The Election of 1824

Excerpt from John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, A Private Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), Paul C. Nagel writes:

It was, however, in selecting his own successor at the State department that Adams undid his strategy for nonpartisanship and national unity. He asked Henry Clay, to whom he owed his election, to serve as secretary of state. The offer was extended after the House had elected Adams-not before as is often alleged

In *the Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), Robert Remini writes that:

The fateful decision came on January 9, 1825. A meeting was arranged between Adams and Clay for an evening's conversation. "Mr. Clay came at six," Adams confided to his journal, "and spent the evening with me in a long conversation." In the course of the conversation Clay asked the New Englander "to satisfy him with regard to some principles of great public importance, but without any personal considerations for himself." Nothing crude or vulgar, like declaring the terms of a political deal, passed their lips. No need. Both men understood one another's purposes. Surely they both realized that in exchange for House support Adams would designate Clay as his secretary of state.

The Campaign and Election of 1824 from the The American President describes it this way:

Jackson could barely contain his fury at having lost the election in what he claimed was a "corrupt bargain" between Adams and Clay to overturn the will of the people. To most Jacksonian supporters it looked as if congressional leaders had conspired to revive the caucus system, whereby Congress greatly influenced—if not determined—the selection of the president. Jackson laid the blame on Clay, telling anyone who would listen that the Speaker had approached him with the offer of a deal: Clay would support Jackson in return for Jackson's appointment of Clay as secretary of state. When Jackson refused, Clay made the deal with Adams instead. In Jackson’s words, Clay had sold his influence in a ‘corrupt bargain’”.

Clay denied the charges, and while there certainly had been some behind-the-scene maneuvering by Clay to push the vote to Adams, it most likely reflected Clay's genuine doubts about Jackson's qualifications as a president. In assessing the odds of successfully forwarding his own political agenda, Clay questioned Jackson's commitment to the American System of internal improvements. On the other hand, Clay knew that Adams had supported it consistently over the years … Enraged, Jackson resigned his seat in the U.S. Senate and vowed to win the presidency in 1828 as an outsider to Washington politics.

**Does the circumstantial evidence indicate there was or was not a "bargain"? If a bargain had been struck, what criteria should be used to determine whether that bargain was in fact "corrupt"? Use the evidence below to develop your idea and respond in one page**

House Records of the nomination of Henry Clay to Secretary of State:

The Senate proceeded to consider the message of the 5th instant, nominating Henry Clay, and others, to office; and.

On the question, “Will the Senate advise and consent to the appointment of Henry Clay?”

It was determined in the affirmative: Yeas, 27; Nays, 14

Those who voted in the affirmative, are—Messrs, Barton, Bell, Benton, Boulighny, Chandler, Chase, Clayton, D’Wolf, Dickerson, Edwards, Gailard, Harrison, Hendricks, Holmes, Johnson, Kane, King, Knight, Lloyd, Lloyd, Mils, Rowan, Ruggles, Seymore, Smith, Van Buren, and Van Dyke

Those who voted in the negative are—Messrs, Berrien, Branch, Cobb, Eaton, Findlay, Hayne, Holmes Jackson, Mellvaine, Macon, Marks, Tazewell, Thomas, and Williams

So it was resolved that the Senate do advise and consent to the appointment of Henry Clay, agreeable to the nomination.

Eye witness account of House of Representatives after Election

“Monroe and Lafayette breathed sighs of relief and bean with satisfaction as they watched the former opponents fulfill the promise of American liberty and republican self-government. For a moment America remained secure.

General Jackson shook hands with Mr. Adams and very cordially congratulated him on his sweep. This was honorable to human nature but it was not honorable to human nature to see Clay walking about with exultation and a smiling face… he looked as proud and happy as if he had done a noble action by selling himself to Adams and securing his election.

Andrew Jackson’s reaction to the announcement of Clay’s appointment

* “The people have been cheated. Corruptions and intrigues at Washington defeated the will of the people” [Society](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/jackson/soc.htm) section of the essay [Andrew Jackson: Champion of the Kingly Commons](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/jackson/jackson.html%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)
* “So you see the Judas of the west [Clay] has closed the contract and will receive the thirty pieces of silver. His end will be the same. Was there ever witnessed such a bare faced corruption in any country before?” Andrew Jackson to William B. Lewis, February 14, 1825
* “government, and if not checked by the people, will lead to open direct bribery… Mr. Clay is prostrate here in the minds of all honest and honorable men."
—Andrew Jackson to George Wilson, February 20, 1825

Clay Defending himself to the House of representatives

The Speaker rose, and observed, that he requested the indulgence of the House for a few moments, while he asked its attention to a subject in which he himself deeply concerned. A note had appeared this morning in the National Intelligencer, under the name, and with the authority, as he presumed, of a member of the House from Pennsylvania (Mr. Kremer), which adopted as his own, a previous letter published in another print, containing serious and injurious imputations against him, and which the author avowed his readiness to substantiate by proof. These charges implicated his conduct in regard to the pending Presidential election; and the respectability of the station which the member holds, who thus openly refers them, and that of the people whom he represents, entitled them to grave attention. It might be, indeed, worthy of consideration, whether the character and dignity of the House itself, did not require a full investigation of them, and an impartial decision on their truth. For, if they were true; if he were capable and base enough, to betray the solemn trust which the constitution had confided in him; if, yielding to personal views and considerations, he could compromise the highest interests of this country, and the House would be scandalized by his continuance to occupy the chair with which he had been so long honored in presiding at its deliberations, and he merited instantaneous expulsion. Without, however, presuming to indicate what the House might conceive it out to do, on account of its own purity and honor, he hoped that he should be allowed, respectfully, to solicit, in behalf of himself, an inquiry into the truth of the chares to which he referred. Standing in the relations to the House, which both the member from Pennsylvania and himself did, it appeared to him, that here was the proper place to institute the inquiry, in order that, if guilty, here the proper punishment might be applied, and if innocent, that here his character and conduct may be vindicated. He anxiously hoped, therefore, that the House would be pleased to direct an investigation to ne made into the truth of the charges. Emanating from the source which they did, this was the only notice which he could take of them. If the House should think proper to raise a committee, he trusted that some other than the ordinary mode pursued by the practice and rules of the House would be adopted to appoint the committee.

Strictly Confidential

My dear sir,
I have seized the first leisure on the termination of my official duties to renew our

correspondence on my part. We have passed through many and strange events during last winter, which are but little known to the country. The result of which is, that we have triumphed in part and been defeated in part. The policy of Mr. Monroe’s administration I consider fixed. He is too popular to be attacked. This is a great point; but there ends our victory. The mass of political and moral power, which carried the late administration through in triumph, has been wholly neglected in the new organization; and in the final stages of the election, the voices and the power of the people has been set at naught; and the result has been a President elected not by them, but by a few ambitious men with a view of their own interest, I fear. This result has caused the deepest discontent, and in my opinion deservedly. There is a solemn feeling of duty, that it must be corrected at another election, or the liberty of the country will be in danger. It is my opinion, that the country will never be quiet till the example is corrected, and the Constitution so amended as to prevent the recurrence of the danger. The country will appear to subside, but the appearance will be deceitful. Principles cannot be violated in this country with impunity. In four years all that has happened will be reversed, and the country will settle down on sound principles, and wise policy.

As to my self, I do not think of moving under existing circumstances. I know the force of my position, and my friends need not fear, I trust, either ambition, or imprudence on my part. I however, cannot but see what must come; and I shall never separate from principles, let the consequences be what it may. I see in the fact that Mr. Clay has made the President against the voice of his constituents, and that he has been rewarded by the man elevated by him by the first office in his gift, the most dangerous stab, which the liberty of this country has ever received. I will not be on that side. I am with the people. And shall remain so. I would say much more but you can get all the information which you may desire from Gou’r. (NOTE: end of relevant material.)

With great respect,
I am

J C Calhoun

(Source: Hay, Thomas Robson. “John C. Calhoun and the Presidential Campaign of 1824: Some Unpublished Calhoun Letters, II.” The American Historical Review, Vol. 40, Issue 2. January 1935. 287-300.)