chose moderation and compromise over force.⁹

During the late 1850s, Jackson's legacy and rhetoric experienced a period of re-examination. A new wave of historians and writers judged Jackson harshly for his intense partisanship, his destruction of the National Bank and his expansion of executive power. Perhaps the most significant work on Jackson written during the secession crisis came from James Parton. His three-volume *The Life of Andrew Jackson* resulted in an unusual portrait of Old Hickory. Parton admired the forceful and decisive military man but abhorred the rash and often unreasonable president. The 1828 election saw "the elevation to the presidency of a man whose ignorance, whose good intentions, and whose passion combined to render him of all conceivable beings, the most unfit for office." According to Parton, Jackson was, in fact, the direct opposite of the cool, centered, emotionless, republican leader envisioned by the founders. For Parton, a former Whig, Jackson's election to the presidency "was a mistake on the part of the people."¹⁰

In Parton's mind, only the nullification crisis redeemed President Jackson. Parton's Jackson exuded courage to thwart secession. "If ever a man resolved to accomplish a purpose," he wrote, "General Jackson was resolved on this occasion to preserve intact the authority with which he had been entrusted." Heavily influenced by the growing sectional struggles of the late 1850s, Parton believed that the South Carolina nullifiers were

⁹ *Register of Debates*, 22: 2, 462-73; James Madison to Henry Clay, April 2, 1833, in *The Papers of Henry Clay*, ed. Robert Seeger II (Lexington, 1984), 8:636. For the most complete look at Madison's long and troubled relationship with nullification and secession, see Drew McCoy, *The Last of the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy* (Cambridge, 1989).

¹⁰ Milton E. Flower, *James Parton, The Father of Modern Biography*, (Durham, NC, 1951), 7, 80; James Parton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1859-1860), 3:700, 694; Charles Grier Sellers Jr., "Andrew Jackson Versus the Historians," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 47 (1958): 665-66.

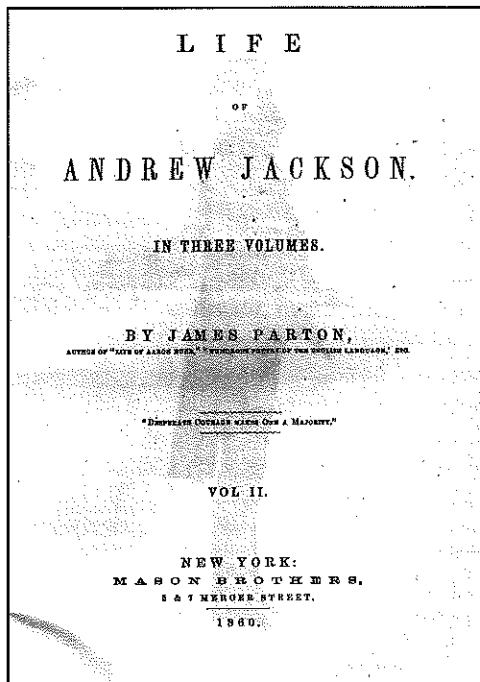
actually planning a southern confederacy. He placed Calhoun at the genesis of the southern confederacy concept saying, "Calhoun began it, Calhoun continued it." As evidence, Parton explained that secessionists cast medals bearing Calhoun's image, declaring him the first president of the southern confederacy. Writing of treasonous southerners, Parton explained that once the idea of states' rights, a concept first born during the nullification crisis, collided with the emotional issue of slavery it created a climate receptive to secession. Despite his flaws, the Jackson in Parton's work stood as the antidote to Calhoun and the southern lurch toward treason.¹¹

Parton negated the compromise that Clay had fashioned which had ended the nullification crisis. In this moment, biography and current events converged:

*General Jackson signed the bill concocted by his enemies. It would have been more like him to have vetoed it, and I do not know why he didn't veto it. The time may come when the people of the United States will wish he had vetoed it, and thus brought an issue, and settled finally, a question which, at some future day, may assume more awkward dimensions, and the country has no Jackson to meet it.*¹²

As Parton surveyed the current sectional strife he lamented Jackson's lost opportunity to subjugate the South and squash secession. He believed that an unrestrained Jackson would surely have settled the great question of state sovereignty and federal authority. Parton argued that in a moment of weakness, compromise had sprung forth to muzzle Old Hickory's aggressive disposition.

Although sales figures are uncertain and readership impossible to ascertain, Parton's biography captured the essence of the moment



James Parton's three-volume study of Andrew Jackson, published between 1859-1860, fueled new interest in Old Hickory. From James Parton, The Life of Andrew Jackson, vol. 2.

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¹⁴ Newark (Ohio) Advocate,

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including the nation's anxieties. Indeed Parton's biographies were indicative of the American approach to history during this period. Historians and biographers attempted to commemorate, explain, and moralize their subjects. Parton's books appeared at a fortuitous historical moment, declaring a strong moral message regarding the United States' future. Newspapers of all political persuasions reviewed the book and almost all discussed Jackson's relevance to the present crisis. In December 1860, as the debate in Congress grew impassioned, *Harper's Weekly* argued that understanding Jackson, his politics, and his era was essential to comprehending the nation's current dilemma. To the editors, the leaders of the Democratic Party who had emerged during Jackson's presidency had ruled the country "with little interruption" and thus were responsible for the failure of Jackson's vision for a glorious and stable Union. Parton's work was "of peculiar interest" and put the critical pieces of the secession crisis in perspective.

Unlike most other works of history, Parton's biography of Jackson was both timely and prescient. Parton pleaded with his readers to understand the historical importance of the moment. He argued that the events of 1860 had direct connection to the challenges faced by Jackson and his administration. Others, however, saw Parton's work as a historical distortion, with one reviewer comparing Parton to Judas Iscariot. *The Crisis*, a newspaper in Columbus, Ohio, declared that the biographer could neither "comprehend nor appreciate" Jackson or his times. The editor's solution that Parton "go out and hang himself" revealed the emotional and violent nature of the period—this time aimed at one who dared interpret Old Hickory.¹³

Jackson resonated with many throughout the nation, especially in the North. Leaders in northern cities and states followed Charles Sumner's lead and trumpeted Jackson. This new admiration for Jackson occurred as many Americans commemorated and celebrated the January 8, 1815, victory of the Battle of New Orleans. That January, cities throughout the North commemorated Jackson's forty-five-year-old victory with bells, toasts, and events. In Auburn, New York, the hometown of longtime Whig and Republican William H. Seward, town leaders fired a one-hundred gun salute to Jackson's victory and his stance against nullification. In Lincoln's Illinois, the legislature wrangled over Old Hickory's image when Democrat William Archer proposed the body adjourn in honor of Jackson's victory. Similar demonstrations followed suit in cities and towns across the North, often in localities where Andrew Jackson had received limited support during his presidency. The anniversary represented a moment for northern states to solidify their support for the Union.¹⁴

¹³ *Harper's Weekly*, December 15, 1860; Parton, *Andrew Jackson*, 3:436; Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory*, 63; *The Crisis*, March 7, 1861.

¹⁴ *Newark (Ohio) Advocate*, January 11, 1861

American victory at the Battle of New Orleans on January 8, 1815, solidified Andrew Jackson's reputation as a military leader. In the early 1860s, many northerners celebrated General Jackson's role in that victory and pointed to his ability to unify the nation with swift and deliberate action. From James Parton, *The Life of Andrew Jackson*, vol. 2.



Newspapers once critical of Jackson embraced Old Hickory for his ability to unify the nation. William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator* emerged as one of Jackson's new admirers. In January 1861, the newspaper published a lengthy article

about the dangers of secession by an author who used the pseudonym "Andrew Jackson." This "Jackson" declared secession as treason, and labeled President James Buchanan as a traitor. The image of Jackson became a tool used by northerners to put the crisis in perspective. Unionist writers and leaders throughout the North created their own version of Jackson, as a way to argue their position.¹⁵

Both political parties used the rhetoric of Jackson to create solidarity for their causes. Republicans touted the stern, but beloved Jackson to solidify support for the Union, while Democrats argued over Jackson's support or disdain for secession. In Illinois, the home of Lincoln, moderate Democrats of the state attempted to calm the divisions among themselves. At the same time the *Illinois State Journal* accused the Democratic Party of justifying secession. "General Jackson's doctrine repudiated!" the Republican paper declared. As Republicans attacked Democrats and Democrats attacked each other, Jackson emerged as a common touchstone, a source of agreement for each group.¹⁶

On January 19, 1861, Jackson made his strangest appearance during the secession crisis. That evening at Dodsworth's Hall in New York City, Andrew

¹⁵ *The Liberator*, January 11, 1861.

¹⁶ Russell McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession* (Chapel Hill, 2007), 126-29, 139-41. McClintock's account is peppered with contemporary allusions to Jackson throughout the North. See also, Albert D. Kirwan, *John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union* (Lexington, 1962).

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¹⁷ *A Lecture on Secession*
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Jackson lectured. Of course, he spoke through the earthly vessel Cora Hatch, a famed medium and spiritualist. This incarnation of Jackson spoke to a paying audience with unusual clarity about secession and the constitutional history of the nation. Although the southerners precipitated the crisis with plans for secession, "Jackson" also blamed northern abolitionists for the nation's sectional woes. "There are some men, particularly at the North, who have no other profession than that of fanaticism," the spirit of Jackson remarked. Furthermore, the reincarnated president had clear ideas about how to meet the current crisis: "The first man who breathes or thinks of secession, is a traitor, and must die." The unusual lecture, delivered by a twenty-one-year-old medium, only increased Jackson's importance in the debates that winter. The young girl, like most Americans, had something to say about secession—using Jackson as her catalyst, however, gave her comments weight and importance. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson may have created the republic, but Jackson, a young man during the Revolutionary era, had dealt with a direct challenge to the Union.¹⁷

The return of Andrew Jackson, through supernatural methods, in books and other publications, and in congressional speeches, reflected Old Hickory's relevance to the secession crisis. Congressmen from across the nation re-examined the Jackson presidency, searching for directions and justifications. Between the election of Lincoln and his inauguration, Congress discussed secession and its consequences. During those debates Jackson's name appeared regularly with each political faction picking his bones for useful scraps and tidbits. For Unionists, Jackson served as savior, while secessionists recast him in their own image. Most congressmen focused on Jackson's nullification rhetoric while ignoring the compromise that ended that crisis. By manipulating the historical record, congressmen crafted a new image of Jackson for their own use.

Charles Sumner's December 1860 speech lingered as an important part of the discourse, especially as it related to the issue of slavery. By labeling Jackson a "patriot slaveholder" Sumner sought to cast most slaveholders as a disloyal lot. Reading the letter to the Senate, Sumner emphasized the most incendiary moments: "The Tariff in his opinion, was a pretext only,—Disunion and the southern confederacy the real object. 'The next pretext,' says he—'will be the Negro or Slavery question.' These, Sir, are his [Jackson's] words not mine. Such is his emphatic judgment." Sumner argued that Jackson's words looked like a clear indictment of the southern slaveholders. In a gross manipulation, Sumner recast Jackson's motives in an antislavery light, even though Jackson believed unapologetically in slavery. He bought and sold slaves as he pleased and had his bondsmen whipped whenever he deemed it necessary. Jackson supported slavery as much as Calhoun, Jefferson Davis, or Robert Barnwell Rhett. In fact, Jackson blamed the rising segment

¹⁷ *A Lecture on Secession, by Gen. Andrew Jackson, Delivered at Dodsworth's Hall on the Evening of Sunday Jan. 19, 1861. Mrs. Cora L.V. Hatch* (New York, 1861).

of abolitionists of his day for much of the nation's sectional differences. During his presidency abolitionists incensed Jackson when they attempted to distribute their literature in South Carolina. He believed that abolitionists wanted to disrupt the South's slave society. Indeed many southerners held abolitionists responsible for planting the idea of rebellion in the minds of Nat Turner and his followers who in 1831 killed approximately sixty white Virginians. Jackson and others regarded the abolitionist movement, rather than the institution of slavery, as a menace to the republic.¹⁸

Yet, for Sumner and the Republicans, Jackson proved an invaluable symbol for the Union. In 1855, Jackson's close friend and advisor Francis Preston Blair called for Old Hickory's disciples to join the Republican Party. Proslavery extremists drove true Democrats out of the party, Blair argued. The following year in a public letter, "A Voice from the Grave of Jackson," Blair wrote:

for the past eight or ten years, the spirits, and some of the very men, against whose disunion projects General Jackson was compelled to level his executive thunders, have been gradually acquiring an absolute ascendancy in the federal government, and that at this moment it is under the control of a spirit of slavery propagandism, more desperate and more lawless than Mr. Calhoun ever hoped or imagined in his craziest intervals.

As old coalitions dissolved and new ones formed, many northern Democrats carried their icon Jackson with them into the ranks of the Republican Party.¹⁹

In December 1860 and January 1861, Republicans and Unionist Democrats rallied around their own historical memory of Jackson. They believed that Jackson's passion and unshakable faith in the Constitution had kept the Union together in the 1830s. Congressman Edward McPherson's beliefs were typical. He said that the first assault on the Union came in 1832,

when [the nullifiers] met the iron will and sterling patriotism of Andrew Jackson, whose Roman virtue no bribes could sway or threats subdue. While the hero lived, he checked and thwarted them. Dying he, with a wonderful significance, enjoined his family to use the memorials of his bravery in defending the Union from "Domestic Traitors," as well as former enemies.²⁰

¹⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., December 11, 1860, 32; David Herbert Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 1960), 227-8, 264, 340; Robert V. Remini, *The Legacy of Andrew Jackson: Essays on Democracy, Indian Removal and Slavery* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 88-90.

¹⁹ Elbert B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair* (New York, 1980), 219-20; *New York Evening Post*, April 26, 1856; Adam I.P. Smith and Peter Parish, "A Contested Legacy: Party Politics in the North," in *Legacy of Disunion: The Enduring Significance of the American Civil War*, ed. Adam I.P. Smith and Peter Parish (Baton Rouge, 2003), 84; William Ernest Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics* (New York, 1933), 1:348.

²⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., January 25, 1861, 532.

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²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, January 31, 1861.

²³ *Ibid.*, January 10, 1861.



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Contested Legacy: Party Politics in the American Civil War, ed. Adam I.P. Smith, The Francis Preston

1861, 532.

McPherson, a Pennsylvania Republican and former Whig, claimed that Jackson's loyalty and concern for the Union consumed the former president until his death. McPherson entered Jackson's last will and testament into the official record so that all would know what Old Hickory expected of posterity. To his nephew and heir, Andrew Jackson Donelson, Jackson had left "the elegant sword presented to me by the state of Tennessee, with this injunction: that he fail not to use it when necessary in support and protection of our glorious Union, and for the protection of the constitutional rights of our beloved country, should they be assailed by foreign enemies or domestic traitors." The image of Jackson's sword handed down from generation to generation to slay enemies of the Union exuded power and emotion. Jackson also stressed constitutional rights which included slaveholding.²¹

Other congressmen questioned parallels between the 1832 and 1860 crises. William Ellis NiBlack, a Democrat from Indiana, argued that few in 1832 truly considered secession. NiBlack cast the entire episode of nullification as a simple economic disagreement. "Nothing has ever occurred which affords a fair precedent for the emergency now upon us," he said. NiBlack's remarks represented a rare moment of truthful moderation as he suggested using great care in drawing historical comparisons.²²

Southern Democrats, who argued for states' rights, found themselves at odds with the historical Jackson wielded by northern Republicans. Many of them obsessed over the nature of government and searched for ideological footing in the political theories of Jefferson and Madison. Some southern secessionists did invoke Jackson, and like Sumner, molded him for their own purposes. Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, then a Senator, insisted that the Republicans had misunderstood Jackson. Davis explained that Old Hickory had fought oppressive regimes, taking part in the American Revolution and participating in the "overthrow of a Government." Thus, according to Davis, if Jackson walked among them in 1860, he would be accused of "rebellion and treason, when he opposed the federal government." Secessionists, like Davis, saw themselves as embodying a second American Revolution. Davis emphasized Jackson's South Carolina boyhood in the American Revolution in hopes of posthumously adapting it into the secessionists' cause.²³

The debate over Jackson's image revealed internal divisions within the South. In February 1861, Tennessee Senator and ardent Unionist Andrew Johnson delivered his thoughts on the crisis to the Senate. Johnson looked upon his fellow Tennessean as a patron saint and savior of the Union. Jackson had stood on the "true doctrines of the Constitution," Johnson said—the only ones that could preserve the Union. The power of Jackson's nullification proclamation awed Johnson. Like others, Johnson searched for

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., January 31, 1861, 678.

²³ Ibid., January 10, 1861, 310.

strong presidential leadership to calm the tide of disunion.²⁴ Johnson told the members of the Senate:

*I must say that if such a man as Andrew Jackson were President of the United States at the present time, before this moment steps would have been taken which would have preserved us [as] a united people without the shedding of blood, without making war. I believe that if Andrew Jackson were President of the United States, this glorious Union of ours would be intact. I believe that this would have been the case, if he had been President, pursuing the policy which I feel certain he would have pursued in such an emergency.*²⁵

In Johnson's simple and straightforward way, Jackson rose from mere defender of the Union to a symbol of the Union itself. Together Jackson, the Constitution, and Union became inseparable. Secessionists argued that their struggle represented the ultimate defense of constitutional principles. Johnson's argument, however, left little room for maneuvering: a rebellion against the Union meant a rebellion against the Constitution and Jackson.

Johnson's declarations about Jackson and the Union drew an immediate response from Texas Senator Louis T. Wigfall. A South Carolina native and southern "fire-eater," Wigfall had campaigned relentlessly for secession. In early 1861 he sat in the Senate anticipating that the Lone Star State would follow South Carolina out of the Union. While Wigfall demanded disunion and the seizure of federal property, Jackson's protégé Texas Governor Sam Houston resisted the urge of disunion and declared slavery evil.²⁶

Wigfall professed admiration for Jackson but for very different reasons. To the Texas Democrat, Jackson stood as courageous defender of pure Jeffersonian republicanism, a believer in the Kentucky Resolutions, and a supporter of secession when it was the only option. "Now if the Senator [Johnson] wishes to denounce secession and nullification let him go back and denounce Jefferson," he began, "let him go back and denounce Jackson, if he dare. General Jackson approved of the doctrine of nullification of 1798." Wigfall interpreted Jackson's support for the Republican Party of 1798 as consent for Jefferson's doctrine of nullification, and thus secession. The senator argued before Congress that Jackson had remained faithful to the doctrine long into his presidency. Further, he indicated that Jackson's beliefs on secession and states' rights were implicit in his Indian policy. He explained that Jackson had allowed Georgia to carry out Indian removal without the assistance, intervention, or approval of the federal government. However, Wigfall overlooked Jackson's efforts to pass a federal Indian

²⁴ *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, eds. LeRoy P. Graf and Ralph Haskins (Knoxville, 1976), 4:204.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4:248.

²⁶ Eric Walther, *The Fire-Eaters* (Baton Rouge, 1992), 160-63, 187-89.

removal law. Wigfall of Old Hickory's sympathies. Institutions should always be in full vigor, the rights and states' rights on many occasions. On the Senate floor, Wigfall argued in order to give respectability to the Constitution." Although Johnson remained despite the good Jacksonian Democratic

Joseph Lane, a pro-Unionist, reminded his colleagues of the controversy. Lane, a Democrat, Old Hickory, attempted to argue that Jackson had little to do with South Carolina with failure. If that had failed, Lane argued that the signed the compromise. The Democratic Party split into southern Democrats and northern Democrats of Kentucky, thereby giving a looming, Lane wanted to use rhetoric, and ideology of

The image of Jackson and congressmen, many of the staggering events in the history of the ideas and behavior of the time, whether Jackson would be seen up as the epitome of democracy. To discuss compromise or to find a common ground, simple as the crisis of secession caused by the process of state-led secession. John Coffee that "the people alone in the union peaceably." The people's ability to dissolve the union. In February 1861, Jackson could only to have the result

²⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress.

²⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Congress, Lane, "American Nationalist," 1999, 13:127-28.

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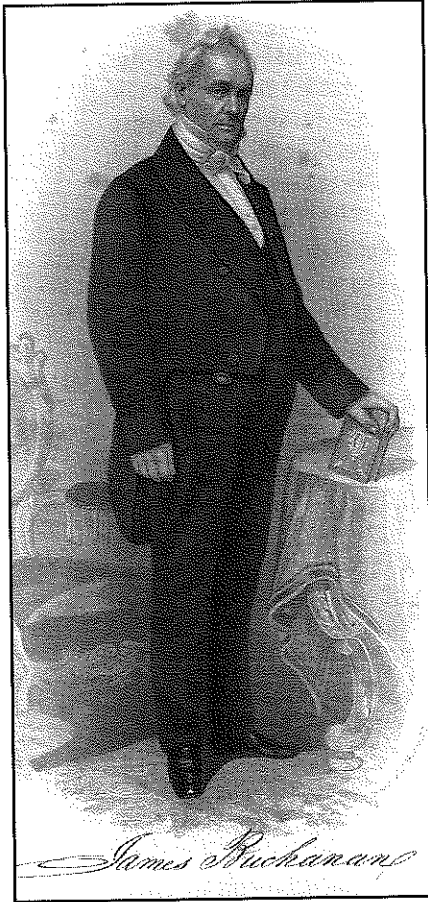
removal law. Wigfall quoted Jackson's 1837 farewell address as evidence of Old Hickory's sympathy with their cause. "Every friend of our free institutions should always be prepared to maintain, unimpaired and in full vigor, the rights and sovereignty of the States." Jackson had supported states' rights on many occasions, according to Wigfall. Before leaving the Senate floor, Wigfall added that, "The name of Jackson is held up here in order to give respectability to the doctrines of parties who are trampling the Constitution." Although Wigfall soon left the Union along with Texas, and Johnson remained despite Tennessee's secession, both considered themselves good Jacksonian Democrats.²⁷

Joseph Lane, a pro-slavery senator from Oregon and Jackson devotee, reminded his colleagues to recall the compromise that ended the nullification controversy. Lane, a Democrat and a lone voice for correctly remembering Old Hickory, attempted to cut through the historical confusion, pointing out that Jackson had little to do with resolving the crisis. Jackson had pressured South Carolina with false deadlines and threats of force, but those attempts had failed, Lane argued. Instead, he explained that Jackson had reluctantly signed the compromise bill that had been passed by Congress. As the Democratic Party splintered during the 1860 presidential campaign, radical southern Democrats chose Lane to run alongside John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, thereby giving the ticket sectional balance. With separation looming, Lane wanted his colleagues to see history clearly without politics, rhetoric, and ideology confusing Jackson's role in the nullification crisis.²⁸

The image of Jackson became a highly potent talisman for senators and congressmen, many of whom were simply trying to comprehend the staggering events in the South and what might follow. These men analyzed the ideas and behavior of Jackson to craft political strategies. They postulated whether Jackson would have crushed secession or held the rebellious states up as the epitome of democracy. Apart from Lane, all congressmen refused to discuss compromise or its consequences. These discussions resulted in little common ground, simply because Jackson had never been faced with an actual crisis of secession caused by slavery. Jackson had, however, considered the process of state-led secession. In December 1832, Jackson wrote to confidante John Coffee that "the people are sovereigns, they can alter and amend, and the people alone in the mode pointed out by themselves, can dissolve this union peaceably." The seceding states strived to fulfill Jackson's belief in the people's ability to dissolve the Union with conventions and referendums. In February 1861, Jackson's own state of Tennessee held a voter referendum only to have the results ignored—an ultimate rejection of Jackson's ideas

²⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., February 7, 1861, 785.

²⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., March 2, 1861, 1346; Frederick J. Blue, "Joseph Lane," *American National Biography*, eds. John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes (New York, 1999), 13:127-28.



President James Buchanan believed that the nullification crisis of the 1830s and Jackson's response to that challenge had little in common with the secession movement of the early 1860s. From George Ticknor Curtis, *Life of James Buchanan: Fifteenth President of the United States* (New York, 1883), vol. 2.

of democracy. In Tennessee, the issue of secession divided the state along regional lines—Unionists in East Tennessee looked warily at the Middle and West sections of the state where pro-southern slaveowners held hegemony over their society. In Knoxville, *Whig* editor and later governor William G. Brownlow declared that “Middle Tennessee must remove the bones of Andrew Jackson to this end of the State, as his grave and tomb-stone are perpetual protests against Disunion.”²⁹

In the absence of a living, breathing Andrew Jackson, congressmen looked toward President James Buchanan for direction, but they found him directionless. A former political associate of Jackson, Buchanan had played minor roles in many of Old Hickory's political scuffles. However, Buchanan did not have an ounce of Jackson's bombastic rhetoric or intense devotion to the Union. Buchanan's inability to end the secession crisis swiftly disappointed everyone. Representative Daniel Somes, a Maine Republican, declared that “the government had ample warnings of the designs of the conspirators; and but for the neglect of the Executive, the secession of this day might have been as harmless as the nullification of South Carolina in 1832.”³⁰

Buchanan had enjoyed a lengthy career in part because he had sidestepped nearly every major sectional issue of the previous generation. He first supported Jackson during the 1824 election, and then a decade later as a congressman, he worked closely with Old Hickory. But in a congressional career that spanned

²⁹ Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, December 14, 1832, in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:500; Brownlow's *Knoxville Whig* quoted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 29, 1861.

³⁰ *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., February 16, 1861, 976.

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³¹ Andrew Jackson
his *Speeches, State*
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²⁹ 1832, in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*,
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nearly thirty years, his stance on slavery and sectionalism remained, at best,
ambiguous. Buchanan served as Jackson's Minister to Russia while the
original nullification crisis unfolded, which removed him from participation
in the affair. Yet Jackson provided updates to Buchanan. In 1833 Jackson
gave Buchanan an account of the crisis, recalling that:

*I met nullification at its threshold. My proclamation was well timed
as it at once opened the eyes of the people to the wicked designs of the
nullifiers. The expression of public opinion elicited by proclamation
from Maine to Louisiana, has so firmly repudiated the absurd doctrine
of nullification and secession, that it is not probable that we shall be
troubled with them again shortly.*³¹

Of course Jackson's account was an example of revisionism or of a highly
selective memory as he omitted the details of the compromise that ended
nullification. Instead Jackson argued that his nullification proclamation and
Force Bill had produced the solution. Buchanan never questioned Jackson's
version of how the nullification crisis ended. Over the next two decades as
fresh wounds opened in the sectional battle, Buchanan avoided taking a clear
position. When Buchanan secured the Democratic nomination in 1856, he
had spent the previous administration at the Court of St. James and lacked
a clear understanding of sectional differences. Not until the final year of his
presidency in 1860, with southerners threatening secession, did Buchanan
finally face the grave nature of America's sectional crisis.

Buchanan exuded confusion in the wake of South Carolina's December
1860 ordinance of secession. Unlike so many others in the nation's capital,
he refused to believe that secession in 1860 resembled nullification in
1832. He argued that secession did constitute rebellion, but that his office
did not possess the power to thwart it. All Buchanan offered in response
was a proposed constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to hold
slaves. Members of his cabinet, frustrated by the inaction, urged Buchanan
to act swiftly and decisively—in Jacksonian fashion—to remedy the crisis.
They feared that without an effective resolution the nation's future and
his political credibility veered toward destruction. Advisors and citizens
alike reminded Buchanan that Jackson had risen from obscurity and above
political challenges to become a patron saint of the Union. In January 1861
Bostonians celebrated the anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans and
consequently Andrew Jackson. One spectator wrote to Buchanan that the
commemoration had been ordered by "citizens who defamed [Jackson] while
President." But now those same citizens looked to Buchanan for stability and
victory over secessionists.³²

³¹ Andrew Jackson to James Buchanan, March 21, 1833, in *Works of James Buchanan: Comprising
his Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (New York, 1908-
1911; reprint, 1960), 2:329.

³² James Buchanan to George M. Wharton, December 16, 1860, in *Works of James Buchanan*,

As the crisis worsened in early 1861, Buchanan avoided action. He blamed the conflict on abolitionists' rhetoric (much as Jackson had), instead of the fire-eating stance of southern secessionists. Disgusted subordinates abandoned Buchanan, beginning with Secretary of State Lewis Cass. As South Carolina prepared for war, Cass pushed Buchanan to confront the crisis, saying: "I have urged at various meetings of the Cabinet that additional troops should be sent to re-inforce the forts in the harbor of Charleston." Buchanan refused his advice, and on December 13, 1860, Cass tendered his resignation and returned home to Michigan. Charles Levi Woodbury, whose father had once served in Old Hickory's cabinet, celebrated the departure saying that Cass "was never a man for an emergency since Genl. Jackson's day." President Buchanan, who so astutely resisted comparisons with Jackson, used Old Hickory's words to attack Cass. He mocked the secretary as indecisive and weak. In one memorandum, Buchanan resurrected President Jackson's thoughts on Cass: "I can no longer consent to do the duties both of President and Secretary of War, General Cass will decide nothing for himself, but comes to me constantly with great bundles of papers to decide questions for him which he ought to decide for himself."³³

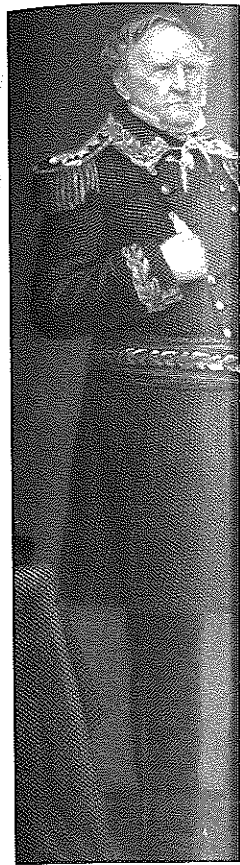
Jackson's views of his contemporaries, many of whom were still politically active in the 1860s, became important in the heated atmosphere of secession. On February 16, 1861, the *New York Tribune* printed allegations that Jackson had warned incoming President James K. Polk against appointing Buchanan to his cabinet, citing his indecisiveness and untrustworthiness: "It is very necessary to have a President who is something more than a bag of straw. Gen. Jackson advised Mr. Polk not to take Mr. Buchanan into his Cabinet, as he was unfit for any such position." In 1860, leaders in Washington often held each other to a standard set by Jackson—one that most failed to meet.³⁴

In the wake of Cass's departure, General Winfield Scott stepped forward to prod Buchanan to act. Like so many others, Scott, a Whig who had once come close to dueling with Jackson, reminded Buchanan that the nullification crisis served as a historical precedent for the issue of secession. He also urged Buchanan to prepare for hostilities, beginning with supplying Fort Moultrie in Charleston Harbor. Scott reminded Buchanan that in 1832, Jackson had reinforced Fort Moultrie in preparation for war. He further explained that losing control of Charleston Harbor would cripple the government's ability to squash a rebellion in South Carolina. General Scott believed that Andrew Jackson had helped diffuse the growing fervor surrounding nullification by reinforcing Fort Moultrie. Buchanan ignored

11:66; Kenneth Stampp, *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis 1860-61* (Baton Rouge, 1950), 50; Nahum Capen to James Buchanan, January 8, 1861, Papers of James Buchanan, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

³³ Lewis Cass to James Buchanan, December 12, 1860; Charles Levi Woodbury to James Buchanan, December 17, 1860, both in Papers of James Buchanan; "Memorandum," December, 15, 1860, in *Works of James Buchanan*, 11:59-60.

³⁴ *New York Tribune*, February 16, 1861.



General Winfield Scott, who had come to Jackson, advised Buchanan to reinforce the forts against possible secessionists. (Portrait by Matthew Brady, the University of Pennsylvania Special Collections.)

³⁵ James Buchanan, 90; *Daily National Intelligencer*, also, Timothy S. 107; John S. 1997). Ethan S. R. Secession C. Profession of 24, 1832, in December 1 see Joseph T.

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*General Winfield Scott, a Whig
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 by Mathew Brady, 1865, from
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the advice and eventually abandoned
 Fort Moultrie, leaving Fort Sumter,
 which lay in the middle of the harbor,
 as the only military outpost in South
 Carolina still in federal hands.³⁵

Following the April 12, 1861,
 Confederate assault on Fort Sumter,
 Scott aired his grievances with former
 President Buchanan. In turn, Buchanan
 responded to Scott’s charges, arguing
 that he had ignored military Jackson’s
 precedent because the 1860 crisis *was*
 different. “In 1833 South Carolina stood
 alone, she had then the sympathy of no
 other Southern states,” Buchanan wrote.
 “Her nullification was condemned by
 them all. Even her own people were
 almost equally divided on the question,”
 he continued. In some ways Buchanan
 was correct to point out the differences
 between the nullification and secession
 crises in South Carolina. In comparison,
 by 1860, several southern states had
 militias and supplies in preparation for
 armed conflict, while in 1832 Jackson
 faced an isolated state problem in South
 Carolina. In 1860, unlike in 1832, South
 Carolina’s fellow cotton states stood
 closely by her side with others poised to
 secede. Buchanan argued that he had
 “decided on a policy of my own” because
 the situation looked overwhelming.
 Others, however, saw no policy, only
 lethargy.³⁶

³⁵ James Buchanan, *Mr. Buchanan’s Administration on the Eve of Rebellion* (New York, 1866), 286-90; *Daily National Intelligencer*, November 1, 1862; *San Francisco Bulletin*, January 3, 1861. See also, Timothy D. Johnson, *Winfield Scott: The Quest for Military Glory* (Lawrence, KS, 1998), 107; John S.D. Eisenhower, *Agent of Destiny: The Life and Times of General Winfield Scott* (New York, 1997), 134-7; Philip Klein, *President James Buchanan* (University Park, PA, 1962), 373; Ethan S. Rafuse, “Former Whigs in Conflict: Winfield Scott, Abraham Lincoln, and the Secession Crisis Revisited,” *Lincoln Herald* 103 (2001):10; Allen Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms* (Kent, OH, 2003), 73-5; Joel R. Poinsett to Andrew Jackson, November 24, 1832, in *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 4:490-91; Winfield Scott to James Buchanan, December 15, 1860, Papers of James Buchanan. For the mobilization of the southern states, see Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee’s Army: From Victory to Collapse* (New York, 2008), 10-16.

³⁶ Buchanan, *Mr. Buchanan’s Administration*, 179.

Buchanan knew that his inaction would damage his political reputation. The critics, Buchanan argued, "will soon arrive at the point of denouncing me for not crushing out the rebellion at once, & thus trying to make me the author of war." Many did blame him for not extinguishing secession and made unfavorable comparisons to Jackson. Republican Senator Edward D. Baker of California, a friend of Abraham Lincoln, mused about Buchanan's lack of presidential leadership: "South Carolina attempted to do once before what is said she has accomplished now. There was then a President of the United States determined to do his whole duty. Whether there be now, I leave others to determine."³⁷

In hindsight, Buchanan's position appeared impossible, which may have been the main reason for his inaction. As Lincoln discovered, a single mistake could have serious ramifications. For example, on November 24, 1860, radical fire-eater Robert Barnwell Rhett warned Buchanan that "it is your power to make the event peaceful or bloody. If you send any more troops into Charleston Bay it will be bloody." War may have been a possibility in 1832, but by the fall of 1860 conflict appeared inevitable, when a single flare could ignite the powder keg, as it ultimately did. Buchanan feared that he would be the one to spark it and then be unable to stop it.³⁸

By the last days of Buchanan's presidency, Unionists drew a sharp contrast between Buchanan and the "bold" Jackson. They argued that the current president, who once "boasted himself the close friend and ally of Andrew Jackson," had betrayed the principles of Union. Critics attacked Buchanan on all fronts, including his perceived personal shortcomings. The *San Francisco Bulletin* labeled the bachelor president's lack of action as an example of his "effeminate timidity." In that respect Buchanan's failure to stop secession represented a defect of character. Others charged that Buchanan was a southern sympathizer, merely a doughface bureaucrat willing to betray the Constitution he swore to uphold. In *The Liberator*, essayist "Andrew Jackson" went as far to accuse Buchanan of "cowardice and treachery." By late winter 1861, most citizens looked past Buchanan to the incoming Lincoln administration for answers.³⁹

While senators such as Charles Sumner focused on swift and rigid action, just like Jackson had demonstrated decades prior, another senator tried to create a compromise. In December 1860, a select committee of Senate Democrats, led by Kentuckian John J. Crittenden, proposed a series of compromises that they hoped would eliminate slavery as a sectional irritant.

³⁷ James Buchanan to J.B. Henry, May 17, 1861, in *Works of Buchanan*, 11:192; Buchanan, *Mr. Buchanan's Administration*, 179; *Congressional Globe*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., January 2, 1861, 224.

³⁸ Robert B. Rhett to James Buchanan, November 24, 1860, Papers of James Buchanan.

³⁹ *New York Herald*, February 1, 1861; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, December 5, 1860; *San Francisco Bulletin*, January 19, 1861; *The Liberator*, January 11, 1861.



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appeared impossible, which may be a mistake. As Lincoln discovered, a single action. For example, on November 24, 1861, William Pickens warned Buchanan that "it is either peace or bloody. If you send any more troops into the South, War may have been a possibility in the future." War appeared inevitable, when a single flare up in the South ultimately did. Buchanan feared that he would be unable to stop it.³⁸

During his presidency, Unionists drew a sharp contrast between Jackson and "bold" Jackson. They argued that the president was himself the close friend and ally of the principles of Union. Critics attacked Jackson's perceived personal shortcomings. They criticized the bachelor president's lack of action and "timidity." In that respect Buchanan's actions were a defect of character. Others charged that he was merely a doughface bureaucrat who swore to uphold. In *The Liberator*, Sumner accused Buchanan of "cowardice" and that most citizens looked past Buchanan to find answers.³⁹

Sumner focused on swift and rigid action. In the late 1850s, another senator, James M. Crittenden, proposed a series of amendments to terminate slavery as a sectional irritant.

³⁸ *Works of Buchanan*, 11:192; Buchanan, *Mr. Buchanan*, 36th Cong., 2d sess., January 2, 1861, 224. ³⁹ *Works of Buchanan*, 11:192; *Papers of James Buchanan*, 1860, 24, 1860, *Papers of James Buchanan*.

⁴⁰ *San Francisco Advertiser*, December 5, 1860; *San Francisco Bulletin*, January 11, 1861.



Henry Clay, one of the most revered politicians of the mid nineteenth century and a Jackson opponent, crafted the bill that led to the end of the nullification crisis. President Abraham Lincoln idolized Clay and detested Jackson. Engraving by A. Seely, 1865, from the University of Tennessee Special Collections.

These senators, known as the Committee of Thirteen, proposed that slavery would be protected where it existed by codifying the 36° 30' line of protection established by the Missouri Compromise in 1820. The plan, called the Crittenden Compromise, essentially gave the western territories to the antislavery cause, but hinted of further expansion of slavery into the Caribbean. Buchanan, Stephen A. Douglas, and many Union Democrats, such as Andrew Johnson and Crittenden, supported the plan. However, the Crittenden Compromise required Lincoln's support.⁴⁰

Since his election, many had urged Abraham Lincoln to emulate Jackson's actions. The suggestion contradicted Lincoln's political sensibilities since he had always been a Whig, who idolized Jackson's nemesis Henry Clay. The

Great Compromiser from Kentucky had always been Lincoln's "beau ideal of a great man, the man for whom I fought for all my humble life." Indeed Lincoln viewed Jackson as an aberration to good republican government. Old Hickory had been a leader who led from his "burning passion" instead of reason. That kind of unchecked emotion led to tyranny and instability, characteristics associated with southern fire-eaters. But in the winter of secession, leaders from all political parties promoted Jackson as the ideal icon of leadership for the time. "We want a little Jacksonism in our government now, and we hope to get it with Mr. Lincoln," editors at the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* wrote. And Lincoln looked poised to answer that demand.

⁴⁰ Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill, 1989), 196-200; *San Francisco Bulletin*, January 3, 1861. See also, *New York Herald*, December 8 and 14, 1860.

As Buchanan and others hoped to defuse the crisis with the Crittenden Compromise, Lincoln and the Republicans refused to even consider it. Lincoln declined overtures by Buchanan to support the compromise. The language of the Crittenden Compromise left open the prospect of southern expansion of slavery which Lincoln and the Republicans firmly opposed. Lincoln wanted to arrest the spread of slavery; such a compromise would represent an abandonment of his anti-slavery political principles. In early 1861, with the Republican Lincoln preparing to take office and the southern congressional delegation preparing to leave the capital, northerners were on the edge of political supremacy and abolitionists envisioned a political system without the yoke of slaveholders.⁴¹

As the March inauguration approached, Lincoln revealed little about his plans to confront the secession crisis. Southerners watched warily as the Republican who opposed slavery moved closer to assuming office. In the interim, some contemplated Jackson's influence on Lincoln. The *Charleston Mercury* mused, "while his speeches have been more guarded lately, one can still detect a vein of coercion running through them. If he can do so he will certainly play the Andrew Jackson." Would Lincoln live up to the deep mythological image of Jackson that ran through the nation's capital that winter? Unionists certainly hoped he would force an end to secession and "be hugged to the people's hearts like a second Andrew Jackson." Both Unionists and secessionists looked anxiously to the inaugural address for answers.⁴²

Lincoln used the occasion to reveal his understanding of the crisis and how he planned to meet it. He crafted it carefully and delivered it forcefully on March 4, 1861. Four major sources of inspiration surfaced in Lincoln's first inaugural address: the Constitution, Daniel Webster's 1830 reply to Robert Hayne, Clay's Compromise of 1850 speech, and Jackson's 1832 nullification proclamation. Lincoln considered historical precedents, and those sources gave him perspective on preserving the Union. He exuded optimism that the differing regions and political opinions could be united. "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies," he announced. Several sections of the address mirrored Jackson's policy against nullification. Lincoln told the nation: "I shall take care, as the Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all states." Later he forcefully echoed Jackson's 1832 proclamation saying: "The dictates of a high duty oblige me solemnly to announce that you can

⁴¹ *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The First Complete and Unexpurgated Text*, ed. Harold Holzer (New York, 1993), 187; Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln and Davis: Imagining America, 1809-1865* (Lawrence, KS, 2001), 81; "Address Before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois," January 17, 1838, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953), 1:108-14; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, February 14, 1861; Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates*, 196-200; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln, President-Elect*, (New York, 2008), 163, 177; McClintock, *Decision for War*, 112.

⁴² *Charleston Mercury*, February 21, 1861; *Chicago Press*, May 21, 1860.

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⁴³ David Herbert F 86; Stamp, *Am Doren Stern (N 2:654; Harper's*

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not succeed. The laws of the United States must be executed. I have no
discretionary power on the subject, my duty is emphatically pronounced in
the Constitution."

Lincoln's inauguration speech revealed a sensibility that few would
confuse with Jackson. Old Hickory's actions isolated South Carolina during
the nullification crisis, but Lincoln faced a far more serious situation. In a
matter of weeks, Fort Sumter fell and Lincoln called up 75,000 volunteers.
While Jackson did not have to carry forward with military action against
South Carolina, Lincoln did and by the end of the Civil War many saw
Lincoln as Jackson's natural successor. But as Lincoln moved toward victory
in 1864 many realized that he had surpassed Old Hickory.⁴³

Lincoln's assassination assured his mythical stature as he became a
deity of America's evolving civil religion in which political symbols became
increasingly sacred. Just weeks before his assassination, *Harper's Weekly*
ruminated on Lincoln, Jackson, and executive leadership. "When the war
began there were those impatient who cried, 'Oh for an hour of Jackson.' But
does any man who truly comprehends the character and antecedents of its
various questions and demands, really think that Andrew Jackson's qualities
were those which the situation requires," the editors asked. In 1865, with
the war nearly over, Unionists questioned whether they had ever needed
Jackson and his image to help navigate secession and the bloody war that
followed. However, in the moment of crisis, the collective memory focused
on Old Hickory—their only precedent. In their rush to confront secession
boldly and swiftly, all parties ignored the compromise in 1833 that ended
the nullification crisis. In the end Jackson only threatened; Lincoln acted
and proved a far more potent symbol for the postwar Union. Lincoln's
war became one of freedom and Union; he became a symbol of the hard
won freedom of slaves—something that the slaveholding Jackson had never
considered. In 1865, with the war over and Lincoln dead, Jackson remained
an icon of republican virtue, democracy, America's military glory and the
Democratic Party; Lincoln became the symbol for Union, the Republicans,
and freedom for a greater number of Americans.⁴⁴

The image of Jackson changed few minds during the debate over
secession. Instead, most used his image to justify already existing partisan
beliefs and sectional jealousies. In the secession winter of 1860-1861, distorted
interpretations of Jackson emerged from various sources, often bent, twisted,
and out of context. In congressional debates, Unionists attempted to shame
secessionists by using the words and memory of Jackson, a slaveholder who
had been an ardent American nationalist rather than a southern nationalist.

⁴³ David Herbert Donald, *We Are Lincoln Men: Abraham Lincoln and his Friends* (New York, 2003),
86; Stamp, *And the War Came*, 198; *The Life and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Philip Van
Doren Stern (New York, 1940), 650; *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*,
2:654; *Harper's Weekly*, November 5, 1864.

⁴⁴ *Harper's Weekly*, February 25, 1865.

Under the spell of abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner, Old Hickory was even (incorrectly) portrayed as an antislavery advocate. Secessionists often ignored the facts as well, cheering the Jackson of the American Revolution and the War of 1812, while ignoring Jackson the president, a staunch Unionist who had opposed South Carolina's nullifiers. President James Buchanan had learned little from his mentor and his inaction during the secession crisis resulted in severe criticism from his contemporaries and later from historians. In the end, Lincoln, an anti-Jackson Whig, ultimately eclipsed Old Hickory by demonstrating a resolve and commitment to the Union far greater than Jackson's real or imagined accomplishments. Quite simply, Lincoln became a more heroic figure than Jackson himself.



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In Nashville, Tennessee, Disciples of Christ journal subscribers who wrote their minister (or, to be more precise, abandoned his church) asked the editor, David Lipscomb, to provide on how the church should be Scriptural. Lipscomb answered by authorizing a teaching on church discipline. The Church must witness before it can be the people of God. All this participation [sic] with the kings and queens, if a teacher left the church, the Christian religion. The church politics destroyed Christ.

This question and answer were the South were struggling during the Civil War. Lipscomb found themselves in a difficult position, resisted the call of the Confederate President Jefferson Davis. The Union army captured

* The author is a doctoral student in the history of the nineteenth century United States.

¹ David Lipscomb, *Gospel*.