

1993

## The Richmond Junto and politics in Jacksonian Virginia

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**Shaffer, Wade Lee, Ph.D.**

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THE RICHMOND JUNTO AND POLITICS IN JACKSONIAN VIRGINIA

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Wade Lee Shaffer

1993


APPROVAL SHEET

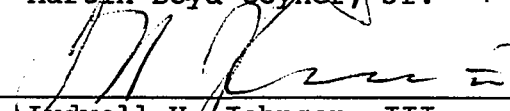
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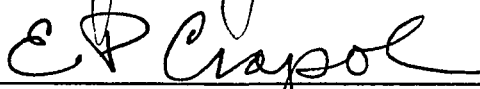
  
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To Monica,  
who taught me about love and life and baseball



TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	v
ABSTRACT . . . . .	vi
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	2
CHAPTER I. "SENTINELS OF LIBERTY": THE REVIVAL OF STATE RIGHTS, 1815-1824 . . . . .	25
CHAPTER II. "JACKSON AND REFORM": 1825-1828 . . . . .	73
CHAPTER III. RUMBLINGS IN THE ATMOSPHERE: 1829-1833	123
CHAPTER IV. PARTY WARFARE: 1834-1840 . . . . .	184
CONCLUSION: THE RICHMOND JUNTO AND POLITICS IN JACKSONIAN VIRGINIA . . . . .	238
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	245

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Everyone should write a dissertation. During the years that I spent researching and writing this work, I made dozens of new friends and married the woman I love. I also came to know my strengths, my limitations, and my faults. In this regard, I arrived at the end of my intellectual journey into 19th century Virginia a wiser and humbler person. Everyone should write a dissertation.

To acknowledge all those who helped me in the course of completing this work would be a Herculean task. But I would be remiss if I did not thank my advisor, Boyd Coyner, and the other members of my dissertation committee, Ludwell Johnson, John Selby, Ed Crapol, and Pete Stewart, for their guidance, gentle criticism, and extreme patience. A special word of thanks goes to Judy Ewell, who helped me in so many ways that I'm sure I will never be able to repay her fully.

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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation offers the first full-length study of the Richmond Junto and its role in shaping politics in Virginia between 1815 and 1845. The Junto led the Jacksonian movement in Virginia and worked successfully to keep the state allied with the Democratic party of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren until the early 1840s. The Junto represented an influential force in Virginia politics during this transitional period, and to a certain extent this small group of men, led by Thomas Ritchie, Peter V. Daniel, Andrew Stevenson, William H. Roane, and Richard E. Parker, epitomized the state's response to the turbulent events of the era. Its actions were expressive of the way in which Virginians chose to come to terms with the changes in American politics and society during the Age of Jackson.

The Junto's course was marked by ambivalence. It sought, for instance, to preserve both the rights of the states and a strong federal Union, and to revive Virginia's influence at the national level without compromising the state's political principles. To achieve these goals, the group consistently articulated a traditional states' rights position, but also moved to adopt the modern features of the second party system. This strategy produced mixed results. The Junto managed to maintain influence in the state for nearly three decades, and Virginia never cast its presidential ballot for a Whig candidate. At the same time, bitter factionalism and violent partisan debate came to characterize Virginia politics in the years after 1832.

The goal of this study is to reveal the pivotal role played by the Richmond Junto in defining and shaping political debate in Jacksonian Virginia. It offers an analysis of the group's political ideology and its methods of operation, as well as a discussion of the Junto's objectives, accomplishments, and failures.

THE RICHMOND JUNTO AND POLITICS IN JACKSONIAN VIRGINIA

## Introduction

This dissertation offers the first full-length study of the Richmond Junto and its role in shaping politics in Virginia between 1815 and 1845. The Junto led the Jacksonian movement in Virginia and worked successfully to keep the state allied with the Democratic party of Andrew Jackson and Martin Van Buren until the early 1840s. The Junto represented an influential force in Virginia politics during this transitional period, and to a certain extent this small group of six to eight men epitomized the state's response to the turbulent events of the era. Its actions were expressive of the way in which Virginians chose to come to terms with the changes in American politics and society during the Age of Jackson. The members of the Junto viewed themselves as caught between two worlds: the older, traditional world of their fathers, the revolutionary generation, and a new world of democratic change and economic expansion that they found both appealing and foreboding. In confronting these new political, economic, and social realities, the Junto consistently used the yardstick of the past to measure the strange new world unfolding before them. To a certain extent, the members of the clique remained rooted in the world of their fathers and devoted to the revolutionary

political ideology that those men had formulated. Throughout much of this period, the Junto rarely thought of discarding or even of amending that ideology. Indeed, its members considered it their particular duty to preserve and protect that faith in republican government, devotion to liberty and equality, and insistence on personal independence that had been handed down as their most precious political legacy. As the members of the Junto moved to protect this legacy, first on the state and then on the national level, they discovered that many Americans did not share their devotion to the republicanism of the older generation. The emerging modern party system that the Junto slowly came to embrace in the 1830s clearly valued party loyalty and unity over ideological consistency and purity. To a large extent, this work is an attempt to examine and evaluate how the Richmond Junto, and by extrapolation Virginia, altered its definition of republicanism and reconciled its political ideology with the realities of Jacksonian America and the second party system.

My interest in the Junto stemmed from a desire to understand more clearly the rise of Southern sectionalism between the Revolution and the Civil War. The changing nature of Southern life and thought during those decades, especially in the realm of political culture, provides the key to understanding growing sectional sentiment and the ultimate call for secession in 1860 and 1861. I chose to

examine Virginia for a number of reasons: in more ways than one, Virginia remained the leading state in the region, although its prestige and influence continued to slip throughout the era; very little modern scholarship outside of biography exists on post-Jeffersonian Virginia; and, finally, the Old Dominion and its leaders played prominent roles in both of the defining events of early American history, the American Revolution and the Civil War. An examination of Virginia between those two wars would thus help shed light on the sectionalizing forces that tore the nation apart in 1861.

Such an expansive topic required narrowing, and I soon realized that a detailed study of the actions and ideas of the so-called Richmond Junto, a shadowy informal clique of politicians, editors, judges, and bankers, offered a window through which larger developments across the state and nation could be viewed. The Junto was intimately involved in all of the great questions facing the nation in the first half of the 19th century: slavery, economic growth, constitutional debates, and political reform. Its members wrote extensively about how they and others felt on these issues, corresponded with national political leaders, and, on more than one occasion, helped shape Southern responses to them. The Junto presented, then, an ideal way to explore the response of countless individuals to the basic questions of the Jacksonian period.

The clique's members were not, by and large, well known figures in Jacksonian America. None of them approached Daniel Webster, John Calhoun, or Henry Clay in stature or in influence. They were state and regional leaders, not national spokesmen. Because of this fact, few studies exist that document how these men attempted to resolve the fundamental questions facing them and their society. Scholarly examinations of the Richmond Junto are limited to a few journal articles, some of dubious merit. Most of these brief accounts focus on the origins and early career of the clique, dismissing entirely its influence after 1824.<sup>1</sup> The only recent article on the group denies its existence, claiming that the Junto was merely a politically motivated rhetorical creation.<sup>2</sup> There are published biographies of key Junto members - Thomas Ritchie, Peter V. Daniel, and Andrew Stevenson - but these works are of limited significance for my purposes because they focus on telling the story of one man's entire life and seldom dwell at length upon their experiences as Junto associates.<sup>3</sup> A handful of monographs

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<sup>1</sup>Harry Ammon, "The Richmond Junto, 1800-1824," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. 61 (1953), 395-418; Rex Beach, "Spencer Roane and the Richmond Junto," William and Mary Quarterly, 2nd series, Vol. 22 (1942), 1-17; Joseph H. Harrison, Jr., "Oligarchs and Democrats: The Richmond Junto," VMHB, Vol. 78 (1970), 184-198.

<sup>2</sup>F. Thornton Miller, "The Richmond Junto: The Secret All-Powerful Club - or Myth," VMHB, Vol. 99 (1991), 63-80.

<sup>3</sup>Charles Ambler, Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics (Richmond: Bell Book & Stationary Co., 1913); John P. Frank, Justice Daniel Dissenting: A Biography of Peter V.



and dissertations mention the Junto and its role in Jacksonian politics, almost all of them following the interpretation laid out by Charles Ambler early in the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Ambler's work on Thomas Ritchie and on sectionalism in antebellum Virginia remain valuable, but surely it is time to reexamine the dynamics of party politics in Jacksonian Virginia.

Historians have written some fine biographies of prominent early nineteenth century Virginians, including Littleton Waller Tazewell, David Campbell, Charles Fenton Mercer, William Cabell Rives, James Barbour and Henry Wise.<sup>5</sup>

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Daniel, 1784-1860 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964); Francis Fry Wayland, Andrew Stevenson: Democrat and Diplomat, 1785-1857 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949).

<sup>4</sup>Charles Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia From 1776 to 1861 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press); Harry Ammon, "The Republican Party in Virginia, 1789 to 1824" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1948); Clyde C. Gelbach, "Spencer Roane of Virginia, 1762-1822: A Judicial Advocate of State Rights" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1955); Margaret E. Horsnell, "Spencer Roane: Judicial Advocate of Jeffersonian Principles" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1967); Bert Marsh Mutersbaugh, "Jeffersonian Journalist: Thomas Ritchie and the Richmond Enquirer, 1804-1820" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1973); Norman Risjord, The Old Republicans: Southern Conservatism in the Age of Jefferson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

<sup>5</sup>Norma Lois Peterson, Littleton Waller Tazewell (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983); Norma Taylor Mitchell, "The Political Career of Governor David Campbell of Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1967); Douglas R. Egerton, Charles Fenton Mercer and the Trial of National Conservatism (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989); Raymond C. Dingleline, Jr., "The Political Career of William Cabell Rives" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1947); Charles D. Lowery, James Barbour: A Jeffersonian Republican (University, Al: The University of

The focus of these works, however, remains on these men and their careers at the national level. Few of them deal extensively with state politics during the Jacksonian period. Also scarce are studies of particular regions or counties within Virginia during this period.<sup>6</sup> We still know very little about political change and debate on the local level in the Old Dominion between 1790 and 1860. Three dissertations on Virginia political developments merit special mention. Lynwood Miller Dent has written a thorough and sound history of the Virginia Democratic Party that the Junto controlled in the 1820s and 1830s. The complicated but crucial debate over Martin Van Buren's subtreasury plan and its impact on Virginia politics is clarified by Harold Moser. Finally, Katherine Ruth Malone's study offers a thoughtful and penetrating examination of the role of "fundamental principles" in Virginia during the early 19th century.<sup>7</sup> Each of these works helps to illuminate the nature

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Alabama Press, 1984); Craig M. Simpson, A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>One notable exception is Daniel W. Crofts, Old Southampton: Politics and Society in a Virginia County, 1834-1869 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

<sup>7</sup>Lynwood Miller Dent, Jr., "The Virginia Democratic Party, 1824-1847" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1974); Harold D. Moser, "Subtreasury Politics and the Virginia Conservative Democrats, 1835-1844" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1977); Katherine Ruth Malone, "The Virginia Doctrines, the Commonwealth, and the Republic: The Role of Fundamental Principles in Virginia Politics, 1798-1833" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1981).

of political culture in Jacksonian Virginia. This study seeks to expand upon these works and fill many of the gaps still remaining in the historiography of antebellum Virginia political history by examining the Richmond Junto and their role in bringing Jacksonian democracy to the Old Dominion.

Before charting the influence of the Richmond Junto, it must first be established that such an organization existed. There is no definitive proof of this: no secret diaries, no minutes of meeting, no confessions from supposed members. This is not unexpected, since no one, then or now, denied that the group lacked formal organization or structure. But substantial circumstantial evidence can be cited to support claims that the Junto was real and exerted influence over political affairs. Most important in documenting the existence of the Junto are widespread mention of such a group in newspapers and private correspondence, second hand accounts of meetings of the clique as described by friends or relatives, and various accounts of political meetings held in Richmond in which Junto members were in control of the proceedings from beginning to end. The men most frequently mentioned as Junto associates - Thomas Ritchie, Andrew Stevenson, Peter V. Daniel, William H. Roane, Philip N. Nicholas, John Brockenbrough, and Richard E. Parker - also served repeatedly on the Democratic Party's Central Committee, the most influential political body in the state.

The Central Committee oversaw presidential campaigns in Virginia and enforced party discipline. In addition, these same men were among the very few Virginians who corresponded regularly with national party leaders such as Martin Van Buren. Given these pieces of evidence, it can be safely argued that an organization popularly known as the Richmond Party, or Junto, existed in Jacksonian Virginia.<sup>8</sup>

Scholars agree that the Junto emerged during Thomas Jefferson's presidential bid in 1800, when concerned Virginians banded together to assure their leader's victory at the polls. In its earliest incarnation, the Junto, led by Wilson Cary Nicholas and Spencer Roane, worked merely as a semi-formal organizing committee that oversaw Jefferson's campaign. Gradually, the scope of its operation and influence spread in the first two decades of the 19th century. But the group still lacked cohesion and was active only during the quadrennial presidential elections.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>The Junto had many names, the most common of which were the Richmond Party and the Richmond Junto. But the group was also referred to as the Central Influence, the Central Junto, and the Junta. In naming the circle the Richmond or Central Junto, opponents drew upon traditional fears of a small clique of men secretly controlling the state's political affairs from the seat of power, the state capital. The word junto, or junta, entered the English language in the early 17th century and carried connotations of despotic rule and secret cabals like the "archetypal Whig Junto of William III's and Queen Anne's time." See Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (1991) and The Random House Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language (1981 edition). Quote from Harrison, "Oligarchs and Democrats," 186.

<sup>9</sup>Beach, "Spencer Roane and the Richmond Junto," 1-17; Ammon, "The Richmond Junto," 395-418.

A rejuvenated Junto emerged after the War of 1812 when Roane led an attack against the nationalistic policies of the federal government. In a series of widely read essays, Roane warned of the dangerous consequences of a loose construction of the Constitution and of consolidating power in the hands of the federal government. While Roane remained leader of the group, Thomas Ritchie, his cousin and editor of the Richmond Enquirer, was using his paper to reassert the primacy of the so-called "Virginia Principles" or "Principles of '98." Built around the ideas articulated in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions and James Madison's Report of 1799, the "Virginia Principles" Ritchie described rested squarely on the foundations of the state rights concept of government.<sup>10</sup>

After Roane and Nicholas both died in the early 1820s, Ritchie became the undisputed leader of the Junto, a position he never relinquished. In fact, after 1824 it would be more accurate to refer to the group as Ritchie's Junto. Ritchie had come to Richmond early in the century after briefly trying his hand at teaching, the law, and medicine. He finally found his calling when he began editing the Richmond Enquirer in 1804. Soon Ritchie's paper was the dominant one in the state, and the only one, Thomas Jefferson remarked, worth reading. Ritchie's intense support

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<sup>10</sup>For a complete explication of the "Virginia principles", see Malone, "The Virginia Doctrines."

for state rights and his familial connection with both Nicholas and Roane allowed him to gain stature both state-wide and within the Junto.<sup>11</sup>

As leader and spokesman of the Junto and editor of the most widely read paper in the state, Ritchie exerted enormous influence in Virginia affairs between 1815 and 1845, when he moved to Washington to edit the Union, the Polk administration paper. Throughout his career in Richmond, Ritchie's overriding political goals were to build party unity and to ease regional tensions in the Old Dominion. Despite his devotion to state rights, the editor treasured the Union and condemned those who threatened to tear it apart for petty reasons, such as South Carolina Nullifiers or northern abolitionists. Ritchie, an awkward looking man who lacked public speaking skills, astutely avoided the spotlight, never held elective office, and repeatedly turned down offers to move his base of operation to Washington. Thomas Ritchie was a force that virtually everyone in Jacksonian Virginia had to contend with at one time or another.

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<sup>11</sup>Biographical account of Thomas Ritchie by Margaret Ritchie Stone, MS, [n.d.], Ritchie-Harrison Papers, College of William and Mary; Ambler, Thomas Ritchie, 9-12; Mutersbaugh, "Jeffersonian Journalist," 10-22. Ritchie was the cousin of Spencer Roane, John and William Brockenbrough, and the brother-in-law of Richard E. Parker. Stevenson married a Brockenbrough and Philip N. Nicholas courted Spencer Roane's daughter after his first wife died. Ritchie, Stevenson, P.N. Nicholas, Daniel, and John Brockenbrough were all neighbors in the Shockhoe Hill area of Richmond. Harrison, "Oligarchs and Democrats," 190; Ambler, Thomas Ritchie, 11-16.

Ritchie's lieutenants, those who formed the inner circle of the Junto, were also powerful and respected men. Peter V. Daniel was a lawyer, judge, long-time Lieutenant Governor, and Supreme Court Justice from 1841 to 1860. Daniel served as the inside source of information for the Junto on the General Assembly and the Executive Council. Daniel's devotion to Jackson and his party outmatched even Ritchie's. Andrew Stevenson, a professional politician, diplomat, and arch-intriguer, was elected Speaker of House in 1827 and later appointed Minister to Great Britain. By all accounts Stevenson was vain, pompous, and widely despised, but he was the Junto's man in Washington.<sup>12</sup> A third member of the clique, John Brockenbrough, served as President of the Bank of Virginia for decades. Junto meetings were frequently held at his residence, which later became the White House of the Confederacy.<sup>13</sup> His brother, Judge William Brockenbrough, was also a Junto associate at times. Two more men rounded out the inner circle of the Junto. William H. Roane, a planter and politician, son of Junto founder Spencer Roane and grandson of Patrick Henry, served as United States Senator from 1837 to 1841. Although a pale imitation of his father, William was a faithful

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<sup>12</sup>Frank, Justice Daniel Dissenting, viii-ix; Wayland, Andrew Stevenson, 1-77.

<sup>13</sup>Ambler, Thomas Ritchie, 15-16, 27.

supporter and party hack.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Philip N. Nicholas, the popular younger brother of Wilson Cary Nicholas, wore many hats. As a planter, politician, judge and banker, Nicholas built up enough of a following across the state to run briefly as a vice-presidential candidate in 1832, against the Junto's wishes.<sup>15</sup>

The men who made up the Richmond Junto lived in a society marked by dramatic change. The story of Virginia in the years between 1815 and 1845 is largely one of people coming to terms with the remarkable transformations taking place in their daily lives. As the country developed and expanded, and as technology began to revolutionize every facet of life, Virginians struggled to adjust to these changes.<sup>16</sup> The modern world seemed very different from the world of their fathers. Life had seemed simpler and purer then. Right and wrong were easy to distinguish. A man knew his place in society, and what was expected of him. People

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<sup>14</sup>Ambler, Thomas Ritchie, 146, 185; Ninety-Second Congress, First Session, Biographical Directory of the American Congress, 1774-1971 (United States Government Printing Office, 1971), 1615.

<sup>15</sup>Thomas P. Abernethy, "Philip N. Nicholas", Dumas Malone, ed., Dictionary of American Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962, originally published 1934), 7:484-485. Abernethy describes Nicholas as a member of the Junto and as "one of the guiding forces in the establishment of the Jacksonian party in Virginia."

<sup>16</sup>Historians have recently stressed the centrality of the Market Revolution in reshaping life during the Jacksonian period. For an excellent summary of the literature on this topic, see Charles Sellers, The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).



around the country admired Virginia and accepted its leadership in national affairs. But now all of the security and pride of that older order was being eroded by a society that revolved around impersonal social and economic transactions and political opportunism. Commercial centers like New York and Philadelphia were increasing their realm of influence, and Virginia's vaunted position in the Union was steadily slipping.

Virginians responded to these changes with words and actions marked by confusion, anger, and desperation. Strong feelings of nostalgia, of better days gone by, pervaded public discourse.<sup>17</sup> The example of their fathers, the men who had fought for independence and forged a government and society unlike any other, was both an inspiration and a burden to them. While they could point to a firm set of goals to follow and ideas to emulate, the new generation of Virginians also realized that they could never measure up to the deeds and the wisdom of their fathers. No matter what the post-revolutionary generation accomplished, the memory of the Founding Fathers would forever overshadow them. The Junto operated within this framework, and many of its

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<sup>17</sup>Robert P. Sutton, "Nostalgia, Pessimism, and Malaise: The Doomed Aristocrat in Late-Jeffersonian Virginia," VMHB, Vol. 76 (1968), 41-55; Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., "The Declension of Virginia, 1776-1860: An Historiographical Perspective," unpublished paper, 1990. Daniel Jordan describes the essence of politics in late Jeffersonian Virginia as "a stressful blend of change and continuity." Jordan, Political Leadership in Jefferson's Virginia (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 13.

actions can be seen as an effort to recapture and reestablish what it believed was the purity of the founding of the nation.

In Virginia, the spirit of the revolutionary generation, including Washington, Jefferson, and Madison, must have been especially strong. Yet the new generation of state leaders had other concerns as well, more concrete ones that compounded their anxiety and confusion. The exodus of farmers from Virginia to the west and southwest continued unabated throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The state's population, wealth, and prestige were all on the decline. Regional disputes between the farmers of the west and the planters of the east kept tensions high for decades, and during the 1829-1830 constitutional convention, threats of disunion were commonplace. Then Nat Turner's slave rebellion shocked the state, touching off a frank and painful debate on the future of the peculiar institution in the Old Dominion. Political struggles grew so intense that men were publicly assaulted for expressing their views. In short, the first half of the nineteenth century proved to be a stressful and confusing period to many in the Old Dominion.

As the world changed around them, Virginians maintained a profound ambivalence about progress and its consequences. They were delighted at the benefits of the Market Revolution and eagerly sought to partake of them. Men of all political

persuasions called for internal improvement projects, for stable banks, and for extended trade. Yet steeped as they were in a political culture that prided itself on stability, deference, and order, many Virginians were inherently suspicious of innovation. They understood clearly that their traditional society and way of life were under attack. Some welcomed the change, but many more were willing to fight to preserve their heritage, especially in the realm of political ideology. A great majority of politically-minded Virginians continued to cherish the ideas of classical republicanism as they had been formulated and expressed in Revolutionary America. Virginians, and the Junto, placed special emphasis on the dangers of the consolidation of centralized power and the necessity of virtue and disinterestedness in government.<sup>18</sup> Failure to avoid either of these would inevitably lead to corruption, tyranny, and the destruction of the Union. Strict adherence to the tenets of this philosophy was necessary, then, in order to insure the independence, liberty, and equality of the people. So pervasive was this belief system in the state that those men who broke away from the Jacksonian ranks in the early 1830s

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<sup>18</sup>On classical republicanism and its continuing influence, see Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Gordon Wood, The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969); Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," WMQ, 3rd series, Vol. 29 (1972), 49-80.

to form an anti-administration party chose to explain their actions by insisting that Jackson was abusing his executive powers and threatening to overthrow the government. Because of their commitment to this political ideology, Virginians resisted efforts to amend or discard it. They also moved slowly to accept the new definitions of party that were being formulated in the Jacksonian period. Experience, they argued, had proven that the precepts of classical republicanism represented the best guideline for the country to follow.

Early nineteenth century Virginians, then, tended to interpret their world through the ideas and beliefs of their fathers. The political philosophy forged in the 1770s to oppose British rule was still potent fifty years later. Indeed, the key to understanding Virginia's actions in the Age of Jackson is acknowledging its devotion to the revolutionary ideology of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. The great tension in the lives of many Virginians, one that resonated in every facet of their existence, was the need to preserve, to conserve, their republican heritage in a modernizing society.

This brief examination of Virginia society helps to put into perspective the outlook and actions of the Junto. Two central goals bound the clique together and gave it purpose. The first and most important goal of the Junto was the articulation and preservation of the state rights argument.

In 1830 Ritchie summed up the guiding sentiment of the group in a letter to William Cabell Rives. "You must not be surprized," the editor wrote, "to find us pressing at this time our old State Rights doctrine ...; believing that they alone will save the country from the gulf of consolidation - and that if we give up now, we are gone forever."<sup>19</sup> Like many Jacksonians, Ritchie viewed the political world in terms of an apocalyptic struggle between the forces of liberty and the forces of power. An excess of either was dangerous; too much liberty produced anarchy; too much power led to autocratic rule.<sup>20</sup> At times the Junto equated liberty with the rights of the states, and power with the federal government. The group believed that it must constantly be wary of attempts to augment the powers granted to the government in Washington.

The second major focus of the Junto was a desire to revitalize Virginia socially, economically, and politically; to restore the state to its former glory by increasing its influence in national councils, improving transportation networks, and by encouraging social and benevolent reform. To achieve the latter two goals, Junto members joined and worked with a number of private and public organizations

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<sup>19</sup>Thomas Ritchie to William Cabell Rives, April 15, 1830, William Cabell Rives Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>20</sup>Harry Watson, Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America (New York: Noonday Press, 1990), 43-44.

dedicated to reviving the state's economy and culture.<sup>21</sup> In political affairs, the Junto worked to boost Virginia's power by serving as the leader of the southern wing of the national Jackson party. This entailed maintaining party orthodoxy and following the dictates of party leaders, something that was not always easy for independent minded Virginians. Ritchie spent a great deal of time on issues involving party discipline and often met with strong resistance from the rank and file members of the party. At times, even he and fellow Junto members balked at the actions of Jackson and Van Buren. To a large degree, however, the Junto's efforts to link Virginia with the national Democratic party proved successful.

The Junto's actions were guided by efforts to achieve its two paramount objectives. Those policies and leaders most likely to preserve state rights and increase Virginia's influence were supported; those that did not were opposed. In 1824, that logic led Ritchie and the Junto to back William H. Crawford for the presidency. During the campaign, the Junto joined with Martin Van Buren and his Albany Regency in an attempt to reforge the New York-Virginia alliance that had once controlled national politics. Crawford's crushing defeat at the national level led to a shakeup of Virginia's Republican Party, but did not

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<sup>21</sup>Stevenson, Ritchie, John Brockenbrough, and Parker, for instance, were all board members of the Richmond Lancasterian School that opened in 1816. Wayland, Andrew Stevenson, 34.

significantly weaken the Junto. In fact, the notion of a "corrupt bargain" and John Q. Adams's nationalistic measures proved so unpopular in Virginia that the Junto moved gradually to support Jackson in 1828, despite the strong reservations that its members and most Virginians had about the military leader. By election day, these qualms had been forgotten, and Jackson was viewed as a crusading reformer who would return the country to its original purity and principles. The dramatic change in the way Virginians portrayed Jackson between 1824 and 1828 is one of the most striking developments of the period. Again, Ritchie and the Junto worked intimately with Van Buren during the campaign to help form the foundations of a national Jackson coalition.

Jackson's election in 1828 was a sweet victory for the Junto, but they had little time to relish it. Jackson's decisions concerning appointments and other actions in his first administration quickly produced a split in the Virginia Jacksonian party ranks that was exacerbated by the power struggle between Van Buren and John C. Calhoun in 1829 and 1830. Some Virginians made it clear that they did not care for the New Yorker, but the Junto was determined to keep its strong ties with Van Buren, who by late 1830 seemed positioned as Jackson's successor. At the same time, a constitutional convention revealed the depth of sectional antagonism in the state. Ritchie supported many of the

reform measures proposed by western Virginians, as did most of the Junto, except for those members who were closely tied to eastern plantations. A bitter debate on the future of slavery in Virginia and an aborted attempt to keep Van Buren off of the party's ticket in the state kept the Junto busy in 1831 and 1832. Despite defections from the Jacksonian ranks, Old Hickory himself remained enormously popular in Virginia, and he swept to an easy victory in 1832, capturing eighty percent of the popular vote.

After Jackson's re-election, the Junto enjoyed a commanding position in state political leadership. Then two events badly split the party and weakened the Junto's grip on political control. Jackson's handling of the Nullification Crisis - specifically, the Proclamation and the Force Bill - outraged many Virginians devoted to state rights. Both measures, critics claimed, smacked strongly of executive usurpation. Somehow, the Junto managed to hold the party together during the crisis, but not before several key politicians had abandoned the Jacksonian coalition. Even more costly to the Junto was Jackson's decision to remove federal deposits from the Bank of the United States in 1834. Again, Virginians committed to state rights expressed their displeasure at this act of presidential high-handedness. The Junto was split itself on the question of banking, and failed to keep the party unified on this question.

Jackson's policies and flamboyant personality cost him



support in Virginia. Defectors increased, and by 1834 opposition to his rule had coalesced in the form of the Whig party, who exploited public dissatisfaction with the president and won control of the state legislature. The Whigs promptly stripped Ritchie of his position as public printer and removed fellow Junto member Peter V. Daniel from the state's Executive Council. The Junto countered by portraying the Whigs as wealthy and corrupt men and by returning to the old themes of reform and fundamental principles. Even though the Democrats recaptured control of the legislature in 1835, both the party and the Junto lacked the cohesion and unity of purpose that they had once had.

The Whigs tried unsuccessfully to defeat the Democrats in 1836 by claiming that Van Buren held abolitionist sentiments. The Junto denounced these charges sharply and backed the New Yorker in the strongest terms. When Van Buren carried Virginia that year, it was the first time that the state's vote had gone to a northern candidate. Economic problems early in his administration badly hurt Van Buren, and by 1837 a conservative revolt in Virginia, led by William Cabell Rives, began to draw people away from the traditional power base of the Junto. The Conservatives under Rives tapped into discontent with Van Buren and his economic policies and helped the Whigs to regain power in 1838.

Although the Junto managed to put together enough support to carry Virginia for Van Buren by the slimmest of

margins in 1840, the nature of politics in Virginia was changing and the Junto's power was on the decline. The question of slavery, which Ritchie and the Junto had tried to keep out of public debate, was playing an increasingly prominent role in Virginia politics. An equally significant development was the reemergence of John C. Calhoun as a key player in the Democratic party. In the late 1820s and early 1830s Calhoun was viewed as too radical by most Virginians, but by 1840 his ideas appealed to many men in the state who had experienced a decade of economic and political strife. A new generation of political leaders in the Old Dominion seemed especially interested in the South Carolinian. Calhoun Democrats became potent enough in the early 1840s to challenge the Junto for control of the party.

Faced with attacks from both the Whigs and the Calhoun Democrats, the Junto attempted to redeem its standing in the state by severing its relationship with Van Buren over the question of annexing Texas in 1844. By then it was too late. The group no longer spoke for Virginia. The increasingly strident position of Southern spokesmen on the question of slavery left little room for compromise and conciliation, the forte of Ritchie and his group. The editor, dismayed by developments in his beloved state, finally agreed to leave Richmond in 1845 to run a national paper in Washington. With Ritchie's departure, the Junto breathed its last.

This dissertation explores and assesses the ways in which one group of men confronted the tensions and contradictions facing Americans in the early nineteenth century. The Richmond Junto played a key role in shaping Virginia's actions during the period known as the Age of Jackson. Like many Virginians, the member's response to the transformations taking place in their society was ambivalent. The Junto, for instance, believed in preserving both the doctrines of state rights and a strong federal Union. While this may appear paradoxical, to the members of the Junto it seemed an appropriate response. Ritchie, Daniel, and the others lived dual lives. They were Virginians first, heirs to a remarkably rich political tradition. But they were also Americans, the first generation to be raised as citizens of the United States. These men desired both a rejuvenated Virginia and a strong and prosperous country. They saw these goals as being interconnected, not antithetical. In his will, Ritchie reminded his fellow citizens to "Preserve both the Rights of the Union and the Rights of the States. These are the two great pillars of American prosperity and glory."<sup>22</sup> Ritchie died in 1854, just a few years before the two things that he loved the most, Virginia and the Federal Union, dissolved their relationship and engaged in civil war.

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<sup>22</sup>Cited in Ambler, Thomas Ritchie, 300.

## Chapter I

### "Sentinels of Liberty": The Revival of State Rights, 1815-1824

In the years following the Treaty of Ghent, the rise of American nationalism prompted Virginia's republicans to reaffirm their faith in the Jeffersonian principles of state rights. Alarmed at the direction in which the nation and the commonwealth seemed headed after the War of 1812, the state's Republican party, guided by the Richmond Junto, fought tirelessly to stop the "fashionable heresies of the time" before they brought permanent ruin to the Union. The Junto, a small coterie of politicians headquartered in Virginia's capital, firmly believed that the best antidote to the consolidating tendencies of the central government was a revival of the fundamental principles of the republican faith.<sup>1</sup> The Panic of 1819, the Marshall Court's

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<sup>1</sup>Richmond Enquirer (hereafter cited as RE), July 17, 1821. The importance of the Enquirer to early 19th century Virginians, especially in the realm of politics, has been noted by historians, but bears repeating. Founded in 1804, the paper quickly became the medium through which most politically-minded Virginians got their information. Ritchie's paper had the highest circulation in the state until 1842. Robert Hume Tomlinson, "The Origins and Editorial Policies of The Richmond Whig and Public Advertiser, 1824-1865" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1971), 3.

decisions in *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819) and *Cohens v. Virginia* (1821), Clay's American System, and the Missouri Crisis were all signs that the federal government, now under the control of northern politicians and capitalists, had dedicated itself to the destruction of the powers and liberties of the states.

Spencer Roane, an early leader of the Junto, summarized the sentiment of Virginia's political elite in 1819 when he noted that the "tendency of the general government to aggrandize itself and to sweep away the State authorities" was undeniable. "If a powerful counteraction is not made, every thing will be lost. Our confederation will be but a name, and the liberties of the people will fall with the State governments." Virginians, with their distinguished history of leadership in the nation, must again rise to the occasion and repel the assaults on the sovereignty of the states. "Whenever state rights are threatened or invaded," Junto spokesmen pledged, "Virginia will not be the last to sound the tocsin."<sup>2</sup>

A second and equally important motivation for recommitting the Old Dominion to the tenets of Jeffersonian republicanism concerned the declining influence of the state in national affairs. That Virginia's prestige had slipped seemed obvious to party leaders, as obvious as the challenge

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<sup>2</sup>Spencer Roane to James Barbour, Dec. 29, 1819, William and Mary Quarterly, series 1, Vol. 10 (1901-1902), 7-8; RE, March 30, 1819.

to the state's authority posed by the centralizing policies of the federal government. By spearheading a reaction against nationalism, the Junto hoped that Virginia, birthplace of Washington, Henry, Jefferson, and Madison, would resume its rightful place in the nation's councils. The usually astute John Quincy Adams thought he discerned the true reasons for the state's actions when he noted that "Virginia opposition ... to implied powers ... is a convenient weapon, to be taken up or laid aside as it suits the purposes of State turbulence and ambition."<sup>3</sup>

At the forefront of the movement to revive state rights ideology in Virginia stood Spencer Roane and Thomas Ritchie. Roane, judge of the supreme court of Virginia, guided the Junto until his death in 1822. In his attacks on John Marshall's Supreme Court, Roane provided an ideological rationale for anti-nationalistic sentiment in the state. By all accounts a zealous partisan and a throwback to an earlier age, the jurist looked to the past for his inspiration and deprecated the democratic urges of the day. Roane's arguments were derived largely from the ideas of the Old Republicans, men like John Randolph of Roanoke and John Taylor of Caroline, who can accurately be described as rigid

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<sup>3</sup>Oct. 28, 1821; quoted in Harry Ammon, "The Richmond Junto, 1800-1824," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. 61 (1953), 409.

conservatives and ultra-strict constructionists.<sup>4</sup>

After Roane's death in 1822, new leaders gained power, men who had different notions of how to wage the war on centralization. Thomas Ritchie, Roane's cousin and editor of the Richmond Enquirer, assumed leadership of the clique. Although he shared the same goals as Roane, the reawakening of a "spirit of republicanism" and the restoration of Virginia's influence at the national level, Ritchie exhibited more moderation and willingness to compromise than his kinsman. The editor believed that the Junto could best achieve its goals by keeping the Republican party, and the state, unified. That entailed making compromises, assuaging sectional tensions, and discarding some of the more extreme Old Republican principles.<sup>5</sup> The Junto, now led by Ritchie, Andrew Stevenson, Peter V. Daniel, John and William Brockenbrough, Richard E. Parker, and William H. Roane, also worked diligently to reestablish the Virginia-New York

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<sup>4</sup>Rex Beach, "Spencer Roane and the Richmond Junto," WMO, 2nd series, Vol. 22 (1942), 1-17; Clyde C. Gelbach, "Spencer Roane of Virginia, 1762-1822: A Judicial Advocate of State Rights" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1955); Margaret E. Horsnell, "Spencer Roane: Judicial Advocate of Jeffersonian Principle" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1967). Roane awaits a skillful biographer. For the Old Republicans, see Norman Risjord, The Old Republicans: Southern Conservatism in the Age of Jefferson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

<sup>5</sup>"A Virginian," RE, April 30, 1819. Charles H. Ambler, Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics (Richmond: Bell Book & Stationary Co., 1913); Bert Marsh Mutersbaugh, "Jeffersonian Journalist: Thomas Ritchie and the Richmond Enquirer, 1804-1820" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, 1973).

alliance that had guided the country in its infancy. The state could never stand up to the federal government alone, they reasoned, especially when critics around the country were complaining about the influence Virginia had on national political affairs. Thus, when Martin Van Buren, leader of the Albany Regency and the New York Republican party, visited Richmond in 1822 and 1823 to discuss a possible alliance he found a receptive audience. As the presidential election of 1824 neared, the forces of the Regency and the Junto joined in an effort to elect William H. Crawford. Van Buren and Ritchie agreed that Crawford represented the best hope of saving the Republican party and the country in a time of such crisis.<sup>6</sup>

Crawford's defeat at the hands of John Quincy Adams proved a bitter blow to Van Buren, the Virginia Republican party, and the Junto, but not a fatal one. In fact, the inner circle at Richmond managed to retain a good deal of political power within the state. Moreover, their efforts to revive the state rights philosophy in the commonwealth had begun to bear fruit.<sup>7</sup> Adams's victory had been a setback, to

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<sup>6</sup>For Van Buren's trips to Richmond and the renewal of the Virginia-New York alliance, see Robert V. Remini, Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959); Richard H. Brown "Southern Planters and Plain Republicans of the North: Martin Van Buren's Formula for National Politics" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1955).

<sup>7</sup>In 1819 Roane noted that a "revival of the spirit and principles of 1799 has ... taken place here." Roane to Barbour, Dec. 29, 1819, WMO, series 1, Vol. 10 (1901-1902), 7-



be sure, but the Junto refused to give up their fight to save Virginia from the dangers of consolidation. "There is yet a Spartan band to rally around the rights of 'the States' and of 'the people,'" Ritchie wrote in February of 1825, "who though defeated, will persist.... The Old Dominion is firm, fearless and unshaken."<sup>8</sup>

The defiant tone of Ritchie's words was a hallmark of the Old Dominion's response to the events of the late-Jeffersonian era. Virginians spoke out so forcefully against the policies of nationalism because they believed that the stakes were so high. Since 1800 orthodox Republicans had accepted the doctrines of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions and Madison's Report of 1800 as the essence of their political creed. The notion of state sovereignty and a strict construction of the powers of the federal government constituted the most fundamental tenets of what was popularly known as the "Virginia principles." Intertwined with this devotion to state rights were concerns about the purity of the republican experiment. Many Virginians believed that efforts to increase the power of the general government fostered corruption and tyranny and threatened the independence of the individual citizen. If unchecked, such policies threatened to topple republicanism in the

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8. Early in 1822 Ritchie spoke of the increased vigilance of the state in its efforts to stop the "march of usurpation." RE, Jan. 5, 1822.

<sup>8</sup>RE, Feb. 12, 1825.

young nation.<sup>9</sup>

Virginia's political faith seemed to be under full attack as early as 1815. Economic nationalism and judicial review threatened to upset the delicate balance between the powers of the state and federal governments outlined in the Constitution. If these dangerous doctrines were not resisted and put down, the results would be catastrophic. A corrupt and powerful national government would reduce the states to a permanently subservient position and steadily reduce the sphere of liberty in the country. Something must be done to preserve the powers of the states, and Virginia, with its revolutionary heritage and prominent place in the Union, was uniquely qualified to lead the attack. The sense of urgency many Virginians felt during these years can be seen in the response of "Nestor" to the Supreme Court's ruling in *Cohens v. Virginia* (1821). Would Virginia "succumb" to the "usurped powers" of the court, he asked, or act to prove that "she is still a FREE, SOVEREIGN, and INDEPENDENT state." The "eyes of the nation," he noted, "are anxiously looking toward Richmond" to see how the state would respond.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Kathryn Ruth Malone, "The Virginia Doctrines, the Commonwealth, and the Republic: The Role of Fundamental Principles in Virginia Politics, 1798-1833" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1981), describes the state's devotion to the principles of 1798 and persuasively argues that they "served as the articulated outline of the ideology which shaped the political culture" of Virginia in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. (10)

<sup>10</sup>"Nestor," RE, Jan. 10, 1822.

Despite the inflammatory rhetoric, "Nestor's" warning contained some truth. How the Old Dominion responded to the challenges posed by nationalism was important and was closely monitored across the nation. In 1822 a Virginian still occupied the White House, Jefferson and Madison still engendered national respect, and the state still ranked near the top in population and wealth. Developments in Virginia between 1815 and 1824 clearly had national significance.

The first signs of the state's uneasiness with national events came shortly after the War of 1812. Most Virginians had supported "Mr. Madison's war" and experienced the heady nationalism of the day. But as the fighting ended and the glow of patriotism faded, the state's political leaders found themselves confronted with a daunting series of problems. While events at the national level portended ill for the rights of the state, the discontent of western Virginians threatened to divide the state along regional lines and weaken the power of the inner circle at Richmond. Political leaders in western Virginia stepped up their call for improved transportation networks, expanded state banking facilities, and democratic constitutional reform. In 1816, the same year that Ritchie signalled the Junto's break with the national party by speaking out against the tariff and the rechartering of the Bank of the United States, disgruntled westerners convened in Staunton and proposed

widespread changes to the state's constitution.<sup>11</sup>

The result of the nationalistic measures of Congress and of the Supreme Court and the grumblings within the state for reform was a headlong charge back into the particularist doctrines of the state rights school, led by the Junto. One sign of this return to the principles of 1798 was the restoration to party favor of Randolph and Taylor, who had kept the torch of the "Virginia principles" alive during the high-tide of nationalism. Both men had temporarily fallen from grace with party leaders earlier for criticizing Jefferson's second administration and opposing James Madison's presidential candidacy in 1808.<sup>12</sup> Randolph's refusal to support the War of 1812 and his charge that the country was "enveloped in the toils of French duplicity" cost him at the polls as well, where his constituents ousted him from office for the only time in his long career. Taylor's warnings against the "wartime extension of federal

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<sup>11</sup>Charles Ambler, Sectionalism in Virginia From 1776 to 1861 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), 93-102. For Ritchie's break with party leadership, see the Enquirer, March-August, 1816, passim.

<sup>12</sup>For Randolph's well-known break with Jefferson, see Russell Kirk, John Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in American Politics (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1978); Robert Dawidoff, The Education of John Randolph (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1979), esp. ch. 5; for Taylor's opposition to Jefferson, see his letter to James Madison, Jan. 15, 1808, James Madison Papers, University of Virginia; Daniel P. Jordan, Political Leadership in Jefferson's Virginia (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 19. Ammon discusses the two men's role in the election of 1808 in "The Richmond Junto, 1800-1824," 403-405.

powers" in An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States, published in 1814, went largely unnoticed amidst the celebrations of the Battle of New Orleans and the news of a peace treaty.<sup>13</sup> But developments after the war vindicated Taylor and Randolph, and by 1817 they were being hailed as true republicans and restored to their rightful place as party spokesmen.<sup>14</sup> With new found unity, the Republican party of Virginia marshalled its forces for the fight against the dangers of nationalism.

An early target of the Junto was the Supreme Court. Between 1816 and 1821, the high tribunal handed down three decisions that sparked controversy in Virginia and strengthened devotion to the principles of '98. In 1816, the court's verdict in *Martin v. Hunter's Lessee*, concerning the fate of the Fairfax land grants, "did much to diminish

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<sup>13</sup>John Randolph, "To the Freeholders of Charlotte, Prince Edward, Buckingham, and Cumberland," May 30, 1812, reprinted in Kirk, John Randolph of Roanoke, 238-243, quote on 243; John Taylor, An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States (Fredericksburg, Va: Green and Cady, 1814), as discussed in Risjord, The Old Republicans, 149; Robert Shalhope, John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980). On Randolph and Taylor's ostracism, see Ammon, "The Richmond Junto," 404-405.

<sup>14</sup>The timing of Randolph and Taylor's restoration is disputed. I agree with Malone, "The Virginia Doctrines," 160; Risjord, The Old Republicans, 177; and Jordan, Political Leadership, 19, that it came about by 1817 or so. Ammon, in "The Richmond Junto," 404-405, argues that reconciliation did not take place until 1820, as does Charles D. Lowery, James Barbour, A Jeffersonian Republican (University, Al: The University of Alabama Press, 1984), 58, 133.

nationalistic sentiment" in the state.<sup>15</sup> When the justices ruled three years later in *McCulloch v. Maryland* that a state could not tax the Bank of the United States, political leaders in the Old Dominion spoke out strongly against both the Court and the bank it defended.<sup>16</sup> Finally, in *Cohens v. Virginia*, Virginians expressed outrage when the Court accepted a case appealed from the highest court in the state.<sup>17</sup>

Each of the court's rulings, derived from a loose construction of the Constitution, elicited vigorous response from Virginia Republicans. Spencer Roane was especially active in attacking Marshall and his fellow justices. In a series of essays written under the pseudonym of "Hampden," Roane lambasted the reasoning of the *McCulloch* decision and began an extensive reformulation of the theory that the Constitution protected state sovereignty by clearly limiting

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<sup>15</sup>Ambler, Sectionalism, 103.

<sup>16</sup>Chief Justice John Marshall, a neighbor of most of the Junto members and source of their irritation on this matter, commented extensively on the negative reaction in Virginia towards the Court's ruling in *McCulloch v. Maryland*. "Great dissatisfaction has been given to the politicians of Virginia by our opinion on the bank question," he told Bushrod Washington. They will attack the decision in the papers and we will be "condemned as a pack of consolidating aristocrats." Marshall to Washington, March 27, 1819, John Marshall Papers, College of William and Mary.

<sup>17</sup>Marshall thought that this decision "has been assaulted with a degree of virulence transcending what has appeared on any former occasion." Marshall to Joseph Story, June 15, 1821, Marshall Papers, William and Mary (typescript copy of original in Massachusetts Historical Society).

the powers of the central government. Two years later, in 1821, Roane wrote again, this time in response to *Cohens*. Thinly disguised as "Algernon Sidney," the jurist continued his attack on the high court and his campaign to instill a state rights ideology among his countrymen. Roane's essays constitute an excellent summary of the southern state rights' platform as it stood in the early 1820s. As such, they merit careful consideration.<sup>18</sup>

In his essays Roane set out to awaken his fellow countrymen "from the fatal coma which has fallen upon them" and to warn of the "progress of federal usurpation." In order to do this, to stop the dangerous expansion of the powers of the central government, Roane proposed a "recurrence to fundamental principles" and a reexamination of the nature of the Constitution.<sup>19</sup>

Roane argued that the compact that formed the Union in 1789 represented the culmination of the ideals of the American Revolution. In their desire to create a strong and permanent union, the writers of the Constitution had been

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<sup>18</sup>"Hampden," RE, June 11, 15, 18, 22, 1819, reprinted in John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College, Vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1905), 77-121; "Algernon Sidney," RE, May 25, 29, June 5, 8, 1821, reprinted in Branch Historical Papers, Vol. 2, no. 2 (June 1906), 78-183. Until recently, scholars had also attributed the "Amphictyon" letters (RE, March 30, April 2, 1819) to Roane. Gerald Gunther, in the introduction to John Marshall's Defense of McCulloch v. Maryland (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969), has challenged that notion and named William Brockenbrough, another Junto member, as "Amphictyon."

<sup>19</sup>"Hampden," 121; "Algernon Sidney," 78-79.

wise enough to place limits on the powers that the national government could wield. The states had given up some of their powers in joining the Union, but maintained their sovereignty. The first ten amendments offered further safeguards against abuses of power and delegated all unspecified powers to the people and to the states. The hallmark of the Constitution, Roane concluded, was its deliberate efforts to preserve state sovereignty.<sup>20</sup>

Since the adoption of the Constitution, there had been those who had attempted to subvert its true meaning by giving inordinate powers to the central government. In 1798, the threat of the Federalists had been turned back by Jefferson and Madison's brilliant rebuttal in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions. The "Doctrines of '98" represented the "Magna Charta" of all true republicans and "its principles have only *been departed* from since by turn-coats and apostates." But the country was once again falling prey to the designs of the Federalists, who were even more dangerous now because they disguised themselves as Republicans. Under their influence, a "money-loving, funding, stock-jobbing spirit has taken foothold among us," Roane claimed. While the "liberties and constitution of our country are endangered," the people remained "sunk in

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<sup>20</sup>"Hampden," 79, 83-93; "Algernon Sidney," 97-99.



apathy."<sup>21</sup>

To make his countrymen aware of the dangers that confronted them, Roane spelled out the implications of the court's rulings. In *McCulloch v. Maryland*, Marshall and his fellow justices had sought "to adjudicate away the reserved rights of a sovereign member of the confederacy, and vest them in the general government." The consequences of this were plain for all to see. "If the limits imposed on the general government, by the constitution, are stricken off, they have, *literally*, the power to legislate for us 'in all cases whatsoever'; and then we may bid a last adieu to the State governments." Likewise, the *Cohens* decision "completely negatives the idea that the American States have a real existence, or are to be considered, in any sense, as sovereign and independent states."<sup>22</sup> Here was the essence of Roane's argument. Virginians and their fellow countrymen must resist the federalist pronouncements of the high court by adhering closely to the fundamental doctrines of the republican faith. To do otherwise would be tantamount to rejecting the principles that underlie the Constitution. Ignoring the threat posed by the Court could prove fatal to the rights of the states and the cause of liberty.

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<sup>21</sup>"Hampden," 82-83; "Algernon Sidney," 78. Roane chose his words well. His references to stock-jobbers and the evils of banking were clearly designed to evoke traditional opposition concern about the dangers of an artificial "paper aristocracy."

<sup>22</sup>"Hampden," 80-81; "Algernon Sidney," 80.

The "Hampden" and "Algernon Sidney" essays were widely applauded in Virginia and attracted the praise of Jefferson and Madison, but Roane was not alone in condemning the high court.<sup>23</sup> In 1819 the state legislature adopted one resolution, introduced by Junto member Andrew Stevenson, that suggested a constitutional amendment to limit the scope of the Supreme Court's powers, and a second that instructed its senators in Congress to oppose the Bank of the United States. Two years later the legislature approved three more amendments designed to reduce further the court's jurisdiction.<sup>24</sup>

Letters and editorials criticizing the high court and pleading for action on the part of the states appeared frequently in the columns of Ritchie's Enquirer. One writer insisted that the Supreme Court had interpreted the Constitution in a "directly different manner" than that intended by its framers. Another bemoaned the court's

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<sup>23</sup>Jefferson wrote Roane that the "Hampden" essays "contain the true principles of the revolution of 1800." Jefferson to Roane, Sept. 6, 1819, Paul L. Ford, ed., The Writings of Thomas Jefferson (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1899), 10:140-143. In 1821 Jefferson said of the jurist, "to him I look, and have long looked, as our strongest bulwark" against the forces of consolidation. Jefferson to Archibald Thweatt, Jan. 19, 1821, Ford, ed., Writings of Jefferson, 10:184-185. For praise of the "Algernon Sidney" letters, see Jefferson to Roane, June 25, 1821, Branch Historical Papers, Vol. 2, no. 1, (June 1905), 138-139, and Madison to Roane, June 29, 1821, James Madison Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>24</sup>Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia ... 1819 (Richmond: Thomas Ritchie, 1819), 56-59; Malone, "The Virginia Doctrines," 209; Ammon, "The Richmond Junto," 408; Ambler, Sectionalism, 104.

pronouncements and fretted over the declining "watchfulness and opposition" on the part of state rights' advocates. An anonymous poet, who made up for his lack of literary talent with partisan zeal, had a stern warning for the Chief

Justice:

Old Johnny Marshall mind your ways,  
and let the States alone sir,  
or else before there are many days,  
you'll yield your place to Roane sir.<sup>25</sup>

Ritchie hinted at the partisan overtones involved in the Court's decisions. In October of 1819 he twice called upon his fellow Virginians to interpose their authority against the court's ruling in *McCulloch* in the same manner that the state had opposed the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798.

"Crito" ended his diatribe on the *Cohens* decision with a challenge: "Defenders of the federal Constitution in its proper powers! - Defenders of state rights! - Sentinels of liberty! - to your posts!"<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>"Franklin," RE, April 23, 1819; "A Virginian," RE, April 30, 1819; Anonymous, n.d. [1821?], Marshall Papers, William and Mary (photostat of original at University of Virginia).

<sup>26</sup>RE, April 20, 23, Oct. 15, 22, 1819; "Crito," RE, Feb. 17, 1821. Apparently there were limits to Ritchie's devotion to this cause. When the editor and printer declined to publish in pamphlet form Roane's "Algernon Sidney" essays, the jurist snapped that "Ritchie and Gooch [co-owner of the Enquirer] have not liberality and public spirit enough to engage in the publication of books or pamphlets unless they conduce to their immediate emolument." Roane to Archibald Thweatt, Dec. 11, 1821, Branch Historical Papers, Vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1905), 140-141. For other evidence of a split between the two leaders of the Junto at this time, see Ritchie to Roane, M.S., n.d. [probably 1821 or 1822], Virginia Historical Society.

Despite such enthusiasm, the popular response to Ritchie's plea for action and to Roane's abstract legal arguments proved disappointing. While Marshall's condemnation of Roane's writings was expected, the Junto leader complained bitterly of the "apathy of the times" and chided Jefferson and Madison for not taking a more prominent role in the struggle against the aggrandizing measures of the national government.<sup>27</sup> Madison responded by claiming that "in the existing posture of things ... the latitude of jurisdiction assumed by the Judicial power of the U.S. ... is less formidable to the reserved sovereignty of the States, than the latitude of power which it has assigned to the Legislature." In other words, Roane was barking up the wrong tree.<sup>28</sup> Other Virginians agreed. They found it difficult to get excited about obscure and legalistic debates on the limits of judicial powers, especially when

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<sup>27</sup>Roane to Thweatt, Dec. 11, 24, 1821, Branch Historical Papers, Vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1905), 140-142. Marshall slammed Roane for his "coarseness & malignity of invention." Marshall to Joseph Story, June 15, 1821, Marshall Papers, William and Mary (typescript copy of original in Massachusetts Historical Society). What most upset Marshall about Roane's and the Junto's response to the Court's decision was their efforts to return the country to what he believed were the dark days of the Articles of Confederation. By 1821, Marshall was convinced that "A deep design to convert our government into a mere league of states has taken hold of a powerful & violent party in Virginia. The attack upon the judiciary is in fact an attack upon the union." Marshall to Story, Sept. 18, 1821, Marshall Papers, William and Mary (typescript copy of original at Massachusetts Historical Society).

<sup>28</sup>Madison to Roane, May 6, 1821, M.S., General Collection, UVA.

more pressing matters confronted them. In 1819 and 1821 people were much more concerned about the state of the economy.

The Panic of 1819 compounded the financial troubles of the South, and of the eastern portions of Virginia in particular. With the notable exception of the immediate postwar years, Tidewater and Piedmont Virginians had watched the value of their land and of their agricultural exports decrease dramatically since the 1790s. A steady exodus of farmers to the south and west served as a further reminder of the bleak conditions in the area. The economic panic that paralyzed the nation's commerce starting in 1819 accelerated the pace of both these phenomena. Between 1817 and 1830 the value of Virginia's exports dropped steadily, as did the total value of land in the state.<sup>29</sup> More than 2,000 people left Richmond between 1817 and 1820, and at the height of the depression property in the city lost from one-half to three-quarters of its value. "The distress of Richmond has increased one hundred fold," one city dweller wrote in March of 1819. "The Banks are loosing [sic] all their specie - and have been obliged to stop discounts - men of the best credit today, are suspected tomorrow, and the next are found ruined." On top of everything else, much of Virginia

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<sup>29</sup>Avery Craven, Soil Exhaustion As a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860, in University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, Vol. 13, no. 1 (1925), 72-121.

experienced a severe drought in the summer of 1819 that threatened to ruin many crops completely. Times had rarely been harder.<sup>30</sup> John Randolph predicted, only half-jokingly, that the "day would come" in eastern Virginia "when the master would run away from his negroes and be advertised by them in the public prints."<sup>31</sup>

Those who remained behind responded to their plight in a number of ways. John Taylor and Edmund Ruffin experimented with new farming techniques. Planters banded together in agricultural societies, the most famous of which was the Albemarle Agricultural Association. At its meetings, regularly reported in the Enquirer, members of the Association presented reports on the results of their agricultural experiments.<sup>32</sup> Eastern Virginians even tried to

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<sup>30</sup>Charles S. Sydnor, The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848 Vol. 5 of A History of the South (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), 113. In chapter 5 of his work, Sydnor assesses the impact of the Panic on the South; William Dandridge to Dr. James Morris, March 22, 1819, Morris Family Papers, UVA; RE, July and August, 1819. See editorial of Aug. 10, 1819 for anxiety over drought conditions.

<sup>31</sup>Ambler, Sectionalism, 111. For similar expressions of despair, see Robert P. Sutton, "Nostalgia, Pessimism, and Malaise: The Doomed Aristocrat in Late-Jeffersonian Virginia," VMHB, Vol. 76 (1968), 41-55; Thomas E. Buckley, S.J., "The Declension of Virginia, 1776-1860: An Historiographical Perspective," unpublished paper, 1990.

<sup>32</sup>Taylor's Arator, first published in 1814 and republished in 1823, offered the most extensive discussion of new agricultural techniques. Ruffin's later work was equally influential. See Craven, Soil Exhaustion, 97-99, 105-106, 134-142. The Enquirer began printing speeches from the Albemarle Association in 1818. See also "Minute Book of the Agricultural Society of Albemarle," Annual Report of the American

grow cotton on their lands, and for a brief time in the mid-1820s production rose steadily and the venture looked like it might succeed. But falling prices and the thin soils of the region combined to make eastern Virginia's experiment with King Cotton a short one.<sup>33</sup>

The unsuccessful efforts of eastern planters to reverse their economic decline served to harden their commitment to the political doctrines of the state rights school. As they examined the sources of their impoverished condition, it became increasingly clear that factors beyond their control were partly to blame. Since they could not hope to control crop prices on the international market, eastern Virginians sought out ways to lower costs, such as reducing high tariff duties, and to expand their markets, such as ending trade restriction with the West Indies.<sup>34</sup> Such goals put them at odds with the nationalists in Congress. By 1820, eastern Virginians had come to view most of the policies associated with Henry Clay's "American System" as inimical to their interests. A federally funded program of internal improvements, a national bank, and a protective tariff, they

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Historical Association, Vol. 1 (1918), 263-349.

<sup>33</sup>Virginia produced 25,000,000 pounds of cotton in 1826, but only 10,000,000 pounds in 1834, two million pounds less than had been produced in 1821. Ambler, Sectionalism, 115, n.53.

<sup>34</sup>William H. Roane to John C. Calhoun, Nov. 24, 1824, Harrison Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society; RE, Jan. 8, 1822.

argued, were all part of a plan to weaken the economic and political power of the agricultural South at the hands of the capitalists and manufacturers of the North.

Even before the Panic of 1819 hit, the planters of eastern Virginia had attributed the region's economic woes to the corruption and mismanagement of the Bank of the United States. Although they had no problem with state chartered banks, strict constructionists considered a national bank unconstitutional, and Ritchie had heaped abuse upon it since its rechartering in 1816. The "bank question" - not just the debate over the constitutionality of its charter, but discussions of its policies and impact on regional economies - was among the most talked about subjects of the day, far outstripping in volume and in intensity the debates on the Supreme Court's decisions.<sup>35</sup>

Coupled with distrust of the Bank of United States was a strong aversion to protective tariffs. Eastern Virginians sensed that tariff duties ostensibly designed to encourage American manufacturing were in fact nothing more than government approved taxes imposed on the agricultural South to nourish the commercial and manufacturing interests of the North. In petitions, memorials, private correspondence, and

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<sup>35</sup>For typical examples of anti-Bank sentiment, see Ritchie's editorial of Sept. 18, 1818 and Sept. 3, 1819, as well as the essays of "Lycurgus," Oct. 16, 1818, and "Americanus," Oct. 20, 1818, all in RE. Junto members held positions of power in all of Virginia's banks, both state and national.



newspaper columns, Virginians explained how artificially high duties hurt the South both economically and politically. The tariff, as John C. Calhoun made clear in his Exposition (1828), forced farmers to buy high and sell low. Protective duties were also of dubious constitutionality, and the Old Dominion's congressmen spearheaded opposition to the tariff in Washington by cultivating a steady habit of voting against any rate increases.<sup>36</sup>

Another burden imposed upon the South by the national government, eastern Virginians argued, was a bloated and useless system of internal improvements. Ritchie, like many eastern Virginians, agreed that a state-funded program of improvements was desirable, in fact necessary, to revive the commerce of the state. But a federally-funded program was both unconstitutional and clearly designed to benefit the western portions of the country at the expense of easterners. What use did a Tidewater or Piedmont farmer have for costly projects that offered them no relief from their

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<sup>36</sup>While the South split over the tariff of 1816, Virginia's delegation opposed it 13 to 6. By 1824, the rest of the South had joined Virginia in condemning the protective tariff. Lowery, James Barbour, 92-93, 141. For examples of eastern Virginia's opposition to the tariff, see RE, Sept. 24, 1819, Feb. 19, April 28, May 2, Aug. 11, 1820 (Proceedings of a meeting called in Richmond to protest the tariff), and "The Farmers and Merchants of Fredericksburg, A Memorial on the Policy of Protective Tariffs," which appeared on the front page of the Enquirer of Aug. 25, 1820. The memorial, written by John Taylor, noted that the "mercantile, naval, and agricultural occupations, are all discouraged by restrictions upon commerce."

economic misfortunes?<sup>37</sup>

From this brief examination of the response of eastern Virginia to the economic and political questions of the day, it can be seen that provincialism and sectionalism had assumed new importance in the state by 1820. In an 1821 editorial Ritchie summarized the region's growing hostility to the American System and to all things northern. As the editor saw it, the North was the "place where the people were losing interest in the preservation of the Constitution; where the public expenditures were being made; where the United States Bank sat in majesty; where the spirit of mercantile cupidity was enveloping itself in the mantle of monopoly and privilege; and where the people wished to enthrone the federal government and debase that of the states."<sup>38</sup> Among the more important consequences of the depressed economic condition of much of the state during the postwar years was the considerable aid it gave to the Junto's efforts to reassert the primacy of the "Virginia principles."

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<sup>37</sup>RE, March 20, Nov. 16, March 16, 1819. Mutersbaugh, "Jeffersonian Journalist," 129, explains Ritchie's support of state-supported internal improvements: "There were no constitutional difficulties here, and no fear of centralization sliding toward tyranny." Philip N. Nicholas informed Andrew Stevenson that their opinions on internal improvements "suit the meridian of Richmond and the Old Dominion better than that of Washington." Nicholas to Stevenson, April 8, 1824, Papers of Andrew and John White Stevenson, LC.

<sup>38</sup>The words are Ambler's analysis of Ritchie's editorial of Aug. 8, 1821, in Sectionalism, 119.

A more significant development that pushed Virginians toward adopting a strong state rights ideology was the Missouri Crisis. Between 1819 and 1821 debate on this question occupied center stage, at times reaching fever pitch. From start to end of the crisis the state's political leaders, including the Jutno, rallied their fellow citizens to action. They argued that "Virginia at the head of the Southern States, ought now to speak as she did in '98. She ought to put forth her whole strength + save the Constitution from this unhallowed assault." The General Assembly agreed and adopted resolutions pledging to resist, "with manly fortitude, any attempt which Congress may make to impose restraints, or restrictions, as the price of admission [of Missouri to statehood], not authorized by the great principles of the constitution."<sup>39</sup>

In discussions on the Missouri question that followed, two main issues impressed Virginians as vital to the welfare of their state and the Union. First and foremost, efforts to restrict Missouri's entrance into the Union must be resisted at all costs. Attempts by northern congressmen to impose conditions upon the territory's admission to statehood were unconstitutional and set an ominous precedent that threatened all of the states. The Tallmadge Amendment, which

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<sup>39</sup>Thomas McLeland to Joseph C. Cabell, Jan. 12, 1820, Cabell Family Papers, UVA; Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia ... 1820 (Richmond: Thomas Ritchie, 1820), 166-178.

sought to end slavery in Missouri, amounted to "a vital blow ... aimed at the constitution of the United States.... A government limited in its powers is to be endued with an authority to which there is no assignable limit." To acquiesce in this bold move on the part of northern politicians would be equivalent to forfeiting state sovereignty. Ritchie made this clear when he noted that "it is in the interest of all the states to support the rights of Missouri: her rights are those of Virginia."<sup>40</sup>

Leaders in the commonwealth also expressed concern that proposals to exclude slavery from Missouri would provoke a divisive and unproductive debate on the merits of that institution. Undoubtedly, such a discussion would only heighten sectional animosities. "The East and the South stand on very different grounds" when it came to the topic of extending slavery, Ritchie noted. "The former says, 'We believe it to be *expedient* to restrict slavery;' the latter, 'We believe a restriction to be a breach of the constitution which we have sworn to support.'" Northern critics of slavery, "fiery enthusiasts" quick to charge the "southern people with inhumanity" for owning slaves, failed to "conceive how difficult it is for us to be rid of it, in a

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<sup>40</sup>RE, Jan. 22, 1820, May 27, 1819; see also Ritchie's editorials on July 9, Oct. 22, 1819.

manner consistent with our future peace and tranquillity."<sup>41</sup> By throwing the debate on slavery into the political arena, northern zealots had presented the young nation with a problem that it simply was not capable of resolving without causing irreparable damage.

Virginians also believed that they detected ulterior motives in northern efforts to halt the extension of slavery. "Some sinister design, something inimical to the interests of the southern states" lurked "behind the specious mask of humanity." The real purpose for northern maneuvering on the Missouri question was to "exclude a very great majority of the citizens of the Southern States from a participation of the benefits and advantages ever to be derived from the fertile western regions, and confine them and their prosperity, to the narrow limits which they now possess." Spencer Roane echoed this sentiment when he wrote Madison that the state would never consent to be "damned up in a land of Slaves" as a consequence of northern "lust for dominion and power." Far removed from Virginia, John Quincy Adams speculated that the political dealings surrounding the Missouri Compromise were calculated to produce a new political alliance "terrible to the whole Union, but portentously terrible to the South - threatening in its

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<sup>41</sup>RE, Jan. 11, Feb. 10, 1820. Even at this early stage of the debate over slavery, Ritchie had no stomach for extended discussion of this divisive question. "Where will the vortex of this slave question terminate?" he wondered aloud in the Feb. 3, 1821 edition of the Enquirer.

progress the emancipation of all their slaves ..., and threatening that political ascendancy of Virginia ..." which had guided the country since Jefferson's election in 1800.<sup>42</sup>

When news reached Richmond in early 1820 of a proposed compromise that would admit Maine as a free state, Missouri as a slave state, and fix a line at 36 degrees and 30 minutes, above which slavery would be forbidden, Virginians were stunned. Ritchie could barely contain himself. "A compromise! who will compromise with the constitution of the country? and barter away its essential principle?" In the capital "indignation at the idea of such a compromise is the ruling sentiment." People say, "If we yield now, beware. They will ride us forever." George Hay wrote to his uncle, James Monroe, that Richmonders considered the Compromise "a base + hypocritical scheme to get power under the mask of humanity + it excites the most unqualified indignation + resentment."<sup>43</sup>

In a series of letters to Virginia senator James Barbour, Junto members and intimates explained their reasons for condemning the compromise. Henry St. George Tucker, a

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<sup>42</sup>RE, Dec. 16, 1819; Roane to Madison, Feb. 16, 1820, in Ammon, "Richmond Junto," 412; Charles Francis Adams, ed., Memoirs of John Quincy Adams (Philadelphia, 1874-1877), 4:529. The best treatment of the Missouri Crisis remains Glover Moore, The Missouri Controversy, 1819-1821 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1953).

<sup>43</sup>RE, Feb. 8, 10, 1820; George Hay to James Monroe, Feb. 18, 1820, James Monroe Papers, LC.

western Virginian in the capital for the legislative caucus to determine the state's presidential nominee in 1820, confided to Barbour that "I am unable to describe the sensation in Richmond at the intelligence conveyed by your letter. A compromise which gives up the fairest and largest part of the Western Territory and leaves us to a narrow slip intersected with mountains in one direction, destroyed by Earthquakes in another, and interspersed in a third with swamps and bayous, and infested with mosquitoes, and bilious diseases, never can be grateful to us." William Gordon discounted such practical considerations and went straight to what he believed was the heart of the matter. The South must resist the compromise not because of the "value of the territory or the disadvantage of the bargain so much," but rather because it "manifests what we consider a spirit of injustice and want of faith in the Northern politician, which if yielded to would lead only to farther and more daring and vital usurpations." Linn Banks, Speaker of the House of Delegates, used blunter language. "If a compromise of this kind be constitutional and expedient," he predicted, "it would lead directly to a dissolution of the Union, by giving an unjust influence in the National Councils, by which the Southern people would become the 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' for those of the North." In one fell swoop, northern politicians had announced their plan to

smash the Union and enslave the South.<sup>44</sup>

Excitement over the proposed compromise reached such heights in Richmond that the legislative caucus was temporarily adjourned. By mid-February, however, tempers cooled and "reason ... resumed her empire." The caucus reconvened and endorsed Monroe, despite his alleged support of the Compromise. "We prefer him as president to any other," Roane informed Barbour, "but would not sacrifice our Constitution or risque [sic] our safety to insure his election. I expect this is a general sentiment in Virginia."<sup>45</sup> Monroe's nomination amounted to a "tacit acceptance" of the Missouri Compromise on the part of Virginia's political leaders, albeit in a tone of resignation and not acquiescence. "We submit ..., we bow to it," Ritchie seethed, "though on no occasion with so poor a grace and so bitter a spirit."<sup>46</sup>

Ritchie could find something positive to say about the Missouri Compromise. Along with the controversy surrounding

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<sup>44</sup>These and similar letters to Barbour appear in WMQ, series 1, Vol. 10 (1901-1902), 5-24. Tucker's letter, dated Feb. 11, 1820, appears on pages 10 and 11; Gordon's, Feb. 18, 1820, 18-19; Banks's, Feb. 20, 1820, 20-22. Barbour had broken the news of the proposed compromise and Monroe's support of it in a letter to Charles Yancey, who leaked it to the state legislators. Ibid., 6.

<sup>45</sup>Charles Yancey to Barbour, Feb. 16, 17, 1820; Roane to Barbour, Feb. 19, 1820, both in WMQ, series 1, Vol. 10 (1901-1902), 13-18. For Barbour's role in getting Virginians to accept the Missouri Compromise, see Lowery, James Barbour, 110-141.

<sup>46</sup>Ammon, "The Richmond Junto," 413; RE, March 7, 1820.



the American System and the Supreme Court's decisions, the compromise had provoked a much-needed return to the sound doctrines of the past. "A short time ago," the editor noted, "and the very sound of state rights was scarcely heard out of Virginia. But now the people begin to awake."<sup>47</sup> Ritchie's assessment proved an accurate one. The questions of the day had reinvigorated the American political process by blowing life into the smoldering sectional animosities that lay just beneath the surface of the political landscape in the mis-named Era of Good Feelings. Virginia's response between 1816 and 1822 had been to restore to primacy the fundamental doctrines of the republican faith, including state rights and a strict interpretation of the Constitution. Now the Old Dominion's leaders turned their efforts to bringing about similar developments on a national scale. That could best be accomplished by putting a man who shared their beliefs in the White House.

The presidential election of 1824 began soon after James Monroe's second inauguration in March of 1821. Because no one stood out as the obvious successor to the Virginia dynasty, the field of candidates grew significantly. John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, John Calhoun, William Crawford, and Andrew Jackson all had designs on the office. While no one matched Jefferson or Madison in stature, Adams and

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<sup>47</sup>RE, Aug. 31, 1821.

Crawford had served the country ably for decades, and Calhoun and Clay were rising stars in Congress. Jackson's popularity stemmed chiefly from his military successes in the War of 1812 and in Florida. Although all five candidates claimed membership in the Republican party, they differed significantly in their political beliefs and in their interpretations of the Constitution.<sup>48</sup>

The lack of ideological unity in the national Republican party had in fact been a point of contention with the Junto throughout Monroe's two terms as chief executive. The clique's tepid support for Monroe had stemmed in part from his qualified endorsements of nationalistic policies and his efforts to extinguish party differences, a policy referred to as amalgamation. A few Virginians agreed with the fifth president that political parties represented "the curse of the country." Daniel Norton, a young planter writing to a friend in Europe, expressed this displeasure when he complained of the damaging effects of party spirit on men. "So blinded are men to their own interests and to the good of the community, that when once they have joined and act[ed] under the influence of party spirit, rather than break that charm that holds them together, they will dance

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<sup>48</sup>George Dangerfield, The Awakening of American Nationalism, 1815-1828 (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 218-230.

hand in hand into Hell."<sup>49</sup>

A more common sentiment in Virginia was the belief that party distinctions needed to be preserved because they were both natural and beneficial to a democracy. Party spirit must exist, "Fabricus" told his fellow Virginians, "in every free country.... Nothing but the rod of despotism can keep it down. To a certain extent, it may even be salutary; it creates and keeps alive a degree of vigilance on men in power which may often produce the happiest effects." William H. Roane, who had replaced his father in the Junto, notified John C. Calhoun that Monroe's efforts to abolish parties had cost him in Virginia because people realized that "there must ever be parties in the country." Jefferson explained to his good friend the Marquis de Lafayette that "the parties of Whig and Tory, are those of nature. They exist in all countries.... The sickly, weakly, timid man, fears the people, and is a tory by nature. The healthy, strong, and bold cherish them, and is formed a Whig by nature." To many politically-minded Virginians, attempts to eliminate competing parties could never succeed because

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<sup>49</sup>Monroe to James Madison, May 10, 1822, Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., The Writings of James Monroe (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1902-1903), 6:284-290; Daniel N. Norton to J.J. Ambler, July 2, 1824, Papers of the Ambler and Barbour Families, UVA.

they went against human nature.<sup>50</sup>

Virginia's desire to preserve party distinctions struck a responsive chord with Martin Van Buren, who by 1822 was busy reviving the political alliance between New York and the Old Dominion, this time based upon a union of the Albany Regency and the Richmond Junto. The New Yorker had convinced himself that the "settled purpose of Mr Monroe[']s administration ... [was] ... to destroy the Republican Party by amalgamating it with its opponents." There was still time to reverse Monroe's folly and salvage the party of Jefferson if Virginia, spokesman for the South, lended its support to Van Buren's plan. "All hopes of the restoration of the party," Van Buren explained, "now rests on the fidelity of Virginia & New York.... Without the two pillars I have named the edifice cannot be sustained."<sup>51</sup>

To bring about the reorganization of the Republican party, Van Buren opened correspondence with prominent Virginians and travelled to the commonwealth to cultivate friendships with the Junto. The Little Magician's manners and devotion to the "Virginia principles" impressed political leaders in the state. Writing from Washington, Virginia congressman John Floyd told Junto associate

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<sup>50</sup>"Fabricus," RE, Jan. 3, 1822; William H. Roane to John C. Calhoun, Nov. 24, 1824, Harrison Family Papers, VHS; Jefferson to Lafayette, Nov. 3, 1823, Ford, ed., Writings of Jefferson, 10:279-283.

<sup>51</sup>Martin Van Buren to David Evans, June 9, 1824, Martin Van Buren Papers, LC.

Claiborne W. Gooch that Van Buren represented "our hope to the north.... He will serve the purposes better than any, as his notions of State Rights are correct, and he is now almost the only distinguished man out of our own state who entertains opinions ... approximating our own." Ritchie struck up an immediate relationship with the New Yorker that lasted until 1844, when the two split on the Texas question. In 1822 and 1823 Van Buren's plans found enthusiastic support among the political leaders of Virginia.<sup>52</sup>

By the summer of 1823, Van Buren's Albany Regency and the Junto had settled on William Crawford as their choice to succeed Monroe. Ritchie had held back discussions on the campaign in the Enquirer until late 1822, claiming that the country had more pressing problems to address. In fact, Ritchie and the Junto still had not selected their candidate. Calhoun and Clay could be dismissed quickly because of their support for various nationalistic measures after the War of 1812. The South Carolinian, Ritchie explained simply in late 1822, "is not the candidate we should select as the President of the U.S. - the *why* and *wherefore* it is unnecessary to explain." The Kentuckian's candidacy in the state stalled because many Virginians "look on Mr. Clay as a deserter from the *good old Virginia*

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<sup>52</sup>John Floyd to C.W. Gooch, June 9, 1824, Gooch Family Papers, VHS. In 1838 Ritchie wrote to Van Buren that from the "first moment of my acquaintance with you, I have been your personal & political friend." Ritchie to Van Buren, July 2, 1838, Van Buren Papers, LC.

*politicks.*"<sup>53</sup>

The Junto expressed strong reservations about Jackson, suggesting that his fiery temper and meager experience made him peculiarly unqualified for high civil office. Virginians had castigated Jackson for his actions in Florida in 1818 and 1819 by claiming that he had exceeded the constitutional limits of his power as territorial governor. One voter was so disgruntled at Jackson that he confessed to being "entirely at a loss to decide which is the most alarming, the conduct of Genl. Jackson, or the decisions of the Supreme Court in the case of the United State Bank."<sup>54</sup> Ritchie had condemned Jackson in 1819 as well, and saw nothing in the General's conduct since that warranted a reappraisal. The editor summed up the feelings of the Junto toward Jackson when he wrote that "we think he has been betrayed into errors by the enthusiasm of his feelings, and

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<sup>53</sup>RE, Jan. 5, Aug. 13, Nov. 29, 1822. In an editorial on April 4, 1823, Ritchie bluntly stated that "Mr. Calhoun has less chance in Virginia than any other candidate who has been named." See also M. Sheppard to Andrew Stevenson, April 28, 1824, Stevenson Papers, LC. Littleton Waller Tazewell dismissed Clay as a "mere politician" completely lacking in principles. Tazewell to John Randolph, March 4, 1824, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL. Waller Taylor, however, insisted that Clay was popular in Virginia in 1822, and that he had heard that "even Judge Roan [sic], the great stickler for State Rights, is supposed to be favorable to him." Taylor to Archibald Austin, March 11, 1822, Austin-Twyman Papers, William and Mary.

<sup>54</sup>"Virginia," RE, March 30, 1819. Attacks on Jackson filled the Enquirer from July 1818 to March 1819. For a scathing indictment of Old Hickory's career, see "Algernon Sidney," RE, Dec. 22, 1818, Jan. 7, 12, 14, 1819.

the warmth of his temper."<sup>55</sup> Despite warnings from his supporters that his enemies in Virginia had successfully created "an impression that you were a man governed alone by Passion and impulse," Jackson continued to believe that the Old Dominion would cast its vote for him on election day.<sup>56</sup>

Having eliminated Jackson, Calhoun, and Clay, only two candidates remained from which the Junto could select. Adams, though respected for his intellect and services to the country, was a recent convert to the Republican party, and a Yankee to boot. Ritchie and others had strong reservations about Adams's reliance on the doctrine of implied powers. The New Englander did, however, maintain a significant following across the state and was the second choice of many Virginians.<sup>57</sup>

The Junto selected Crawford, then, partly by a process of elimination. But the Georgian's services to the country and his devotion to state rights principles were more

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<sup>55</sup>RE, May 6, 1823. See also RE, July 30, 1822, Feb. 28, March 2, 6, 19, 26, May 14, 1824; J.A. Coles to Andrew Stevenson, April 11, 1824, Stevenson Papers, LC.

<sup>56</sup>Col. Charles P. Tutt to Andrew Jackson, June 24, 1823, John Spencer Bassett, ed. Correspondence of Andrew Jackson (Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-1935), 3:199; Jackson to George Martin, Jan. 2, 1824; to Andrew J. Donelson, Feb. 12, 1824; to John Coffee, March 14, 1824, Ibid., 3:221-233.

<sup>57</sup>RE, Jan. 23, May 20, June 15, July 4, Aug. 5, 8, 1823; J.A. Coles to Stevenson, April 11, 1824, Stevenson Papers, LC. John Taylor of Caroline, while not thrilled by any of the candidates, found Adams the least objectionable. Taylor to Monroe, April 29, 1823, Monroe Papers, LC.

important in leading the Junto to select him as their candidate. After a distinguished public career, Crawford had narrowly missed capturing the Republican party's presidential nomination in 1816, and had been impatiently waiting for his turn ever since. Ritchie and his group had long admired Crawford, although they fretted over his flirtation with nationalism immediately after the War of 1812 and preferred Spencer Roane for president until his death in 1822. Still, Crawford's flaws were smaller and fewer than the other candidates, as one commentator explained. "The election of Mr. Crawford will restore our institutions to their primitive purity and simplicity. The elevation of Mr. Adams or of Mr. Jackson will perpetuate the extravagance and false splendor of the government, and perhaps by sanctioning usurpations of power, make it too strong for the rights and the liberties of the people."<sup>58</sup> Moreover, Crawford was the choice of Van Buren and his New York party; the Georgian could serve as the instrument by which a Virginia-New York alliance could regain power. Ritchie announced the party's support for Crawford in early April 1823, thereby shifting the contest for the presidency

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<sup>58</sup>RE, April 8, Aug. 5, 1823, Feb. 19, 28, 1824; "Bolinbroke," RE, Aug. 27, 1824. Articles attacking Crawford slowly disappeared from the columns of the Enquirer after September of 1823, and were replaced by statements supporting and defending the Georgian.



into high gear.<sup>59</sup>

The closeness and bitterness of the presidential race led to dubious campaign tactics and violent personal attacks. To Virginians accustomed to the genteel politics of the past, the tone of the election seemed proof positive of degeneracy. John Taylor complained that politicians now won office "by crafty influence and pecuniary influence" rather than by devotion to republican principles. David Campbell, prominent landowner in western Virginia, wrote his wife in disgust over the personal attacks on the candidates that typified modern electioneering. "*Such are the republicans of the present day,*" he sighed. Old Republicans expressed revulsion at the way the campaign unfolded. James M. Garnett wrote John Randolph of Roanoke that newspaper editors, the "Regulators-General of all the affairs of the Nation, will condescend to make a President for the Profanum Vulgus, who must necessarily be incompetent." William Branch Giles insisted that "visionary, fanatical, excessive democracy" threatened to force down fundamental principles. A new era of politics was dawning, and tradition-minded Virginians found little it to commend.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>RE, Feb. 13, Oct. 7, 1823; Remini, Making of the Democratic Party, 49-51, 63-66.

<sup>60</sup>John Taylor of Caroline to Monroe, April 29, 1823, Monroe Papers, LC; David Campbell to Mary Campbell, Feb. 16, 1823, Campbell Family Papers, Duke University; James Mercer Garnett to John Randolph of Roanoke, Oct. 21, 1823, John Randolph Papers, LC (typescript); William B. Giles, RE, April 9, 1824. Not surprisingly, Randolph confessed that he opposed

A second development that worried the faithful in the commonwealth was the steady stream of charges of 'Virginia influence' that issued from politicians and editors across the country. The Junto took particular care to downplay such claims, and Jefferson seemed particularly adamant about coaxing other states into assuming leadership roles in the struggle against the dangers of nationalism. In the columns of the Enquirer Ritchie repeatedly urged the same policy, all the while insisting that "there is no spirit in Virginia, which aspires to a sway or dictation over the other states."<sup>61</sup>

On top of accusations of 'Virginia influence' came more specific charges that a club or Junto ruled the state from Richmond. Although attacks on the Junto stretched back to 1816, they increased in number and intensity as the election neared. Newspapers from across the state and the nation described the sinister machinations of the "Central Influence" in Richmond, with the Lynchburg Virginian and

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"this age of reformation + spectacle, - where presents + speeches + entertainments are 'got up' + all erectness of spirit + manly sincerity [are] exploded for fulsome adulation"; Randolph to Garnett, Sept. 26, 1825, Randolph Papers, LC (transcript).

<sup>61</sup>Jefferson to Spencer Roane, June 25, 1821, Branch Historical Papers, Vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1905), 138-139; Jefferson to Nathaniel Macon, Oct. 20, 1821, Ford, ed., Writings of Jefferson, 10:193-194; RE, July 2, 1822; see also issues of Feb. 21, Aug. 13, 1822, Sept. 19, 1823. William H. Roane told Calhoun that Virginia "should fold her arms + remain completely passive" regarding the outcome of the election. Roane to Calhoun, Nov. 24, 1824, Harrison Papers, VHS.

Niles' Register leading the way.<sup>62</sup> Soon mention of the group and their *modus operandi* began appearing in personal correspondence as well, including those of Crawford's rival candidates.<sup>63</sup>

The most thorough and infamous attack on the Junto came from an anonymous writer who published a series of letters that first appeared in the Washington Republican in November of 1823. Reprinted in pamphlet form as Letters on the Richmond Party and signed simply "A Virginian," the epistles generated considerable interest across the state. Unlike earlier jabs at the Junto, the author of the Letters named clique members and described in great detail their deeds in

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<sup>62</sup>"A Virginian," Albany Advertiser, Aug. 26, 27, Sept. 17, 1816. By my count, at least eleven different newspapers, six from outside Virginia, contained articles on the Junto in 1822, 1823, and 1824. The sharpest attacks came from the editor of the Virginian, John Hampden Pleasants, who moved to Richmond in late 1823 to found the Richmond Constitutional Whig in support of Adams's candidacy; Lynchburg Virginian, April 15, 29, 1823, Aug. 17, Nov. 20, 1824. Pleasants's zeal got him into plenty of trouble and an occasional duel. Ironically, a son of his lifelong rival Thomas Ritchie killed Pleasants in a duel in 1846. For Pleasants's belligerency, see John Campbell to James Campbell, Nov. 29, 1823, Campbell Family Papers, Duke.

<sup>63</sup>Dr. Thomas G. Watkins to Andrew Jackson, March 13, 1822, Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Jackson, 3:153-155; Francis W. Gilmer to Peachy R. Gilmer, Jan. 13, 1824, MS, VHS, in which F.W. Gilmer refers to the Junto as a "club of inveterate Tories bound together by fraudulent collusion + family compact ... [who] ... put up + put down whom they please"; E.H. Lundy to William Brodnax, Feb. 10, 1824, William H. Brodnax Letters, VHS; John Quincy Adams to Louisa C. Adams, Sept. 6, 1822, Worthington Chauncy Ford, ed., Writings of John Quincy Adams (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1917), 7:301-302; Henry Clay to Peter Porter, Feb., 1823, cited in Remini, Making of the Democratic Party, 38.

the past and their goals for the future. "A Virginian" dwelled at length on the family connections in the group and their controlling interest in Virginia's court system and banks. The current Junto had been formed in 1816, when the "old party" of Wilson Cary Nicholas joined forces with the nascent Richmond Party to oppose Monroe's election. Since then the Junto had controlled affairs in the state behind a veil of secrecy. Its decision to join with the Republicans of New York to elect Crawford in 1824 held ominous implications for the commonwealth. Now that the group's leadership and tactics stood exposed, the author trusted that the people of Virginia must disable the Junto before it ruined what remained of the state's power and prestige.<sup>64</sup>

In Richmond the Letters produced much excitement and speculation. Most readers agreed that the author's purpose was to affect the outcome of the presidential election. Others viewed it as a personal attack upon the men mentioned as Junto leaders. Whatever its purpose, the pamphlet certainly got Ritchie's attention. The editor had carefully

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<sup>64</sup>Letters on the Richmond Party, By a Virginian, Originally published in the Washington Republican (Washington City, 1823), microfiche copy from original in LC. Speculation as to the author of the pamphlet consumed a great deal of time, both then and now. Leading candidates include Alexander McRae and John H. Pleasants. I would add Henry Lee to the list. Lee was a political hack living in Washington at the time who knew Virginia politics intimately. On Nov. 29, 1824, Benjamin Watkins Leigh wrote to him that "you were mistaken, when you supposed there was a 'Richmond party' - if, indeed, what you published last summer on that subject, were not (as I more than half suspected) a mere banter." Leigh to Lee, Nov. 29, 1824, Benjamin Watkins Leigh Papers, VHS.

refuted every charge of a Junto in his paper, claiming time and again that such an organization never existed. The idea of a Richmond Party was a "phantom" conjured up by political zealots for partisan purposes. They combined it with the "cry of *Virginia candidate-Virginia influence ... for the purpose of bringing one of the candidates into odium and contempt.*" Ritchie expressed surprise that any man with common sense would believe "that this proud and independent state is ruled by a Junto at the City of Richmond; that her citizens are in fact the puppets of a political and intriguing oligarchy at the metropolis."<sup>65</sup>

While Ritchie could brush aside insinuations of a autocratic Junto operating from the state capital, he found it harder to ignore accusations that the Virginia Republican party had compromised the state's integrity by forming a "combination" with the politicians of New York to elect Crawford. In September of 1824, Hezekiah Niles began a six part exposé on the union between the Junto and the Albany Regency, ending it in mid-October by claiming that the "combination" sought to push Crawford on the nation through political "*management* and, I believe, I may say political fraud." Calhoun noted this development as well. "Between the

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<sup>65</sup>RE, March 7, May 6, 1823; for other instances of Ritchie's denials, see issues of Sept. 7, 1816, April 22, May 2, Aug 5, 1823, Sept. 14, 24, Oct. 5, 1824. David Campbell offered a lengthy description of the pamphlet and the uproar it caused in Richmond to his brother James. David Campbell to James Campbell, Dec. 5, 10, 1823, Campbell Family Papers, Duke.

Regency at Albany and the junto at Richmond there is a vital connection," he informed Samuel Gouverneur. "They give and receive hope from each other, and confidently expect to govern this nation." Ritchie explicitly denied that any "combination with the leading politicians of New York" existed, and thought that Niles "labors under some delirium of the brain" for suggesting such a thing.<sup>66</sup>

Ritchie's denial of a union between New York and Virginia to elect Crawford strengthened the Georgian's standing in the Old Dominion. Crawford's prospects remained bright in the state, thanks in part to the Junto's efforts to explain his past support for the tariff and internal improvements and their savage attacks on the other candidates. Ritchie confidently predicted victory on both the state and national level for his candidate. Then disaster struck. Crawford suffered a paralytic stroke at the home of James Barbour in September 1823. The stroke left Crawford personally incapacitated and politically handicapped.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps even more damaging was Crawford's nomination at

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<sup>66</sup>Hezekiah Niles, "The Sovereignty of the People," Niles' Weekly Register, Sept. 4, 11, 16, 28, Oct. 2, 16, 1824, quote from Oct. 16; Calhoun to Samuel Gouverneur, Nov. 9, 1823, cited in Remini, Making of the Democratic Party, 41; RE, Sept. 14, 24, Oct. 5, 1824, quote from Sept. 24.

<sup>67</sup>RE, April 22, May 20, June 15, July 4, Aug. 8, 1823; Lowery, James Barbour, 147. Ritchie often downplayed Crawford's illness and insisted he was capable of serving as president if elected; see, for example, RE, June 1, 8, Aug. 10, 1824.

the hands of a discredited and despised congressional caucus. Hostility toward this form of nomination had been growing for years, and as late as 1820 Ritchie himself had condemned it, claiming it was "no longer needed." But the bitter contest of 1824 led him to change his mind. Crawford must receive the official sanction of the national Republican party to insure his election, and that seal of approval had always been issued by the congressional caucus. Besides, no reasonable alternatives existed. "Why rail against it," Ritchie asked his readers, "unless some better substitute is to be devised?"<sup>68</sup>

Crawford's campaign leaders severely underestimated popular resentment of the caucus and paid the consequences. Only 68 of 220 Republican congressmen showed up at the Washington caucus to cast their vote, many of them from Virginia and New York. Opponents heaped abuse on the undemocratic mode of election and agreed with Niles that it represented a "*deliberate attempt ... to overthrow the constitution of my country.*" Citizens in Winchester urged an end to the caucus system, claiming it encouraged abuses of power and led to tyranny. "Power usurped, and usurpation long acquiesced in, are often mistaken for right."<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>RE, April 14, 1820, March 28, 1823; Ritchie rallied the faithful to support the caucus system; see "Publius," RE, Dec. 23, 1823, Jan. 1, 3, 1824 for a particularly able defense.

<sup>69</sup>For the results of the Washington caucus, see RE, Feb. 19, 1824. Niles' Weekly Register, Oct. 13, 1823; "Resolutions of Town Hall Meeting in Winchester, Virginia," April 5, 1824,

Ritchie developed an ingenious answer to such claims. Without the guidance and unity provided by the congressional caucus, he claimed, the election would undoubtedly be thrown into the House of Representatives to be decided. A small group of politicians would then select an executive, rather than the people. John Wickham saw through this argument when he wrote sarcastically to Littleton Waller Tazewell that in Richmond the "opinion is very general that a caucus is necessary and the Doctrine that the Liberties of the people are best supported by passive obedience is thought a very sound one."<sup>70</sup>

The final blow to Crawford's presidential hopes came from Pennsylvania, where Jackson won the nomination of the state Republican convention in March 1824. Pennsylvania's actions changed the complexion of the campaign nationwide. Jackson gained considerably from it, while Crawford appeared almost totally discredited. Van Buren and the Junto knew this, but refused to give up on their nominee. Plans were made to replace Albert Gallatin, Crawford's vice-presidential nominee, with Henry Clay, in the hopes of strengthening the ticket in the West.<sup>71</sup> These last minute

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Broadside, VHS.

<sup>70</sup>RE, Feb. 12, 1824; Wickham to Tazewell, Jan. 11, 1824, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL.

<sup>71</sup>C.W. Gooch to Van Buren, Sept. 14, 1824, P.N. Nicholas to Van Buren, Oct. 19, 31, 1824, both in Van Buren Papers, LC; Gales and Seaton to Ritchie, Oct. 17, 1824, Gooch Family Papers, UVA.



changes proved to be too little, too late. While Virginia cast its 24 electoral votes for Crawford, he finished a distant third behind Jackson and Adams nationally, just high enough to have his name submitted to the House of Representatives, where the deadlocked election would be decided. Amid charges of intrigue and of a "corrupt bargain" with Clay, John Quincy Adams won the election on the first ballot early in 1825.<sup>72</sup>

The rumor that Clay and Adams had struck a bargain to effect the latter's election in the House outraged Virginians, and turned many of them against both men. From Richmond, Andrew Stevenson's young niece wrote him that the "good people are run mad here about the Presidential election - I was with some of your great men at Dr. Brockenbrough's the other night, and found them all universally denouncing Clay and Adams. They ([Philip] N. Nicholas, Dr. and Judge B[rockenbrough], [William H.] Roane, [John] Campbell, etc) said they would take Jackson or any body now in preference to Adams."<sup>73</sup> That the Junto was contemplating supporting Jackson, even for a moment, showed the degree of their disenchantment with Adams. By bargaining with Clay, he had shown his lack of devotion to the

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<sup>72</sup>RE, Nov. 1824-Feb. 1825, passim; Dangerfield, American Nationalism, 218-230; Remini, Making of the Democratic Party, 72-84.

<sup>73</sup>B. Coles to Andrew Stevenson, Feb. 3, 1825, Stevenson Papers, LC; John Campbell to David Campbell, Jan. 28, 1825, Campbell Family Papers, Duke.

preservation of republican principles. His subsequent actions only hardened those feelings among the Junto.

Between 1816 and 1824, the Richmond Junto oversaw the revival of state rights thought in Virginia. By decrying the dangers of the centralizing policies of Congress and the Supreme Court in the years that followed, the group had succeeded to a large extent in renewing attachments to what it considered the cardinal principles of republicanism. As far as its second goal, that of revitalizing the Old Dominion's role in national politics, was concerned, the Junto met with mixed results. The union with Van Buren and New York held promise, despite Crawford's defeat. It was clear that a new style of politics had emerged during the campaign, one that differed significantly from the methods of the past, and one that could not be ignored. To many it seemed that "Virginia men, and Va. principles and Va. conduct ... are getting quite out of fashion."<sup>74</sup> In order to continue its struggle, the members of the Junto realized that they needed to adapt to the changing times without abandoning their commitment to the "Virginia principles," which they continued to see as vital to their continued well-being. The Junto also realized that it needed to ally itself with someone capable of inspiring enthusiasm and

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<sup>74</sup>David Watson, Dec. 1824, Miscellaneous Memoranda, 1822-1829, David Watson Papers, LC.

unifying the state and the country behind its goals. In 1825 the Junto began scanning the political horizon for the man who could carry its dreams to fruition.

## Chapter II

### "Jackson and Reform": 1825-1828

Among the more intriguing and perplexing tasks confronting the historian of antebellum Virginia is explaining why the state strongly supported Andrew Jackson in 1828 after opposing and even condemning him just four years earlier. What happened in those years to make Jackson a more attractive candidate to the Richmond Junto and their fellow Virginians? Had the issues involved changed dramatically? Did Old Hickory confess the errors of his way and hew closer to the strict construction line after 1824? In their zeal to gain political power, did Virginians abandon the political principles they claimed to hold sacred? The answer to these questions can be found by examining the changing perceptions of Jackson that the Junto and others articulated during the campaign of 1828. In 1824, the Junto had branded Jackson as a dangerous and high-handed military chieftain unfit to rule the nation. But the nationalistic measures of the Adams administration, coupled with Jackson's emergence as the leader of a new political coalition ostensibly based on the doctrines of state rights, led the clique to reevaluate the General. While Ritchie

still had reservations about Jackson's qualifications for the office of president, other members of the group came to support his candidacy with varying degrees of enthusiasm. As the election neared, however, the Junto dropped all criticism of Jackson and embraced him openly. It now described the Hero of New Orleans as the the herald of a new age of liberty and reform. The Junto, and Virginia, supported Jackson in the election of 1828 because it believed that he would restore virtue to the American government. Henry Lee summed up the sentiment of many voters in the state when he told Jackson that the "honorable men in this great republic hope by electing you to preserve our liberty."<sup>1</sup>

Some commentators, both contemporary and modern, have argued that Virginians supported Jackson in 1828 only reluctantly, viewing him as the lesser of two evils. There is a certain validity to this claim, and it does explain why some in the state voted for Jackson. William Pollard's comment that "I am affraid [sic] whilst I am endeavoring to get rid of Charybdis I shall fall in with Scylla," accurately describes the sentiment of a segment of Virginia voters.<sup>2</sup> Even some of those who convinced themselves to vote

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<sup>1</sup>Henry Lee to Andrew Jackson, Sept. 17, 1828, quoted in Robert Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 1822-1832 (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 101.

<sup>2</sup>William Pollard to A.G. Ruffin, March 7, 1827, Wilson Cary Nicholas Papers, Library of Congress; John Wickham to Littleton Waller Tazewell, Dec. 17, 1826, Tazewell Family

for Jackson did so with reservations or stipulations. Virginia will "do everything she can" to elect Jackson, John Campbell wrote in November 1827, "but the moment he gets into any of his tantrums and gets afoul of the Constitution again, she will most assuredly get afoul of him with all the force she can muster."<sup>3</sup> Despite such ambivalence, the notion that Virginia voted for Jackson merely because he was the least objectionable candidate must be discarded as too simplistic. It fails to take proper measure of the importance that Virginians attached to their political philosophy.

The Richmond Junto's role in bringing Jacksonianism to Virginia has never been fully explored. The group established itself as the leader of the opposition movement in the state by late 1825 and was later enormously

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Papers, Virginia State Library; Richmond Enquirer (hereafter cited as RE), Oct. 17, 1826, May 22, 1827; For examples of scholars who accept this thesis, see Charles H. Ambler, Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics (Richmond: Bell Book & Stationary Co., 1913), 106; Katherine Ruth Malone, "The Virginia Doctrines, The Commonwealth, and the Republic: The Role of Fundamental Principles in Virginia Politics, 1798-1833" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1981), 285-295. Malone wrote that Virginians accepted Jackson "with regret rather than enthusiasm" (295).

<sup>3</sup>John Campbell to David Campbell, Nov. 16, 1827, Campbell Family Papers (hereafter cited as CFP), Duke University. Ritchie expressed a similar sentiment in a September, 11, 1827, editorial in the Enquirer, when he wrote that Virginia's support for Jackson did not "necessarily involve the obligation to support measures which she cannot approve." It could be argued that these warnings to Jackson were actually part of a strategy on the part of Jackson's supporters to placate those who still distrusted him.

influential in organizing the Jackson campaign in Virginia. For much of the campaign, however, the members of the Junto remained uncertain about Jackson's candidacy. They wanted to insure that he was pledged to positions compatible with their own on such matters as the protective tariff and federally-funded internal improvements. The Junto insisted that Old Hickory measure up to their state rights standards. The Junto and its followers were too dedicated to the tenets of republicanism to cast their votes for a man who had not earned their respect and admiration, or who did not share their concerns about the future of the Union. Virginia's decision to support Crawford in 1824, despite his poor health and fading hopes of victory, made clear the importance that Old Dominion voters placed on a candidate's principles. Expediency was no reason to vote for any man for any office. What mattered was his commitment to preserving liberty and his devotion to the Constitution. Had Jackson failed to measure up to these standards, he would have been rejected out of hand by the Junto and by Virginia. To earn the state's vote, Jackson, like any other office-seeker, would have to pass a test of political orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup>

Jackson gained the Junto's support in 1828 because he

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<sup>4</sup>John Tyler spoke for many Virginians when he warned that, "Should he [Jackson] abuse Virginia, by setting at naught her political sentiments, he will find her at the head of the opposition, and he will probably experience the fate of J.Q.A." Tyler to John Rutherford, Dec. 8, 1827, Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers (3 vols., Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1884-1896), 1:376-378.

seemed capable of defeating Adams and returning the federal government to its original purity. The Junto viewed the threat to state rights posed by the Adams administration as so grave that it focused all of its efforts on turning Adams out of power. Moreover, the group insisted that his successor be devoted to preserving the liberties of the people and the rights of the states. Like Jefferson in 1800, the new president must be dedicated to the fundamental principles of republicanism. The logic of this argument drove the Junto to emphasize Jackson's soundness on all of the issues facing the country: the tariff, internal improvements, and corruption in the federal government. In short, the Junto came to portray Jackson as the living embodiment of the southern state rights philosophy. This strategy worked marvelously and helped Jackson to capture 69% of the vote in Virginia in 1828.<sup>5</sup> But the unrealistic image of Jackson as the savior of the South inevitably cracked once he was in office. There was no way that Jackson could satisfy completely the expectations placed upon him by the Junto and by other southerners in 1828. Much of the bitter factionalism of Virginia politics in the 1830s can be traced to the disillusionment of those who supported Jackson in 1828, only to see him betray their trust. When, during the course of his administration, Jackson deviated from the

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<sup>5</sup>Congressional Quarterly, Inc. Presidential Elections Since 1789 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1987), 93.



true state rights course, many Virginians felt not just disappointment, but betrayal.

The Junto's march toward Jacksonianism between 1825 and 1828 followed three distinct stages. First, the group warned Virginia voters that the Adams administration presented dangers to the rights of the states every bit as real and threatening as those of 1798. Strong action was needed now, as it had been then, to prevent the overthrow of republican government. Next, the Junto concluded that Jackson was the only candidate capable of defeating Adams and reforming the federal government. It acknowledged Jackson's faults, but insisted that he was the best hope for success. Having gone this far, the group then spent the last months of the campaign reshaping Jackson's image in Virginia. By election day, the General was not only the defender of liberty and the agent of reform, but the "new apostle of the South, the new Jefferson, the new sentinel of southern power and prerogative in the nation."<sup>6</sup> In a time filled with political corruption and dangerous doctrines, the Junto argued, Jackson stood ready to defend the rights of the states. Only he was "capable of seeing the interest of the Southern & Western people" clearly; only he was free from the corrupting influence of faction, for "no party

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<sup>6</sup>William J. Cooper, Jr., The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 7.

considerations would induce him to support a wrong measure."<sup>7</sup> The Junto succeeded in equating Adams with power, corruption, and a federal government unbound by the strictures of the Constitution, and Jackson with liberty, virtue, and the rights of the states.<sup>8</sup> That made the choice in 1828 obvious.

The bitter and divisive presidential election of 1824 carried within it the seeds of political change at both the state and national level. The death of the congressional caucus, the rampant factionalism, and the generally low tone of the campaign were just three indications that the political status quo had been shaken, if not toppled. Quite frankly, the future appeared bleak to many. Unprincipled faction threatened to destroy the republican experiment. Elections centered on personalities instead of principles. Long standing party distinctions had been broken down and beneficial political alliances torn asunder. John Quincy Adams, the new president, had won office in a dubious manner, and he could expect strong opposition from Jackson's disappointed supporters. The nation found itself facing another crisis, the Junto argued, and something must be done

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<sup>7</sup>David Campbell to James Campbell, March 29, 1827, CFP, Duke.

<sup>8</sup>RE, Oct. 26, Nov. 27, 1827, Sept. 5, 1828; John Campbell to James Campbell, Dec. 13, 1827, CFP, Duke; John Tyler to Henry Curtis, Mar. 18, 1828, Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers, 1:383-386.

to awaken the people to the dangers they faced. "Doctrines are afloat," Ritchie wrote in early 1825, "which in times past would have roused up the jealous principles of the Republican Party."<sup>9</sup> But that party now stood in disarray, unable to guide the country as it had in the past. What was needed to remedy the situation was a return to the political distinctions of the past and a reassertion of the primacy of the "Virginia principles" in political affairs. This was the strategy Ritchie and the Junto mapped out in 1825 as they began to evaluate the administration of John Quincy Adams.

The Junto had succeeded in reviving state rights sentiment in Virginia, and this was the block upon which the Adams administration stumbled in the state. Adams's and Clay's perceived deviance from the true principles of republicanism sparked and sustained opposition to them in the Old Dominion. Virginians believed that the tenets of their political faith, best expressed by Jefferson and Madison in 1798 and 1799, had withstood the test of time and had served admirably as an unerring compass for the freest and most perfect nation in the world for half a century. Since their creed derived from firmly held beliefs about human nature, it was highly static and slow to accept change. Virginians could find no reason to alter or abandon their principles simply because the country had grown or

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<sup>9</sup>RE, Jan. 6, 1825.

times had changed.<sup>10</sup> "Grant, that Virginia differs from most of her sister states, as to the interpretation of the constitution," Ritchie wrote in 1825. "Does this difference prove that Virginia is in the wrong? Is the constitution a nose of wax? Its words are the same as in 1789."<sup>11</sup> Human nature had not evolved, nor had the forces of good triumphed over the forces of evil. Power and liberty still existed in inverse proportion to each other, power still corrupted, patriotic opposition was still necessary and noble, and the surest way to maintain political purity was still through a "frequent recurrence to fundamental principles." Devotion to liberty, to virtue, to the faith of their fathers, dictated the course that true patriots must follow. "*Obsta principiis*," Ritchie proclaimed from the pages of the Enquirer, and a great number of his fellow Virginians agreed heartily.<sup>12</sup>

When Ritchie and the Junto applied their standards to the Adams administration, they found it severely wanting, and the new government came under immediate attack in Virginia. The notion that Henry Clay had plotted with Adams to elevate him to power proved impossible to shake in the

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<sup>10</sup>Malone, "The Virginia Doctrines," 278-295.

<sup>11</sup>RE, Jan. 20, 1825.

<sup>12</sup>Ritchie used the phrase repeatedly in the Enquirer. Junto member Andrew Stevenson told James Barbour that "Principles and not men, has heretofore and will continue to be my motto." Stevenson to Barbour, March 28, 1825, Barbour Family Papers, University of Virginia.

state, handicapping the administration from the start.<sup>13</sup> The Junto viewed Clay and Adams's machinations as a clear sign that the liberties of the people were being subverted by politicians bent on personal gain. Such an administration, founded in corruption, would surely continue to ignore constitutional restraints and could never be trusted. "I care not what principles regulate Mr. Adams's and Mr. Clay's administration," one disgusted observer pronounced. "I care not how they conduct themselves in future. It is enough for me to know, that it is an *ill-gotten administration*, 'begotten in sin, and brought forth in iniquity'."<sup>14</sup> Charges of a "corrupt bargain" marked the beginning of an assault on Adams and Clay that intensified in the years ahead.

Adams's Inaugural Address in March of 1825 increased Virginia's displeasure with the new administration.<sup>15</sup> Ritchie dissected the oration carefully before announcing

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<sup>13</sup>Richmond Constitutional Whig (also known simply as the Richmond Whig), Feb. 1, March 29, April 1, 8, 1825; RE, March 11, 22, April 12, 1825. In July and August of 1827, at the height of the campaign, Ritchie dragged out the "corrupt bargain" question again. The Junto's hatred of Clay outmatched their dislike of Adams.

<sup>14</sup>"One From the East," RE, May 10, 1825. In a similar vein, David Campbell told his brother that Adams's association with Clay "injured him greatly in this State. Indeed we view it as a corrupt one tho it may not be." David Campbell to James Campbell, Oct. 22, 1826, CFP, Duke.

<sup>15</sup>James D. Richardson, ed. and comp., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897 (10 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1896-1899), 2:292-299.

that the Chief Executive's loose construction of the Constitution represented "no very agreeable prognostic of the course which we, Virginians, are to anticipate from the present administration." Adams hoped to "build up a magnificent and splendid national government, upon the ruins of the Constitution." The Old Dominion must continue its struggle against the pernicious "doctrine of the general welfare," Ritchie concluded. "The crisis is a serious one, and calls for all our vigilance and all our energy."<sup>16</sup> From the state capital, John Campbell wrote to James Barbour in Washington about the address. Federalist Richmond applauded Adams's remarks, but "his views relative to the powers of Congress in making internal improvement are altogether at war with the doctrines of V[irginia]." A short time later, Andrew Stevenson wrote Barbour suggesting he decline a cabinet position in the new administration. Ritchie and other party leaders objected to him accepting, the congressman implied, because they hoped to evaluate the administration impartially. Barbour's presence in the cabinet would hinder that. In fact, Stevenson's letter made clear the Junto's disapproval of Adams.<sup>17</sup>

William Branch Giles and John Randolph, two Old Republicans with ties to the Junto, attacked the president

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<sup>16</sup>RE, March 8, 11, 1825.

<sup>17</sup>John Campbell to James Barbour, March 8, 1825, CFP, Duke; Andrew Stevenson to Barbour, March 28, 1825, Barbour Family Papers, UVA.

more forcefully. Giles insisted that Adams's "entire destitution of republican principles" and "blind sublimated ungovernable ambition" made him especially dangerous. His administration must be stopped before it did irreparable damage to the edifice of liberty. The people gave the government its power, Giles announced boldly, and they can take it away. Randolph, ever full of venom, rarely missed a chance to assail Adams and Clay and flatly stated his desire to pull down the administration. Less than a month into his term of office, Adams had already provoked opposition and earned the enmity of some of Virginia's leading politicians.<sup>18</sup>

The situation worsened considerably for the president as the year ended. Barbour ignored Stevenson's and Ritchie's advice and became Adams's Secretary of War, thereby vacating his Senate seat.<sup>19</sup> As the Virginia General Assembly prepared to designate a replacement, the Enquirer was filled with letters and editorials urging the legislature to select a true republican to fight against the administration in

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<sup>18</sup>William Branch Giles, "Political Disquisitions #3," March 25, 1825, in Political Miscellanies (Richmond, 1829). Randolph's "Blifel and Black George" speech, delivered in the Senate on March 30, 1826, was typical of the stridency of his attacks on the administration. Virginia's other senator at the time, Norfolk lawyer Littleton Waller Tazewell, was also an early and outspoken opponent of Adams. Norma Lois Peterson, Littleton Waller Tazewell (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1983), 148.

<sup>19</sup>Charles D. Lowery, James Barbour, A Jeffersonian Republican (University, Al: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 151-152.

Washington. Commentators typically pointed out that the "general welfare" clause of Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution was being used to usurp the powers of the states. Under Adams, "Fabricius" warned his readers, "this is no longer to be a confederative republic, but a great consolidated empire. A reference to constitutional limits is laughed to scorn. Expediency is the order of the day.... If not resisted, the general government will become everything and the state nothing." Other analysts agreed and joined in calling for their representatives to appoint a senator who would "support the old Virginia Doctrines of the constitution."<sup>20</sup> The Legislature responded by selecting John Randolph of Roanoke, that Argus-eyed protector of liberty, to the post.<sup>21</sup>

Given the hostile atmosphere in Virginia toward the Adams administration, it is not surprising that Adams's nationalistic message to Congress on December 6, 1825 set

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<sup>20</sup>"Fabricius," RE, Nov. 8, 1825; RE, Oct. 28, 1825. See also "Mutius," RE, Nov. 18, 1825; James Trezvant to William H. Brodnax, Dec. 10, 1825, William H. Brodnax Letters, Virginia Historical Society; Claiborne W. Gooch to Thomas Jefferson, Dec. 31, 1825, Gooch Family Papers, VHS.

<sup>21</sup>Randolph outpolled Giles (who had the support of the Junto, but was even less popular than Randolph), John Floyd, and Henry St. George Tucker, a popular western lawyer and Randolph's step-brother. Lynchburg Virginian, Nov. 17, 1825; Dice Robins Anderson, William Branch Giles: A Study in the Politics of Virginia and the Nation from 1790 to 1830 (Menasha, WI: George Banta Publishing Co., 1914), 218. Doubts about Tucker's orthodoxy on the internal improvement question kept him from receiving the office. See John Campbell to David Campbell, Jan. 19, 1826, CFP, Duke.



off fireworks in the state. Ritchie condemned Adams's commitment to expand the powers of the federal government, ridiculed his plans to build "lighthouses of the skies," and mused rhetorically, "are we really reading a state-paper, or a school-boy's thesis?"<sup>22</sup> In a similarly wry but revealing comment, "Common Sense" quipped that "it was observed, by one present, that he had heard a great deal of the violations of the constitution committed by 'General Jackson;' but from what he *now heard*, 'General Welfare' beat him, all hollow, in the number of his violations." At the Fourth of July celebrations in Richmond that year, Ritchie toasted "'Sky-light' Politicians; May those who dare to soar 'sky-high' beyond the Constitution of their Country, be dashed, like Phaeton to the earth."<sup>23</sup>

Jesting aside, Virginians found much in Adams's message to justify their apprehensions about the course of his administration. The president's interpretation of the Constitution and some of his statements, particularly his comment that elected officials should not be "palsied by the wills of their constituents," and his remark that "Liberty is power," deeply troubled Virginians grounded in the

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<sup>22</sup>RE, Dec. 8, 1825. Pleasants mocked Ritchie in the Dec. 9, 1825 issue of the Richmond Constitutional Whig: "There is but one way in which Mr. Adams can hope to write a *perfect* message, and that is, by first consulting Thomas Ritchie, Esq. Let Mr. Ritchie furnish the ideas, and Mr. Adams add the last polish, and then we shall have a *great* Message."

<sup>23</sup>"Common Sense," RE, Dec. 18, 1825; Constitutional Whig, July 7, 1826.

republican creed of their fathers.<sup>24</sup> Representatives not responsive to the voters? A central government with enormously expanded powers? Nothing could alarm Virginians more. The president's plans smacked distinctly of despotism. To show the state's concern with the doctrines set forth in Adams's message, the Virginia General Assembly passed resolutions condemning a general system of internal improvements and protective tariffs as violations of the Constitution.<sup>25</sup> "Rapid strides are making towards the consolidation of all powers in the hands of that [federal] government," Claiborne W. Gooch informed Thomas Jefferson shortly after Adams's Message, "and it is feared that when that consolidation takes place, the day will not be distant when the liberties of the people will be subverted." Ritchie was not alone in claiming that his opposition to the administration dated from the delivery of Adams's first message.<sup>26</sup>

The president's supporters responded swiftly to these

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<sup>24</sup>Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 2, 299-317. Both Pleasants and Hezekiah Niles scrambled to explain the president's quotes. See Constitutional Whig, Jan. 6, 1826, and Niles' Weekly Register, Jan. 14, 1826.

<sup>25</sup>The legislators used the language of the Virginia Resolutions of 1798 in the preamble to the resolutions. Journal of the House of Delegates of the Commonwealth of Virginia ... 1825 (Richmond: Thomas Ritchie, 1825). Niles thought the resolutions were passed solely for political effect. Niles' Weekly Register, March 18, 1826.

<sup>26</sup>Gooch to Jefferson, Dec. 31, 1825, Gooch Family Papers, VHS (photocopy); RE, June 1, 1827; Ambler, Thomas Ritchie, 101-102.

early attacks upon his administration. In the Richmond Constitutional Whig, the Lynchburg Virginian, and Niles' Weekly Register, editors and essayists explained Adams's policies, denied their unconstitutionality, and argued that an unnatural coalition had formed with the sole and avowed purpose of opposing every measure of the administration. "The Crawford party," John Hampden Pleasants announced in March of 1825, "are seeking at this moment, to rally an opposition to Mr. Adams's administration . . .," and the Jacksonians, "that party who have no opinions," have joined them. "It is an unprincipled opposition on all hands." Ritchie was the ringleader, Pleasants noted, and had secretly supported Jackson all along. Only the General's unpopularity in Virginia prevented the Junto leader from admitting this in public.<sup>27</sup>

The Virginian dragged out charges about the Junto again, claiming Ritchie and his cronies (Giles received special attention) were out to topple Adams any way they could. "With unlimited talents and a paper of extensive circulation to convey their opinions, the members of the Richmond Junto issue their orders with all the hauteur of a Roman Pontiff and the people obey with unresisting servility." The Junto was the true subverter of liberty, the

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<sup>27</sup>Constitutional Whig, Feb. 1, March 15, March 25, 1825. Pleasants repeated these charges frequently throughout 1825 and 1826.

editor concluded, not the Adams administration.<sup>28</sup> Hezekiah Niles, an old foe of Ritchie and the Junto, condemned its attacks on Adams and chastised the group for "whipping-up an opposition about something - *any thing*." The Baltimore editor also jabbed at Giles and Randolph for being doomsayers and for never suggesting solutions to the problems they ranted about. He then defended vigorously Adams and his Message.<sup>29</sup>

The composition and tactics of both the supporters and detractors of the administration had begun to take form by the end of 1825. The president's adherents denied all allegations of wrongdoing and claimed an unprincipled coalition of disgruntled politicians intended to derail the administration's plans for fostering national growth and harmony. The opposition, which the Junto and much of Virginia had slipped into by year's end, castigated Adams severely for discarding fundamental republican axioms and for abusing the privileges of office. The administration, born of corruption, was unquestionably jeopardizing the liberties of the nation. James Trezvant summed up the concerns and goals of the opposition as Adams's second year began. "I fear the worst - yet I hope there is a redeeming spirit in the virtue of the people which will ultimately produce a reaction in public sentiment, and bring us back to

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<sup>28</sup>Lynchburg Virginian, Nov. 17, Dec. 5, 1825.

<sup>29</sup>Niles' Weekly Register, Dec. 17, 31, 1825.

the wholesome and sound constitutional doctrines from which we have been certainly tho' gradually departing ever since the end of Jefferson's administration."<sup>30</sup> The message was clear, but who was to be the messenger?

Ritchie and his circle judged the administration's actions against the yardstick of their political principles. Federally funded internal improvements, however beneficial, stretched the powers of the central government beyond their constitutional limitations. A protective tariff was not only unconstitutional, but injudicious and immoral as well. Executive patronage was inherently dangerous, because it reposed excessive power in the one branch of government most likely to abuse it. These conclusions flowed logically from the ideology of state rights and strict construction. To deny their validity or to forsake them for political expediency constituted a repudiation of everything that they held sacred.

Not all Virginians joined with the Junto in demanding adherence to the "Principles of '98." Some chafed under the yoke of the ideological constraints of the state rights school. They denounced as antiquated the doctrines of strict construction. Jefferson's and Madison's fears of a consolidated federal government may have been well founded in 1800, but that crisis had long passed. America had

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<sup>30</sup>James Trezvant to William H. Brodnax, Feb. 8, 1826, Brodnax Letters, VHS; Remini, Course of American Freedom, 100-115.

changed, and ideas must change to suit the realities of the day. The country had different problems to solve in 1825 than it did in 1800, and the old interpretations and solutions were no longer acceptable.<sup>31</sup>

Proponents of these conflicting ideologies clashed repeatedly during the campaign of 1828 over nearly every subject, including whom to support for the presidency. Nowhere was the debate sharper than on the questions of tariffs and internal improvements. The positions of Adams and Jackson on these issues shaped the response of Virginians to their respective candidacies. Debate in Virginia on the protective tariff system and federally-funded internal improvements centered not so much on the economic dimensions of these issues, but on the ideological aspects. Adams's opponents, including the Junto, argued that both of these policies were not only unconstitutional, but detrimental to the health of a republican government as well.

As Virginians assessed the Adams administration and began discussing the upcoming election, they came to focus quickly on some old concerns. Debate over the constitutionality of a protective tariff stretched back at least to 1816, and Ritchie was an early and outspoken foe of

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<sup>31</sup>In his study of James Barbour, Charles D. Lowery describes this desire "to transcend the limits of ... rural Virginia culture and to respond positively to complex national needs." Lowery, James Barbour, 106.

the principle of protection. Other Virginians joined the fight against high tariffs when rates were increased substantially in 1824. The tariff, however, received little attention in the campaign of 1828 until Daniel Webster introduced a bill to raise rates on imported woolens in 1827. While the bill never passed, it did increase anxiety in Virginia and the South about the issue and the upcoming revision of the tariff schedule in 1828.<sup>32</sup> The Virginia General Assembly was so concerned that they passed resolutions, penned by Giles, that denounced the protective tariff as "the most despotic and dangerous power that can be exercised by government in any form. It places the occupation and property of every man, under the control of the government, and thus converts the citizen into the slave, the natural man into a governmental machine."<sup>33</sup> While Giles's bellicose views foreshadowed the position taken by South Carolina in the Nullification Crisis, they did not reflect the prevailing sentiment of Virginia or the region at the time.

Ritchie, attempting to keep relations with Pennsylvania and New York on a friendly basis, assured his northern

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<sup>32</sup>Robert Remini, Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 134-135; Robert Remini, The Election of Andrew Jackson (Philadelphia and New York: J.B. Lippencott Company, 1963), 143-148.

<sup>33</sup>The Virginia Resolutions of 1827, reprinted in Niles' Weekly Register, April 21, 1827.

friends that Giles did not speak for Virginia.<sup>34</sup> The Old Dominion did doubt the expediency, even the constitutionality, of a protective tariff scheme, but Giles had been excessive in his condemnation. Ritchie noted, however, that Adams's approval of high tariffs made him unpopular in Virginia, and he asked his northern correspondents if they were familiar with Jackson's views on this issue. Could they assure Virginia that the General was opposed to the principle of a protective tariff? Such a statement would go far toward convincing Virginians to support Jackson's candidacy. While Ritchie waited for Jackson's supporters to explain his views on the tariff question, other Virginians were reporting that Jackson opposed "prohibitory duties" and favored only "fair + moderate protection" that would allow American manufacturers to compete in the world market.<sup>35</sup> Ritchie and the Junto remained unconvinced. They realized that Jackson was especially vulnerable on this question. If he came out strongly in favor of protection, he would be lauded in Pennsylvania but scolded in the South. If he spoke out against the tariff, his northern supporters might abandon him. Littleton Waller Tazewell and others who supported Jackson understood the delicacy of the situation and warned

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<sup>34</sup>Ambler, Ritchie, 113.

<sup>35</sup>William Cabell Rives to Thomas W. Gilmer, July 22, 1827, William Cabell Rives Papers, LC.



that Jackson's election in Virginia would be endangered if he took a strong stance in favor of the tariff.<sup>36</sup>

Ritchie attempted to contain discussion on the tariff question throughout most of the campaign. He continued to placate his northern friends on the matter throughout 1827 and early 1828, even admitting at one point the constitutionality of the tariff system. To Van Buren he confided his concerns about the impact of the debate on Jackson's candidacy in the South. Ritchie assured the New Yorker that he was endeavoring to divert attention away from the topic in his paper.<sup>37</sup> But the debate on the "Tariff of Abominations" in the summer of 1828 changed Ritchie's response to the subject. He now joined the chorus of Southerners who spoke out against "this vexatious measure, which is at war with the spirit of the Constitution, as well as the spirit of the age ...; this oppressive measure, which operates so unequally and partially upon the different parts of our country." The emerging Jacksonian coalition must work to end this injustice, Ritchie argued, and on this matter Virginia's devotion to the strict construction philosophy and to the South would take precedence over party harmony

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<sup>36</sup>Tazewell to Giles, June 26, 1828, M.S., UVA; John Floyd to Sam Houston, March 15, 1828, Andrew Jackson Papers, LC; Richard E. Parker to Tazewell, May 4, 1828, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL.

<sup>37</sup>RE, Nov. 16, 1827; Ritchie to Van Buren, March 11, 1828, Martin Van Buren Papers, LC.

and unity.<sup>38</sup>

A second major battle in the campaign of 1828 involved the question of internal improvements. In his first annual address, Adams had outlined an ambitious blueprint for a national system of canals, roads, turnpikes, and bridges that would facilitate commerce and communication between the various regions of the country, thereby drawing them closer together. Regional prejudices and tensions would be set aside as the farmer of the west joined hands with the merchants and manufacturers of the east and north in economic union. The federal government's function, Adams reckoned, was to provide the resources needed to bring about such a marriage. Like other loose constructionists, the president hinged his scheme on the "general welfare" clause of the Constitution, which gave Congress powers to provide for the well-being of the nation. Besides, the president argued, these improvements were badly needed, and the people overwhelmingly favored them.<sup>39</sup>

Strict constructionists, however, argued forcefully that the Founding Fathers never intended their words to have such elasticity. After all, virtually any project could fall under the rubric of providing for the general welfare. The Constitution clearly placed limitations upon the federal

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<sup>38</sup>RE, June 6, Aug. 5, 1828; Remini, Election of Jackson, 171-180.

<sup>39</sup>Richardson, ed., Messages and Papers of Presidents, 2:299-317.

government's powers and reserved others to the states. The "power to make internal improvements" was an "original substantive" power that could not be "assumed by the general government." Granting Congress such power "would not only destroy all the demarkations of power between the state and general governments grounded upon principles of locality, and generality; but would be consolidation in its essence."<sup>40</sup> Further, a program of federally funded improvements would undoubtedly lead to corruption and the abuse of power. Projects would always favor one section at the expense of others. Taxes would be collected from honest citizens to pay for improvements that might never benefit them, or worse yet, might injure them economically. Such unjust and unconstitutional measures must not be allowed to come to fruition, regardless of how popular they were.<sup>41</sup>

Troubled by this issue, Ritchie wrote to Madison and asked if Adams's plans for internal improvement did not represent an assumption of powers by the federal government similar to the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798. Ritchie knew that "old Virginia herself is divided

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<sup>40</sup>The Virginia Resolutions of 1827, reprinted in Niles' Weekly Register, April 21, 1827.

<sup>41</sup>RE, Nov. 8, Dec. 8, 1825, Feb. 18, 1826. Once again, it should be pointed out that even the most doctrinaire Virginians had no problem with state financed improvements. The Enquirer was filled with proposals and calls for actions on such projects. See April 12, 15, 19, 26, 1825; Jan. 12, Feb. 23, March 7, June 6, 1826, etc. In July of 1828, a convention met in Charlottesville to discuss internal improvements.

upon this subject," but suggested that a constitutional amendment denying Congress power to fund internal improvements would resolve the dispute once and for all. Ritchie clearly hoped to link the younger Adams's actions with those of his father in the hopes of discrediting his administration. If he could get the father of the Constitution to acknowledge the similarities between 1798 and 1825, Adams's fate in Virginia would be sealed.<sup>42</sup>

Madison's carefully worded reply failed to provide the ammunition the editor had hoped for. While Madison admitted concerns about the recent "license of construction which has been applied to the Constitution," he refused to compare the Alien and Sedition Acts with John Quincy Adams's message to Congress. Madison lectured Ritchie on distinguishing between a government assuming power against the will of its constituents, which was the case in 1798, and the "assumption by the Constituent Body through the Government as the organ of its will," which the current call of the people for internal improvements represented. The citizens of the republic, he argued, possessed the absolute right to shape the federal government's actions. Therefore, Madison concluded, the best way to address the issues of the day was for the people to instruct their representatives in

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<sup>42</sup>Ritchie to Madison, Dec. 10, 1825, Madison-Todd Papers, UVA.

Washington rather than to propose constitutional amendments.<sup>43</sup>

The exchange between Madison and Ritchie revealed more than their respective positions on the internal improvement question. Ritchie's letter underscored his devotion to a theoretical political philosophy that many of his generation accepted implicitly. Madison's response confirmed the evolution of his political thought and his desire to stay in touch with the sentiments and aspirations of his countrymen. Democracy was fluid, evershifting, Madison maintained, and ideological rigidity stunted the progress of liberty. In this instance, the words of the disciples no longer matched the ideas of the master.<sup>44</sup>

If Madison's reply disappointed Ritchie, it did not slow down his assault on the administration or stop him and his fellow Virginians from comparing the younger Adams with the elder. The tenacious editor warned his readers repeatedly that the Constitution was "again exposed to the most serious dangers." Heretical doctrines were espoused that threatened to hurl the country into the "gulf of consolidation," and all true republicans knew that "the next

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<sup>43</sup>Madison to Ritchie, Dec. 18, 1825, James Madison Papers, LC. Apparently, Van Buren asked Madison the same question, and Madison made the same distinction and suggestions to him in a letter dated Sept. 20, 1826, Madison Papers, LC.

<sup>44</sup>For a first-rate treatment of Madison's maturation as a political theoretician, see Drew McCoy, The Last on the Fathers: James Madison and the Republican Legacy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

step to *consolidation*, is *Monarchy* in some of its forms."<sup>45</sup> John Campbell, a Junto intimate, thought that Adams's "latitudinarian doctrines have gone far ahead of even Alex. Hamilton," and added his voice to those calling for an end to the "mad and ambitious schemes" of the administration and its "infatuated partizans." Others agreed with Campbell, and Ritchie announced with confidence in the summer of 1826 that "no administration ever lost strength throughout Virginia, so completely, as the present one since its commencement." Virginians were so bitter about Adams's actions, Ritchie insisted, that he could never expect the state to support his administration.<sup>46</sup>

Astute observers from across the state agreed with Ritchie's analysis. Adams's support continued to fall in the Old Dominion. The question now concerned who the state would support in the upcoming presidential contest. Western Virginia seemed committed to Jackson already, and a general consensus existed by late 1826 that most of Crawford's

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<sup>45</sup>RE, Feb. 23, 1826; see also RE, Mar. 2, 24, April 26, 1826. In the June 16, 1826 issue, Ritchie noted that he had received correspondence from across the state comparing J.Q. Adams's administration with that of John Adams.

<sup>46</sup>John Campbell to James Campbell, April 8, 1826, CFP, Duke; RE, June 13, 1826. For other examples of this sentiment, see James Trezvant to William H. Brodnax, Dec. 10, 1825, Brodnax Letters, VHS; William H. Roane to Van Buren, April 23, 1826, Harrison Family Papers, VHS.

supporters now backed the Hero of New Orleans.<sup>47</sup> One of Jackson's correspondents notified him that "Virginia is changing fast, the Western part of the State was always disposed to support you, and in the Eastern section of the State a change is gradually taking place."<sup>48</sup> But other voters remained undecided. Richmond lawyer Benjamin Watkins Leigh described the growing, but still tenuous, support for Jackson in a letter to Henry Lee. "I begin to apprehend, that the vote of Virginia will be given to Gen. Jackson . . . , tho the public feeling is not yet by any means decided. The most zealous men of the old Jefferson party are for him - and I believe would be for any body - against John Q."<sup>49</sup>

Leigh's comments about Jackson's supporters accurately reflected the state of sentiment as it existed in the summer of 1826. The Junto had moved much more decisively into the General's ranks, however, by early 1827. A key reason for this shift was Van Buren's efforts to add the Junto to the Jackson coalition. This required assurances that Jackson

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<sup>47</sup>John Campbell to James Campbell, April 8, 1826; David Campbell to James Campbell, July 3, 1826, both in CFP, Duke; John Wickham to Tazewell, Dec. 17, 1826, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; Sam Houston to Andrew Jackson, Jan. 5, 1827, in John Spencer Bassett, ed. Correspondence of Andrew Jackson (7 vols. Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-1935), 3:330-331.

<sup>48</sup>Arthur P. Hayne to Jackson, July 20, 1826, Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Jackson, 3:306-307.

<sup>49</sup>Benjamin Watkins Leigh to Henry Lee, July 30, 1826, Benjamin Watkins Leigh Papers, VHS; emphasis mine. Leigh despised both Adams and Jackson, and had no reason to misrepresent the political climate in the capital.

accepted the "Virginia doctrines," which the Little Magician quickly gave. Although historians usually credit the New Yorker with bringing Virginia into the Jackson fold, evidence exists to prove that the Junto sought out Van Buren as a source of information and possible collaboration.<sup>50</sup>

Communication between Van Buren and the Junto had lapsed after Adams's election, as both parties turned to other matters. Van Buren, back in control of New York, returned to the national stage, and set about creating a coalition to drive Adams from office. Sometime in 1826, the New Yorker settled on Jackson as his candidate. He then talked with John Calhoun, Adams's Vice President, about joining forces on Jackson's behalf. Calhoun had already made overtures to the General, and agreed to work with Van Buren as well. The New Yorker promised to discuss matters with the Richmond Junto in the hopes of enticing it to join the coalition as well.<sup>51</sup>

The Junto had, in fact, already made tentative gestures toward Van Buren. William Roane, son of Spencer Roane, wrote to the Little Magician early in 1826 to praise the speech he had made on the Panama Mission. Adams had appointed commissioners to attend a conference in Panama without first

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<sup>50</sup>Remini, Making of Democratic Party, 118-129; Donald B. Cole, Martin Van Buren and the American Political System (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 116-159; John Niven, Martin Van Buren: The Romantic Age of American Politics (New York: Oxford, 1983), 156-214.

<sup>51</sup>Remini, Making of Democratic Party, 123-146.



securing the approval of Congress, thereby leaving himself open to charges of abusing his presidential powers. Van Buren, back in Congress, joined Randolph and Tazewell in denouncing the president's actions.<sup>52</sup> Roane thought that the New Yorker's speech made perfectly clear the dangerous actions of the administration. The Junto member then informed Van Buren of the widespread opposition to Adams in Virginia, and the common fear that the administration was "breaking down the best principles + changing the ancient + established usages of the govt." Roane closed by expressing his support of Van Buren's "efforts to retract the govmt to its original + true principles."<sup>53</sup>

Having thus established, or rather reestablished, communication with Van Buren, the Junto grew bolder. Philip Norborne Nicholas, brother of Wilson Cary Nicholas, penned the New Yorker a letter in October of 1826 detailing the clique's ambivalence about Jackson and hinting at its desire for reliable information about him. After asking Van Buren to explain New York politics, Nicholas informed him that Virginians opposed Adams strongly, but remained undecided about who to run against him. Jackson, who "was not the favorite originally of V[irginia]," had picked up

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<sup>52</sup>Peterson, Tazewell, 126-132.

<sup>53</sup>Roane to Van Buren, April 23, 1826, Harrison Family Papers, VHS. Ritchie spoke out repeatedly against the Panama Mission in the Enquirer in late March and early April of 1826. In the April 11 issue, Ritchie praised Van Buren's speech.

supporters, although "there are many with us who I think carry their hostility to him to quite an unreasonable length." With more information about the General's views and about developments in New York and Pennsylvania, perhaps Jackson's prospects would improve in Virginia. Nicholas then went to the heart of the matter. "We are so little informed in the views of those with whom we would cooperate in other states. There are surely some of us discreet enough to be confided in."<sup>54</sup> The cards were on the table. Nicholas was suggesting to Van Buren that the Junto join his coalition to oust Adams.

Van Buren's reply began with a lengthy exposition on the "inexplicable" state of political affairs in New York. He traced party developments in the state from the days of Burr and Hamilton, carefully pointing out that his party "is now + has been throughout the same old Republican party which secured the election of Mr. Jefferson." The New Yorker then abruptly changed the subject to a discussion of Jackson's prospects in 1828. "If Gen. Jackson and his friends will put his election on old party grounds," the Little Magician claimed, "preserve the old systems, avoid if not condemn the practices of the last campaign[,] we can by adding his personal popularity to the yet remaining force of old party feeling, not only succeed in electing him but our

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<sup>54</sup>Nicholas to Van Buren, Oct. 13, 1826, Van Buren Papers, LC.

success when achieved will be worth something." Van Buren seemed to be revealing his blueprint for the upcoming election, but Nicholas and the Junto remained unclear about what role they were to have in it.<sup>55</sup>

Two developments in January of 1827 clarified matters and strengthened the Junto's commitment to Jackson. John Randolph, having served the remainder of Barbour's Senate term, stood for reelection. Randolph's intemperate actions in Washington and his role as "Van Buren's stalking horse for Jackson in the Old Dominion" sparked a movement in the legislature to have him replaced by John Tyler, a moderate who opposed Adams but who had not yet endorsed the Hero.<sup>56</sup> Ritchie and the Junto backed Randolph strongly. They knew that Tyler, who had defended Clay against the "corrupt bargain" charges, had the support of the administration men in Virginia. The senatorial election quickly became a hotly disputed topic in the state and attracted attention nationwide.<sup>57</sup> Tyler's forces claimed that Randolph's only support came from the oligarchic Junto, the "parents of the factious opposition to the administration." They also

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<sup>55</sup>Van Buren to Nicholas, Nov. 1, 1826, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>56</sup>John Niven, Van Buren, 181; John Y. Mason to William H. Brodnax, March 4, 1827, M.S., VSL; "Barre," Constitutional Whig, Jan. 2, 1827, Jan. 26, 1827.

<sup>57</sup>The Enquirer and Constitutional Whig were filled with editorials and essays about the election in late December, 1826 and early January, 1827.

highlighted Randolph's eccentricities to discredit further his candidacy. Despite these tactics and the feeling that Adams's friends in Virginia were attempting to divide the Republicans of the state by turning out Randolph, the Junto remained confident that its man would triumph.<sup>58</sup>

Tyler's subsequent victory, then, left the group stunned and "deeply mortified." The administration presses claimed that the opposition and the Junto had suffered a mortal wound.<sup>59</sup> Randolph's defeat did represent a setback for the anti-administration forces in Virginia, but not a crippling one. Randolph himself considered the defeat more of a personal insult than anything else. He had confided to his close friend and Junto member John Brockenbrough that if he were not reelected, he would assume it was because the state considered him unfit for the office. When notified of his defeat, Randolph asked Brockenbrough, "Why is it that our system has a uniform tendency to bring forward low and little men, to the exclusion of the more worthy?" After reflecting upon the matter, Randolph grew less bitter and

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<sup>58</sup>Benjamin Watkins Leigh to Littleton Waller Tazewell, Jan. 24, 1827, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL (Leigh was quoting from a speech given by Samuel Moore of Rockbridge in the Assembly); Constitutional Whig, Jan. 1827, *passim*; "Virginus," RE, Jan. 4, 1827; Sam Houston wrote Jackson that "Times have been squally as Richmond, but his friends here say he [Randolph] will be elected easily." Houston to Jackson, Jan. 5, 1827, Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Jackson, 3:330-331.

<sup>59</sup>Benjamin Estill to David Campbell, Jan. 24, 1827, CFP, Duke; "Timon," Constitutional Whig, Feb. 20, 1827.

decided that "nothing then, remains but a calm and dignified submission to the disgrace that has been put upon me."<sup>60</sup>

While one observer claimed that the election results threw Ritchie "into hystericks," the editor quickly assured his readers that no significant damage had been inflicted. Since Tyler opposed the administration and was a true friend of state rights, there was no need for concern.<sup>61</sup>

Just a few days after Randolph's defeat, Ritchie received a long letter from Van Buren that removed all doubts as to the role the Junto would play in the upcoming campaign. The professed purpose of the epistle was to gain the Junto's support for a scheme Van Buren had proposed to restructure the Republican Party's national convention, but the New Yorker ranged far beyond that. With uncharacteristic candor, Van Buren suggested to Ritchie that the "planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the north" unite in the "substantial reorganization of the Old Republican party." Jackson would serve as their leader and Van Buren's general convention scheme would be the means by which unity and victory would be achieved.

Van Buren explained the reasoning behind his plan in a

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<sup>60</sup>RE, Jan. 16, 20, 1827; John Randolph to John Brockenbrough, Aug. 8, Oct. 13, 1826; Jan. 13, 19, 1827, Kenneth Shorey, ed., Collected Letters of John Randolph to Dr. John Brockenbrough, 1812-1833 (New Brunswick: Transition Press, 1988), 82-84.

<sup>61</sup>Benjamin Estill to David Campbell, Jan. 24, 1827, CFP, Duke; RE, Jan. 16, 1827.

fashion well calculated to impress the Junto. The breakdown of the old party system, hastened by Monroe's "amalgamating policy," had revived local and regional prejudices long considered dormant. Factionalism and corruption ensued. To correct this, the "old party distinctions" must again be raised and maintained. "We must always have party distinctions and the old ones are the best." Furthermore, "political combinations between the inhabitants of the different states are unavoidable ..., and the most natural and beneficial to the country is that between the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the north."<sup>62</sup>

The engine driving this "political combination" would be the ideology of Jeffersonian Republicanism, and the popular Jackson would serve as engineer. Van Buren told Ritchie that he had "long been satisfied that we can only get rid of the present, + restore a better state of things, by combining Genl Jackson's personal popularity with the portion of old party feeling yet remaining." The device of a general convention would help bring such a goal to fruition. Because it was "more in unison with the spirit of the times, especially at the seat of the war Pennsylvania + N. York," a convention would lend respectabilty to the campaign. It would also bring together Republicans from all regions and, by drawing "anew the old Party lines," unite them behind

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<sup>62</sup>Van Buren to Ritchie, Jan. 13, 1827 (copy), Van Buren Papers, LC.

common principles. Next, Van Buren discussed how a nomination from a national convention committed to a specific platform would strengthen Jackson's campaign. "His election, as the result of his military services without reference to party + ... principle, would be one thing. His election as the result of a combined and concerted effort of a political party, holding in the main, to certain tenets + opposed to certain prevailing principles, might be another and a far different thing."<sup>63</sup>

The New Yorker closed his letter by shamelessly praising Ritchie for his indispensable services in the name of liberty. In case the Junto leader missed the point, Van Buren informed him that "there is not another man in the Union [who] can render as much service to the cause in which we are engaged as yourself." The Little Magician's words must have warmed the hearts of Ritchie and the Junto. A national party grounded in the "Virginia doctrines" was a longstanding goal of the group, and now it seemed on the verge of realization.<sup>64</sup>

Van Buren's proposition and kind words stiffened Ritchie's wavering commitment to Jackson. The editor had been more reluctant than others in the Junto to embrace Old Hickory, and he continued to worry about the General's ability to hold high public office. Ritchie began to comment

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

more favorably on Jackson in the Enquirer, however, soon after receiving Van Buren's communication. The first reports of pro-Jackson meetings in Virginia appeared in his paper on February 20, 1827, when the citizens of Fredericksburg praised Jackson as the "'great republican leader under whose auspices the constitution may be restored to its supremacy.'" On March 1, 1827, Ritchie noted for the first time that Virginia would probably give its vote to Jackson. He confided to Tazewell, a leader of the Jackson forces on the Southside, that "I perfectly agree with you and Mr. Van Buren that if we are fortunate enough to shake off the present disastrous administration, the succession of Gen. Jackson will be the most important era which our country has witnessed.... Principles will then be fixed, which will cast their shadows or their lights for years to come." After considerable hesitation, Ritchie finally endorsed Jackson publicly in the April 27, 1827, issue of the Enquirer.<sup>65</sup>

Despite his apparent conversion, Ritchie continued to express misgivings about Jackson's candidacy and felt compelled to explain the reasoning behind his decision to back him. Adams's first message to Congress had made clear his dangerous policies, and from that moment on Ritchie had opposed him. Repeated abuses of patronage and widespread corruption in the administration proved the correctness of

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<sup>65</sup>RE, Feb. 20, March 1, 1827; Ritchie to Tazewell, Feb. 28, 1827, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; RE, April 27, 1827.



these initial suspicions. Ritchie could not support Adams, and that left him with no other choice than to back Jackson. "We are compelled to take Jackson with all our objections to him," the editor informed his readers, "rather than Mr. Adams, with his own transgressions." The Junto leader underscored his devotion to the state rights philosophy and the tenuous nature of his advocacy of Jackson by adding that Virginia's support for Old Hickory did not bind the state "to support measures [passed by a Jackson administration] which she cannot approve."<sup>66</sup>

Followers of both candidates attacked Ritchie for his position on Jackson. Adams's backers accused the editor of making an about-face. The editor of the Virginian feigned confusion and asked Ritchie "whether your charges against General Jackson in 1824 or your eulogy of him in 1827 is to be regarded as your mendacious commentary." Pleasants kept up a steady denunciation of Ritchie for switching positions on Jackson.<sup>67</sup> These ribbings were mild compared to the criticism that defenders of Jackson levelled at the influential editor. When asked for advice on starting a Jackson paper in Charlottesville, Rives told Thomas W. Gilmer to "leave Mr. Ritchie to compromise as well as he can with former opinions, + to talk about the 'hard alternative'

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<sup>66</sup>RE, June 1, 15, Sept. 11, 1827.

<sup>67</sup>Lynchburg Virginian, July 23, 1827; Constitutional Whig, July 14, Aug. 29, Nov. 10, 1827.

of supporting Gen. Jackson." He added that he was perfectly satisfied that the General was a "most orthodox + thorough-faced republican of the Jefferson school." Claiborne W. Gooch, co-editor of the Enquirer at the time, complained that Ritchie was too cautious in advancing Jackson's cause and too "courteous" in attacking Adams. James Campbell informed his brother that "Hickory requires defense and if we go on dosing [sic] as we have done in old Va. & talking about choice of evils & all that kind of stuff the Adams party may yet beat us." Jackson's forces in Virginia were clearly disappointed with Ritchie's leadership.<sup>68</sup>

Ritchie responded to these criticisms by praising Jackson more strongly and by dropping all mention of his reservations about supporting his candidacy. The Junto leader now described Jackson as "an honest, high-minded man" dedicated to the cause of liberty and above corruption. He expounded on Jackson's firmness and integrity, defended him against all charges of wrongdoing, and confidently predicted an overwhelming victory at the polls the following November.<sup>69</sup>

Ritchie's shift in editorial policy revealed the strength of Jackson's cause in Virginia. In fact, the

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<sup>68</sup>Rives to Thomas W. Gilmer, July 20, 22, 1827, Rives Papers, LC; Gooch to John Campbell, Oct. 8, 1827, Gooch Family Papers, VHS; James Campbell to David Campbell, Nov. 3, 1827, (typescript); Alexander Smyth to David Campbell, Nov. 6, 1827, both in CFP, Duke.

<sup>69</sup>RE, Oct. 26, Nov. 20, 27, 1827; Aug 29, Oct. 14, 1828.

General appeared so popular by late 1827 that his supporters became complacent about the election.<sup>70</sup> But Adams's forces refused to abandon hope and unveiled some new campaign tactics that they hoped would strengthen their cause. They now focused all their efforts on condemning Jackson rather than praising Adams. This allowed them to attract voters who remained concerned about the General's qualifications or his commitment to the "Virginia principles." A reinvigorated party, now called the Anti-Jacksonians, set about spreading the message that Old Hickory was a militaristic demagogue completely unfit for the presidency. Pleasants and others cranked out editorials that called into question Jackson's actions as governor of Florida, his conduct at the Battle of New Orleans, even his marital status, all for the sake of revealing to Virginia that Jackson lacked integrity, honesty, and a commitment to liberty.<sup>71</sup> The Anti-Jacksonians held meetings to express popular dissatisfaction with the General and to prove that he had repudiated all of the principles sacred to the state. They claimed, with some

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<sup>70</sup>The Enquirer turned to other matters in the summer of 1827, only occasionally touching on the election. See RE, May-September, 1827, *passim*.

<sup>71</sup>Constitutional Whig, Nov. 17, 1826; March 2, May 15, June 15, 1827; James Campbell to David Campbell, Nov. 3, 1827, CFP, Duke; "Preamble and Resolutions of A Meeting ... Disapproving the Election of Gen. Andrew Jackson to the Presidency of the United States," (Richmond: T.W. White, 1827); Richard E. Parker to Tazewell, May 4, 1828, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; Lynwood Miller Dent, Jr., "The Virginia Democratic Party, 1824-1847" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1974), 69-71.

authority, that Jackson looked favorably upon a system of protective tariffs and federally-funded national improvements. "General Jackson is as friendly to a broad construction of the Constitution--is more inimical to State Rights," John Pleasants of the Constitutional Whig insisted, "than the present administration." Given this, the editor asked his fellow Virginians what they stood to gain by electing Jackson: "Where is the probability that this event will make her [Virginia] principles triumphant?"<sup>72</sup>

The Anti-Jacksonians extended their attacks to Old Hickory's supporters, demanding to know why Jackson was now thought to be the best candidate for the office, when just four years earlier Virginians had denounced him as a military chieftain. "If he was not worthy of the Presidency in 1825," one commentator noted, "neither will he be in 1829." Why was it that Virginians supported Jackson now, Adams's followers asked. Was it due to his principles or to the notion that only he could preserve the endangered rights of the states? Hardly. As the Anti-Jacksonians saw it, there was "no serious apprehension felt about state rights" among opponents of the administration. That was merely a "bug bear got up for electioneering purposes, to inflame the minds of the people against the present administration. Virginia did not get *her President* [Crawford]; there is the rub! It is that disappointment which rankles in the bosom of her

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<sup>72</sup>Constitutional Whig, March 14, 2, 1827.

politicians and has made them so extremely lynk eyed in discerning constitutional infractions."<sup>73</sup>

The Anti-Jacksonians reserved their most bitter invective for Ritchie and the Junto. Attacks on the group escalated as the campaign reached fever pitch in 1827, and Ritchie worked tirelessly to assure Virginians that such a clique did not exist. Since the editor felt compelled to refute nearly every claim about the Junto and its powers, it must be assumed that Ritchie considered these charges a serious threat to Jackson's hopes in Virginia. He also viewed them as personal assaults on himself and his paper. His honor required vindication.<sup>74</sup>

Supporters of the administration had denounced the Junto regularly since early 1825, but their tactics grew bolder and their language more biting as the campaign proceeded.<sup>75</sup> Ritchie's foes condemned the clique's grip on political matters in the state and accused the Junto of subordinating Virginia's interests by joining with Van Buren and other northern politicians in an unnatural alliance to put Jackson in the White House. One columnist claimed that

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<sup>73</sup>"No Turncoat," March 6, 1827 and "Americanus," Feb. 13, 1827, both in Constitutional Whig.

<sup>74</sup>RE, 1825 to 1828, *passim*; for evidence that Ritchie took these attacks personally, see Ritchie to Col. A. Ritchie, n.d. (probably late 1825), John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College, Vol. 3, no. 3 (June 1911), 205-206.

<sup>75</sup>RE, March 1, 1825, March 31, 1826; Lynchburg Virginian, Nov. 17, Dec. 5, 1825, Oct. 9, 1826; Niles' Weekly Register, Dec. 17, 1825.

the Junto was using its vast power to "plunge the People into political excess." The Lynchburg Virginian referred to the group as the "Metropolitan demagogues" and claimed that its opposition to the tariff and internal improvements stemmed from economic concerns, not political principles. The Virginian asserted that the decision to support Jackson had broken the unity of the Junto, although the group remained a formidable force working behind the scenes. When pressed by Ritchie to substantiate claims about the Junto, "that idle chimera, which has no existence," the paper's editor admitted that the Richmond Party was an "intangible body," but added defiantly that it was "not the less powerful because of its intangible character."<sup>76</sup>

The National Intelligencer went farther in denouncing the Richmond Party. William Seaton and Joseph Gales, who ran the paper, published a series of editorials in April of 1827 that described the union between the Albany Regency and the Junto. A few months later, they referred to the Junto as the "Political Vatican of Virginia," and insisted that its members were plotting to take the Old Dominion out of the Union in order to strengthen their political position.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>RE, May 8, 1827 (describing editorial in Winchester Republican); Lynchburg Virginian, Oct. 8, Nov. 12, 1827; RE, Nov. 6, 1827.

<sup>77</sup>National Intelligencer, April 7, 19, 1827; RE, April 13, 24, 27, June 15, 1827. Just before the election, Gales and Seaton published more essays on the "combinations" that had formed to elect Jackson. Intelligencer, Sept. 11, 13, 23, 25, Oct. 4, 1828.

While these claims about disunionism were completely groundless, others agreed that the Richmond Party held too much power in the state. Its dominance must be broken and the people's power restored to them. Ritchie's group had deluded Virginians into believing that Jackson was fit to be president, when in fact he would lead the country to ruin. Furthermore, the Junto's decision to support Old Hickory was based on personal and party considerations, without any concern for what was best for Virginia. Clique members were hypocrites, intriguers, and base scoundrels. Only through a concerted effort to prevent Jackson's election could the Junto be cut down and removed from power. "I trust in God," Joseph C. Cabell wrote in the Autumn of 1827, "that the reign of a Central Junto is nearly over, and that the people will now take the matter into their own hands." From Washington, Henry Clay suggested to his friends in Richmond that they use animosity toward the "party of the metropolis" as a tool "to induce men to discard their preference for General Jackson." Ritchie's claim that attacks on the Junto were revived "to answer party purposes" seemed verified by the actions of the group's opponents.<sup>78</sup>

The ferocious attacks of the Anti-Jacksonians seemed to slow down the Jackson machine in Virginia, at least

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<sup>78</sup>Joseph C. Cabell to John H. Cocke of Brems, Oct. 17, 1827, Cabell Family Papers, UVA; Henry Clay to Francis Brooke, Sept. 24, 1827, Calvin Colton, ed., The Private Correspondence of Henry Clay (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971 [reprint of 1855 edition]), 178-180; RE, Jan. 16, 1827.

temporarily. While the administration men spoke of growing support for Adams, Jackson supporters worried about efforts "to turn the tide against Old Hickory."<sup>79</sup> Pleasants, seizing the moment, called for a statewide convention to unify the Anti-Jacksonians.<sup>80</sup> An Anti-Jackson Convention was held in Richmond on January 8, 1828, the thirteenth anniversary of the Battle of New Orleans. Delegates adopted an address that cataloged Jackson's faults and warned of the consequences of his election. The "dearest interest" of the country were at stake, and "even the permanence of her free institutions ... were in peril," should the military chieftain win in November. The address closed by naming both Madison and Monroe to its electoral ticket and by calling on Virginians to go forth at the next election and "save the Temple of Liberty from pollution."<sup>81</sup>

Jackson's followers in Virginia responded vigorously to the barrage of accusations, condemnations, and arguments

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<sup>79</sup>James Campbell to David Campbell, Nov. 3, 1827; Alexander Smyth to David Campbell, Nov. 6, 1827, both in CFP, Duke; Judge Stuart to James Barbour, Oct. 28, 1827, Barbour Family Papers, UVA; John Taliaferro to James Monroe, Dec. 15, 1827; Samuel Southard to Monroe, Dec. 16, 1827, both in James Monroe Papers, LC.

<sup>80</sup>Constitutional Whig, Sept. 1, 15, 19, 26, Oct. 6, 13, 1827.

<sup>81</sup>"The Virginia Address of the National Republican Party (Va.) Convention (1828)," VSL. Madison and Monroe had previously and explicitly declined to serve in any capacity for either candidate. They immediately refused to become electors for Adams. The audacious move of the Anti-Jacksonians outraged Ritchie. Ambler, Ritchie, 116.



laid down by the Anti-Jacksonians. The "noise they are making has roused the lion from his den and will cause the friends of Genl Jackson to offer some strong views," one western Virginian commented. Already the "old patriots" were holding meetings and declaring for Jackson. "Virginia + Pennsylvania can do much and will do it," he concluded, "if too much rubbish is not thrown their way." John Tyler, now in Congress and fighting for Jackson, agreed. Old Hickory "will come in on the shoulders of the South - aided and assisted by New York and Pennsylvania." In Richmond, John Campbell, a Junto associate, wrote home predicting that "We shall sweep every thing before us."<sup>82</sup>

The Jacksonians in Virginia had every right to be confident. Despite the efforts of the Anti-Jacksonians, all signs pointed to a landslide for the General.<sup>83</sup> The party was well organized and solidly behind Jackson. Questions about his orthodoxy had been replaced by a new found zeal for his character and achievements. "Support of Gen. Jackson is now of a character widely different from that which it bore a year ago," Benjamin Watkins Leigh informed his brother in early 1828. "Then, it was with most men, only a

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<sup>82</sup>David Campbell to James Campbell, Nov. 11, 1827, CFP, Duke; Tyler to John Rutherford, Dec. 8, 1827, Tyler, Life and Letters of Tylers, 1:376-378; John Campbell to David Campbell, Dec. 7, 1827, CFP, Duke; Dent, "Virginia Democratic Party," 72-75.

<sup>83</sup>John Y. Mason to James H. Rochelle, Dec. 13, 1827, James Henry Rochelle Papers, Duke; William C. Rives to Thomas W. Gilmer, Sept. 25, 1828, Rives Papers, LC.

hearty determined opposition to the present administration...; now, it has become a positive preference for Gen. Jackson; all his acts are justified; and he is as much the idol of his party ... as ever Mr. Jefferson was of his." Homilies about Jackson's efforts "on the blood-stained fields of Orleans, covering himself with evergreen laurels, and crowning his country with immortal glory," replaced questions about his views on internal improvements and the tariff. Jackson the military chieftain was now Jackson the defender of liberty and savior of the country.<sup>84</sup>

In October 1828 the Jackson Central Committee, controlled by the Junto, addressed the people of Virginia on the significance of the upcoming election. The "important principles" involved rendered this election "momentous in the extreme." The Adams administration had pursued policies "not only inconsistent with the constitution, but incompatible with freedom." Now it was up to the people to decide "whether they will put down this most violent effort to destroy our free constitution." The president's supporters had made every effort to defend his course, but

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<sup>84</sup>Benjamin Watkins Leigh to William Leigh, Feb. 3, 1828, Francis Otway Byrd Papers, VHS; "A Freeholder of Buckingham," RE, April 8, 1828. Leigh had published a popular pamphlet in 1827 under the pseudonym of Christopher Quandary that poked fun at the Jacksonians for describing their candidate as "another WASHINGTON" and for attributing to him "the sum total of all that is great and good." Christopher Quandary [B.W. Leigh] Some Serious Considerations on the Present State of Parties, With Regard to the Presidential Election (Richmond: Thomas White, 1827).

to no avail. They had then attacked Jackson "with an intemperance and an acrimony which are the surest badges of incorrect opinions and a bad cause." These efforts to discredit Jackson had failed, and the people stood ready "to assert and maintain the supremacy of the public will; to vindicate the elective franchise; to preserve the constitution in its purity; and to hand down to posterity the liberty acquired by the virtues and valor of our ancestors." The preservation of liberty and the expansion of freedom flowed downward through the Founding Fathers to Andrew Jackson. He must be elected in an "illustrious and decisive" manner to show the people's commitment to the basic principles which had founded the nation.<sup>85</sup>

On election day Virginians went to the polls in record numbers. Some voters listened to last minute speeches on "Objections to Mr. Adams." Others marched to town in groups of fifty or sixty under signs emblazoned with the words "Jackson and Reform." Virginians cast nearly 27,000 votes for Old Hickory, as opposed to 12,000 for the hapless Adams. The people had spoken. The Constitution stood vindicated. Liberty had been preserved.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>"Address of the Jackson Central Committee," RE, Oct. 7, 1828. Ritchie, Daniel, Nicholas, and Roane all sat on the committee.

<sup>86</sup>"Notes - Heads of a Speech intended to be delivered at Nelson Court House - 3 Nov 1828," Cabell Family Papers, UVA; Jacob Lynch to William B. Campbell, Nov. 5, 1828, CFP, Duke. Lynch told Campbell that Jackson received 564 of 580 votes cast in Abingdon in western Virginia. He then named every man

Thomas Ritchie and the Richmond Junto played a key role in Jackson's victory in Virginia. The clique headed the opposition movement in the state and later organized Jackson's forces for the electoral contest. It kept up a steady attack on Adams and refashioned an image of Andrew Jackson that Virginians found more acceptable. The Junto also represented Virginia in Van Buren's new union of the "planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the north." In short, the group was an integral part of Jackson's emerging political machine.

Despite its strong endorsement of Jackson during the last days of the 1828 campaign, some members of the Junto continued to have nagging doubts about the Tennessean. The group understood Jackson's views on two matters crucial to Virginia, the tariff and internal improvements, imperfectly. His fiery temper and military background remained a source of concern. Ritchie and the Junto wondered if Jackson would remember the role Virginia played in his election when he selected his cabinet. Most of all, they worried about Jackson's devotion to the "Virginia Principles" of state rights and strict construction. Ritchie wasted no time in notifying Jackson of Virginia's expectations of his administration. The people of the Old Dominion presumed the government would be guided by the "high minded enlightened

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who voted for Adams. For vote totals, see Congressional Quarterly, Inc., Presidential Elections, 93.

principle[s]" of republicanism. Should Jackson deviate from this course, he could expect Virginia to oppose him as strongly as it had Adams.<sup>87</sup> The price of liberty was eternal vigilance, and that was a price Virginia had always been willing to pay.

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<sup>87</sup>Andrew Stevenson to Jackson, Dec. 8, 1828, Jackson Papers, LC; [Thomas Ritchie], "Memorandum of Points to be considered in the administration of the government," [Dec. 9, 1828], Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Jackson, 3:451-452.

### Chapter III

#### Rumblings in the Atmosphere: 1829-1833

"When I had the pleasure of seeing you in Richmond," Thomas Ritchie wrote Martin Van Buren early in 1829, "I was struck by your views of the benefits which we might promise ourselves from Gen. J[ackson]'s election." Ritchie and the Junto had fought hard to get Andrew Jackson into the White House, and now they hoped that their efforts would pay dividends. The Junto had supported Jackson not only because of its distaste for John Quincy Adams and his policies, but also because it believed that Jackson would restore virtue to government and zealously protect the rights of the states. The Junto also hoped to reexert Virginia's influence in national affairs. "Now is the epoch," Ritchie announced upon hearing of Jackson's victory, "for Virginia to reassert her old doctrines - to fix, if possible, the true interpretation of the Constitution." Naturally, the Junto would be in charge of carrying out such an important task.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Thomas Ritchie to Martin Van Buren, Jan. 31, 1829, Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress; Richmond Enquirer (hereafter cited as RE), Dec. 6, 1828. Ritchie apparently made overtures to Jackson even before he took office. Jackson responded, through Andrew Stevenson, that it would give him "much pleasure to receive at all times Mr. R[itchie]'s frank & full opinion on any & all subjects."

During his first term, Jackson lived up to the Junto's expectations in many ways, but by no means completely. His efforts to ferret out corruption in the federal government, to reduce the national debt, and his attack on the Bank of the United States won applause from the Junto, as did his veto of the Maysville Road Bill. These encouraging signs allowed the Junto to remain loyal to Jackson during his struggle with John C. Calhoun. The group also played an important part in reelecting Jackson and in securing the vice-presidential nomination for Martin Van Buren in 1832. But the Junto's commitment to Old Hickory was never absolute. While Jackson's appointment of editors to public positions and his failure to veto certain internal improvement bills disturbed the clique, his stance toward South Carolina during the nullification crisis, culminating in the Proclamation and Force Bill, severely tested its faith in the President and its control of the Jacksonian forces in Virginia.

The Junto's hesitancy to endorse all of Jackson's actions during his first administration was significant for two reasons. First, Ritchie and his group insisted on retaining their commitment to the doctrines of the state rights school of thought. They had genuinely hoped that

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Jackson to Stevenson, undated [probably early 1829], Harold D. Moser, et. al., eds., The Papers of Andrew Jackson: A Microfilm Supplement (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986), reel 12, frame 0391.

Jackson would follow a state rights course, and were disappointed when he failed to measure up to the standards of the "Virginia doctrines." In 1830, Ritchie confided to a friend that "You must not be surprized to find us pressing at this time our old State Rights Doctrines . . . , believing that they alone will save the country from the gulf of consolidation - and that if we give up now, we are gone forever."<sup>2</sup> The Junto continued to view Jackson as an instrument by which its larger goals could be achieved; he was the means to an end, not the end itself.

Second, the Junto's actions between 1829 and 1833 revealed its reluctance to embrace completely Martin Van Buren's idea of the primacy of party loyalty in the new Jacksonian coalition. To traditionally minded Virginians, slavish devotion to a political party threatened the independence of the individual voter, and many remained suspicious of the idea of following blindly the dictates of party leaders. William Roane assured his voters in 1831 that he was a "Jackson-man," but not "in the servile partisan sense" of the term. He supported the President because of his policies, not his party.<sup>3</sup> When Jackson continued to alienate Virginians during the course of his administration, and as defections from the party continued, however, the

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<sup>2</sup>Ritchie to William Cabell Rives, April 15, 1830, William Cabell Rives Papers, LC.

<sup>3</sup>William H. Roane, "To the Voters of Hanover," [1831], Broadside, Virginia Historical Society.



Junto gradually accommodated itself to the need for effective party discipline and loyalty. Without a cohesive base of support, they reasoned, none of their programs could be implemented.

In addition to national developments that required their constant attention, Ritchie and the Junto also had their hands filled at the state level. The constitutional convention of 1829-30 pushed all other matters into the background for several months and brought sectional tensions in Virginia to a boil. That was followed by Nat Turner's Rebellion in Southampton County and a painful and drawn-out debate on the future of slavery in the Commonwealth. Then came another revolt, this time a movement within the ranks of the Jackson party led by supporters of Philip P. Barbour, who refused to accept Van Buren as Jackson's running mate in 1832. During these troubled years, the Junto struggled constantly to maintain order and unity in the Jacksonian ranks. To a remarkable extent the group was able to keep Virginia hitched to the Jackson wagon. Only the damage caused by Jackson's handling of the Nullification Crisis proved too much for Ritchie and his clique to control. The President's actions on those matters served as a rallying cry for both the party's enemies and a growing number of disaffected Jacksonians. The Democratic Party in Virginia was reshaped during Jackson's first presidency by controversy and growing factionalism, but the Junto

maintained and even strengthened its hold on political matters. In fact, Jackson even increased his vote totals in the election of 1832, capturing 75% of the votes in Virginia.<sup>4</sup> After this decisive victory, Ritchie could downplay party disputes and claim that the Old Dominion had once again redeemed its honor by voting for the true friend of state rights, Andrew Jackson.

Jackson's administration did not begin auspiciously, as far as the Junto was concerned. His cabinet choices seemed completely uninspired and his decisions in removing officeholders seemed based more on political motives than on a desire to restore integrity to the government. Much worse was Jackson's appointment to office of several editors who had helped him in the recent election. Not only did this smack of a spoils system, the Junto argued, but it seriously endangered the freedom of the press, something all republicans understood as a central bulwark of liberty. Ritchie and the other Junto members wasted no time in informing Van Buren and Jackson of their disapproval of these actions. At the same time, they refrained from complaining too stridently, for they continued to look upon Jackson as the means by which Virginia and the state rights philosophy could regain ascendancy in Washington.

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<sup>4</sup>Congressional Quarterly, Inc. Presidential Elections Since 1789 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1987), 94.

News of Jackson's cabinet selections was greeted with disappointment and dismay in Virginia. After all, the General's supporters had promised that he would gather the finest men around him to assist with the work of reforming and purifying the government.<sup>5</sup> Now that promise seemed like a cruel hoax. Of the men whom Jackson chose to be his closest advisors, many Virginians believed that only Martin Van Buren, the Secretary of State, possessed the skills and competence needed for a cabinet position. The remainder of the group, they correctly perceived, was decidedly lackluster. John Campbell informed his brother that not a single man in Richmond was satisfied with the cabinet selections. There was "general disappointment here" and many of their friends were "in a state of great despondency" over the matter. Andrew Stevenson bluntly informed Van Buren that dissatisfaction with the appointments had caused a "state of astonishment and excitement" in Virginia that "required all our skills and prudence to quiet." Ritchie was more diplomatic. "We do not hesitate to say," he told his readers, "that this is not throughout the Cabinet which we could have wished or expected."<sup>6</sup>

A second source of early concern centered on Jackson's

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<sup>5</sup>Richmond Constitutional Whig, March 13, 20, April 1, 1829.

<sup>6</sup>John Campbell to David Campbell, March 26, 1829, Campbell Family Papers (hereafter cited as CFP), Duke University; Stevenson to Van Buren, April 19, 1829, Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, Feb 28, 1829.

removal policy. Jackson had vowed to "cleanse the Augean Stables" once in power, and he quickly bounced several officeholders out of the government. Some were genuinely corrupt or incompetent, but other removals seemed politically motivated. That bothered Jackson's supporters in Virginia. They backed Jackson in his efforts at reform, but believed that public officials should not be discharged solely because of their political beliefs. As long as they carried out their duties effectively, they should be allowed to remain in office. "I go for reform," Ritchie told Van Buren, "but what is reform?" It is not punishing supporters of Adams and rewarding cronies; rather, it should be the removal of incompetents and abusers of offices, and the abolishment of all unnecessary positions.<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that Ritchie and others considered themselves above rewarding party supporters; they simply clung to more traditional notions of disinterested service. Ritchie's comment that some of the removals had cut "doubly deep into the popularity of our party" revealed the problems that many Virginians had in coming to terms with the new style of politics set in motion by Van Buren and Jackson.<sup>8</sup>

A more serious problem concerned Jackson's unfortunate

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<sup>7</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, March 27, 1829; Stevenson to Van Buren, April 19, 1829; Ritchie to Van Buren, April 19, 1829, all in Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>8</sup>Ritchie to John [?] Campbell, October 26, 1829, CFP, Duke.

decision to appoint editors to positions in the government. Virginians spoke out against this policy with near unanimity. They considered the "seeming intimacy between the Press and the Government" a blatant abuse of executive patronage and a dangerous erosion of the freedom of the press. "The administration will be ruined if any further appointments are made of editors," one concerned observer warned Van Buren. John Rutherford, a Richmond merchant and Junto associate, agreed. Jackson's appointments have been a "source of exultation to the enemies, and of the deepest regret and mortification to the friends of Genl. Jackson in this quarter." John H. Pleasants, editor of the anti-Jackson Richmond Constitutional Whig, announced in May that, because of his intemperate actions, "Jackson fanaticism has already died a violent death, and his popularity is declining more rapidly than it ever advanced."<sup>9</sup>

Concerned about Jackson's sliding popularity in Virginia, Ritchie wrote Van Buren to express his apprehension and to recommend a course of action. Van Buren, impressed by Ritchie's arguments, showed the letter to Jackson, who promptly defended his actions in a reply to Van

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<sup>9</sup>"A Lowlander and a Jacksonian," RE, Aug. 14, 1829; William S. Archer to Van Buren, May 6, 1829, Van Buren Papers, LC; John Rutherford to Rives, May 22, 1829, Rives Papers, LC; Richmond Constitutional Whig, May 15, 1829. Pleasants never tired of discussing Jackson's controversial appointments and removals. Between May and August of 1829, discussion of these issues dominated the Whig, even pushing aside debate over the upcoming constitutional convention. For examples, see May 5, 19, June 23, 1829.

Buren. The President asked Van Buren to assure Ritchie of his commitment to the principles of reform. This correspondence revealed very clearly the nature of the relationship between the Junto and the national Jackson party as it stood in 1829, and is worth further investigation.

In his letter to Van Buren on March 27, 1829, Ritchie spelled out the concerns he had about Jackson's early course as president. The editor considered the election of Jackson a "new epoch in the history of our country, - as opening a bright prospect of wise and constitutional principles." But already Jackson had dampened hopes by selecting an incompetent cabinet and removing officeholders for exclusively political reasons. Worse still was Jackson's penchant for appointing friends, especially newspaper editors, to government positions. "It really looks as if there were a systematic effort to reward several Editorial Partizans," Ritchie told Van Buren, "which will have the effect of bringing the vaunted Liberty of the Press into a sort of Contempt." Ritchie understood that patronage was a "delicate" matter, but he believed that Jackson should act more prudently in the future. Ritchie closed by informing Van Buren that the "course of appointments at Washington is calculated to cool and alienate some of our friends ...[;]

you can scarcely conceive the uneasiness which prevails."<sup>10</sup>

The tone of Ritchie's letter, and his position as leader of the Jackson forces in Virginia, convinced Van Buren to show the epistle to Jackson. The New Yorker told the President that he had known Ritchie for a long while and had complete faith in his devotion to the cause of reform. In fact, there was "not a man of purer public spirit in the country." Jackson, unmoved by such praise, wasted no time in countering the charges made by Ritchie. The General informed his Secretary of State that Ritchie's concerns about removals were unfounded, for only those who lacked "moral honesty" had been dismissed. Perhaps the touchy editor had been misled by "some disappointed office hunter" on this matter. Clearly, Jackson continued testily, he had "not reflected upon the subject, or he would not have suffered himself to be so easily alarmed." As to appointments, Jackson seemed perplexed as to why he should not appoint his friends to office. "If my personal friends are qualified and patriotic, why should I not be permitted to bestow a few offices on them?" Write to Ritchie, Jackson closed, and assuage his fears. The country is in no danger from my policies.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, March 27, 1829, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>11</sup>Van Buren to Jackson, March 31, 1829, Van Buren Papers, LC; Jackson to Van Buren, March 31, 1829, John Spencer Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Andrew Jackson (7 vols. Washington: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-1935),

The following day Van Buren penned a note to Ritchie explaining the President's response. While Jackson believed that the editor's fears were unfounded on this issue, he hoped that Ritchie would continue to offer his input in the future. In diplomatic language, Van Buren assured Ritchie that Jackson's motives remained pure and that he valued the Virginian's friendship. If Ritchie would travel to Washington, Van Buren suggested, the two could discuss these matters in greater detail.<sup>12</sup>

Jackson's and Van Buren's replies must have stung Ritchie. They were clearly brushing aside his concerns about issues that threatened to weaken the Jackson party in Virginia. That hardly seemed an appropriate response, especially given the role that Ritchie and the Junto had played in electing Jackson. Van Buren, astute politician that he was, realized that Ritchie was dissatisfied with Jackson's response. To placate him, the New Yorker wrote again, this time seeking advice on some presidential appointments. The editor responded pointedly that he was not capable of advising the President on such matters; he was far too busy with other work. In a sharply worded note accompanying a letter from Andrew Stevenson to Van Buren,

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4:18-19.

<sup>12</sup>Van Buren to Ritchie, April 1, 1829, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed. Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, Vol II, American Historical Association Annual Report, 1918 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 249-250.



Ritchie again expressed his dissatisfaction with Jackson's appointments. By placing editors in high office, the president has "excited a flame in Virginia which it will be difficult if not impossible, to extinguish." Following this outburst, Ritchie, soured by his first encounter with the new administration, ceased corresponding with Van Buren for several months.<sup>13</sup>

The anger and disappointment of Ritchie and the Junto over Jackson's early course in no way shook their devotion to his cause. Protestations against his policies were, in fact, usually accompanied by claims of loyalty to Old Hickory and his administration. Thus, while John Campbell noted that the "ruling passion and governing principle with which he[Jackson] seems to have set out in his administration are to reward those most who have bawl'd loudest in his favour without any regard to their characters or fitness for Office," he quickly added that he had "not lost all confidence in the old man[']s honesty of purpose and ardent love of country."<sup>14</sup> When opponents of the administration began claiming that Virginia's anger with the President stemmed from the lack of political spoils given to the state, Jacksonians responded vigorously. Criticism of

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<sup>13</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, April 13, 19, 1829, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>14</sup>John Campbell to David Campbell, March 26, 1829, CFP, Duke. See also John Rutherford to Rives, May 22, 1829, Rives Papers, LC.

Jackson was motivated by principle and patriotism, they claimed, not by disappointment over the lack of spoils. As usual, Ritchie led the way in making this claim. "We are content to be without ... any hand in the administration," he told fellow editor M.M. Noah. "Office or not; whether we get the loaves & fishes, or are forgotten, it can have no influence on the principles of Virginia." The only guide to judging the administration has been, and will remain, "the course which it may pursue."<sup>15</sup> By the summer of 1829, with Henry Clay's unannounced campaign for the presidency already well underway, dissatisfaction with Jackson in Virginia was beginning to be replaced by a defense of his actions. "The nation is not to be changed by any clamour about Removals and appointments," Ritchie predicted confidently in October; "they wait for higher game."<sup>16</sup>

The "higher game" that Ritchie spoke of undoubtedly involved the great constitutional and economic questions of internal improvements, banking, and the tariff. These issues had dominated state and national debate since the War of 1812. As firm advocates of state rights, the Junto had very

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<sup>15</sup>Ritchie to M.M. Noah, March 14, 1829, Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, May 15, 1829; William Archer to Van Buren, May 6, 1829, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>16</sup>RE, Oct. 13, 1829. See also "One of the People," RE, June 23, 1829; "Mordaunt," RE, Sept. 22, 1829; Claiborne W. Gooch to Van Buren, Oct. 27, 1829, Gooch Family Papers, VHS. Pleasants noted this change in sentiment in the June 19, 1829 issue of the Constitutional Whig. When it came to criticizing Jackson, he noted, "All is hushed into breathless silence! Hypocrites! Shallow, tortuous hypocrites."

clear beliefs on these matters, beliefs that allowed little room for compromise. A significant part of its commitment to Jackson in 1828 stemmed from the notion that he was a state rights man and would work to implement proper policies on these matters. If the Junto was not exactly sure what the General's ideas on internal improvements were or what he meant when he claimed that he supported a "judicious tariff," its members had faith that Jackson would not turn his back on the South and its principles. Although this faith was shaken occasionally by Jackson during his first term of office, the Junto continued to believe that Jackson was working with the best interests of the South in mind.

Early indications of Jackson's course toward banking, internal improvements, and the protective tariff system seemed favorable to the Junto. In his inaugural address and in his first message to Congress, Jackson spoke of the rights of the states and of the need to reduce unnecessary expenses in the government. He also issued a call to weaken the power of the Bank of the United States, claiming that it exerted excessive influence over the economy and politics of the nation. These remarks pleased the Junto, but proof of Jackson's sincerity was needed.

The Junto had nothing but praise for Jackson's call for a reduction in the power of the Bank of the United States. Many Virginians viewed banks, whether at the state or national level, as "artificial" aristocratic institutions

that preyed upon the hard working, honest people of the land. One widely read editorial printed in the Enquirer in 1829 earnestly looked forward to the day when "Banks will cease to exist, and thus leave the judgement of men, free and unfettered."<sup>17</sup> The Junto's strong ties to both state and national banks in Virginia - Andrew Stevenson, Wilson Cary Nicholas and Philip Norborne Nicholas had served as directors of the Richmond branch of the Second Bank of the United States in the 1810s and early 1820s, and John Brockenbrough was President of the Bank of Virginia from 1811 to 1843 - prohibited it from going that far, but it did fall solidly behind Jackson in his early skirmishes with the Second Bank of the United States. Ritchie and his clique, like the President, considered a national bank unconstitutional and worried about the undue influence it exerted on national affairs. The Panic of 1819 had turned many against the Bank, and a decade later it still had few defenders in eastern Virginia.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>"George Clinton" [William Robertson?], RE, Feb 21, 1829. In an editorial in the Constitutional Whig, Oct. 2, 1829, "Anti-Jackson and Anti-Bank" claimed that Robertson's attack on the nature of banking had provoked the fury of the "arrogant ... and vindictive" Junto, who had him removed from the Executive Council.

<sup>18</sup>The Junto broke off its association with the Bank of the United States in the early 1820s. After leaving the BUS, Philip N. Nicholas also served as President of the Farmer's Bank of Virginia from 1818 to 1837. For the Junto's bank connection, see Joseph Harrison, "Oligarchs and Aristocrats - The Richmond Junto," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. 78 (1970), 195.

As Jackson moved to crush the Bank in Congress, Ritchie kept up a steady barrage of editorials in Richmond denouncing the "monster of corruption" and calling for its extinction.<sup>19</sup> He assured his readers that Old Hickory would slay the Bank dragon by vetoing the Bank Bill that had worked its way through Congress. When word arrived that Jackson had indeed vetoed the bill, Ritchie praised him warmly and described the veto as the "most important and glorious act of his civil administration."<sup>20</sup> The Junto considered Jackson's early struggle against the Bank of the United States a signal success and an important step in reforming the national government and preserving the independence of the individual.

Jackson's record on internal improvements was less spectacular. Between 1829 and 1833, Ritchie and his group continued to call for state funded internal improvements in Virginia. They understood the value of improved waterways, roads, canals, and turnpikes in the developing market economy of nineteenth century America, and realized only too painfully the consequences of continuing to neglect these

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<sup>19</sup>RE, July 10, 1832. See also RE, May 18, June 8, July 13, 1832.

<sup>20</sup>RE, July 13, 1832. See also, RE, May 18, June 8, July 10, 1832; P.V. Daniel to Van Buren, July 12, 1832, Van Buren Papers, LC. Early in Jackson's first term, Pleasants claimed that Van Buren had travelled to Richmond to consult with the Junto about banking policy, implying that Van Buren held sway over the group. Ritchie dismissed this allegation as absurd. Richmond Constitutional Whig, Dec. 15, 1829; RE, Dec. 25, 1829.

matters. "We cannot delay it longer," Ritchie told his readers, referring to a system of state funded internal improvements. "Virginia is too proud to be longer kept in the rear of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York."<sup>21</sup> At the same time, the group refused to countenance federally funded improvements, claiming that the Constitution failed to give the federal government jurisdiction over this issue. Congress could create roads and transportation networks under certain conditions, but their powers were very limited in this realm. The Junto hoped that Jackson would move decisively to restrict the federal government's funding of public works.<sup>22</sup>

The President's veto of the Maysville Road Bill in June of 1830, which had authorized funding for construction and repairs on a section of the National Road that ran exclusively through Kentucky, represented a tremendous victory for state rights proponents, but not a completely satisfying one. Ritchie, back in regular contact with Van Buren, told the New Yorker that the Junto had hoped that Jackson would reject the bill "on constitutional grounds." Such a course would represent "an achievement more glorious than the victory of New Orleans." In his message accompanying the veto, Jackson shied away from explicitly

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<sup>21</sup>RE, Feb. 10, 1829. See also Ritchie's editorials in the Enquirer of Feb. 3, 5, 7, March 3, and Aug. 7, 1829.

<sup>22</sup>Ritchie to Rives, April 15, 1830, Rives Papers, LC; RE, Aug. 7, 11, 1829; April 6, 13, May 14, 1830.

declaring the bill unconstitutional, claiming instead that it was simply a bad piece of legislation. After reading the message, Ritchie noted privately that "it does not exactly come up to our Virginia doctrine." Nevertheless, he praised Jackson's "moral courage" and claimed that he had vindicated the "principles of '98." By vetoing the bill, the General had "arrested that little, local, grasping, debasing, log-rolling system of appropriations" that plagued the country and threatened to "prostitute the vital principles of the Constitution to the lust of self-interest."<sup>23</sup> A writer in the Enquirer was more enthusiastic about the veto. Jackson's actions, he claimed, had reversed "twelve years" of "despondency" in the South. The Old Hero "has made a generous effort for the redemption and salvation of his country. Despotism is arrested in its lawless march, and anarchy confounded in its tumultuous route."<sup>24</sup>

Late in his first administration, Jackson disappointed his Virginia supporters by refusing to veto another bill authorizing federal funds for internal improvement projects. An obviously exasperated Ritchie notified Van Buren that Jackson's decision had "shaken his friends in the constantcy

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<sup>23</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, June 1830, Van Buren Papers, LC; Ritchie to Archibald Ritchie, June 8, 1830, Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College, Vol. 1, no. 2 (June 1902), 147-149; RE, June 1, 1830. P.V. Daniel expressed much the same sentiment in a letter to William Brent, Jr., June 18, 1830, Cabell Family Papers, UVA.

<sup>24</sup>"Mecklenburg," RE, July 13, 1830.

[sic] of his principles." Daniel chimed in, citing the damage the passage of the bill had inflicted upon the General's supporters in Virginia. In the Enquirer, Ritchie wondered how Jackson could reconcile the Maysville veto with his recent decision. As he understood it, under the bill passed "We extend the powers of the federal government to our local concerns," and that would lead to consolidation.<sup>25</sup> Jackson's record on internal improvements, then, was spotty as far as the Junto was concerned.

Closely related to the internal improvement question was the tariff controversy, the most discussed and divisive issue in Jackson's first administration. The Junto, along with many southerners, resented the protective tariff system, believing it punished farmers and planters at the expense of manufacturing interests in the North. Needless to add, the policy also lacked a constitutional foundation. The "God-like" Founding Fathers would have never sanctioned such an unfair and unwise policy. Where, Virginians wondered, "is the Republicanism in a measure which exalts the capitalist, the monied aristocracy, above the sturdy yeomanry of the country, the worthy, industrious and patriotic farmer"?<sup>26</sup> Ritchie and other Virginians also believed that the tariff

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<sup>25</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, July 10, 1832; Daniel to Van Buren, July 12, 1832, both in Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, July 10, 1832.

<sup>26</sup>"Mathews," RE, Aug. 20, 1830. See also the petition of the citizens of Nottoway County, reprinted in RE, Dec. 6, 1828, and Ritchie's editorial of Sept. 3, 1830.



served as the unifying link in a series of policies designed to destroy the power of the states in general, and the southern states in particular. They realized that revenue raised from the import taxes could be used to fund internal improvement projects once the national debt was eliminated. This "union ... between the friends of the Tariff and of Internal Improvements" would be especially dangerous. If such an alliance should come to pass, Ritchie warned, the "rights of the States, and the liberties of the people would be threatened with a fearful eclipse." Experience had taught Americans that "one assumed power leads to another." Decisive action must be taken to end the protective tariff system. More than just economic gain or loss was at stake; the fate of liberty and the republican experiment hung in the balance.<sup>27</sup>

The importance of the tariff question led the Junto to keep in constant touch with Washington. Even before Jackson's inauguration, Ritchie wrote Senator Littleton Waller Tazewell of Virginia to tell him of the course the House of Delegates had adopted concerning the Tariff of 1828. The House had passed resolutions condemning the so-called "Tariff of Abominations" and declaring it

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<sup>27</sup>Ritchie to Rives, April 15, 1830, Rives Papers, LC; RE, May 14, 1830. Ritchie frequently attacked the "American System" of Clay, claiming that "it alters the very character of our Federal Government - causing it to break down the barriers which separate its powers from the Rights of the States ..., threatening us with consolidation, with disunion." RE, Sept. 3, 1830. See also RE, Jan. 30, April 6, 1830.

unconstitutional. Would Tazewell explain to Jackson how deeply the state felt on this issue, and try to secure his support in removing or modifying the tariff? Ritchie himself was ready to fight to the end on this issue, and he hoped he could count on the president's backing.<sup>28</sup>

Actions in South Carolina, where hostility to the tariff produced talk of nullification and disunion, changed the nature of the debate over the tariff. Virginians now found themselves in the delicate situation of condemning both the tariff and South Carolina's response to it. Worse, South Carolinians claimed that the doctrine of nullification derived naturally from the principles enunciated in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions of 1798. Nullification and secession were merely the logical conclusions of the state rights philosophy cherished by Virginians and the Junto.<sup>29</sup>

Ritchie and others acted quickly to refute the

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<sup>28</sup>Ritchie to Littleton Waller Tazewell, Feb. 21, 1829, Tazewell Family Papers, Virginia State Library. For a revealing examination of the tariff debate within Virginia, see the series of essays on "Mr. Madison's Letters" that appeared in the Enquirer between Jan. 17 and Feb. 26, 1829.

In a few places, opposition to the tariff took the form of non-importation agreements reminiscent of the Revolutionary era. A writer from Prince Edward county forwarded 213 samples of home-spun clothing to Ritchie and described the atmosphere in his home community. "Instead of seeing us dressed up, and appearing in public with a tawdry suit of clothes manufactured to the North, and many of us playing the 'shabby genteel,' you would now see us clad in the substantial home-spun, with the good old domestic way, and worn with an easy lofty pride, becoming a people resolutely bent on stern resistance to usurpation and oppression" ("Earnest," RE, Feb. 10, 1829).

<sup>29</sup>William W. Freehling, Prelude to Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 207-209.

assertions of the Nullifiers. While some denied that the Resolutions of 1798 condoned nullification, Ritchie was forced to admit that Jefferson had in fact originated the notion of a state nullifying a national law. He pointed out, however, that the tariff controversy was not, in and of itself, sufficient cause for such an extreme measure to be taken.<sup>30</sup> Plenty of room for compromise still existed. Congress may choose to lower rates sufficiently in 1832. Failing that, an "Anti-Tariff Convention" could be called to express the region's displeasure. This was, he declared, the only "peaceful and constitutional means of stating the grievances of the people."<sup>31</sup>

Ritchie and the Junto hoped to distance Virginia from

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<sup>30</sup>Thomas Ritchie to Archibald Ritchie, June 8, 1830, Branch Historical Papers, Vol. 2 (June 1902), 147-149. Ritchie made it clear that Virginia would not abide nullification. "Agricola's" eight part essay on "The Virginia Doctrines, Not Nullification," was the fullest refutation of the connection between the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions and the doctrine of nullification. It ran in the Enquirer from Aug. 17 to Sept. 14, 1832. Madison denied the connection as well. See Madison to Nicholas Trist, Feb. 15, 1830, Gaillard Hunt, ed., The Writings of James Madison (9 vols. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910), 4:61-66; Madison to Joseph Cabell, Aug. 16, 1829, Ibid., 4:42-44; Madison to Edward Everett, Aug., 1830, Ibid., 4:95-106. Ritchie's comments on Jefferson and nullification are in RE, March 13, 1832.

<sup>31</sup>RE, Aug. 5, 1832. Ritchie's writings on the tariff can be sampled in the following issues of the Enquirer: Jan. 6, 1829; Feb. 8, July 12, 19, Aug. 5, 12, Sept. 23, Nov. 1, 1831; March 13, April 24, July 17, Sept. 14, 1832. Philip P. Barbour, John Brockenbrough, and William H. Roane represented Virginia at the Anti-Tariff Convention that met in Philadelphia in October of 1831. RE, Oct. 11, 1831; Charles Ambler, Thomas Ritchie: A Study in Virginia Politics (Richmond: Bell Book & Stationary Co., 1913), 142-143.

the course of the Nullifiers in South Carolina because they understood clearly the politically explosive nature of the tariff debate. Should the state rights men of the Old Dominion be grouped together with the Ultra-Tariffites from the Palmetto State, the Jackson party would be torn apart in Virginia, and the Junto's power would be dashed to pieces. Concerned that a "New Coalition, the friends of the firm of Clay, Webster & Co.," were "attempting to brand the whole Jackson party with the name of nullifiers," the Junto scrambled to set the record straight.<sup>32</sup> Philip N. Nicholas informed John Campbell, now Treasurer of the United States, that the "So. Carolina doctrines, are not those of V[irgini]a as I, & I have no doubt, you, have always understood them. They lead to disunion & to the destruction of the Republican Party." David Campbell spoke for many when he claimed that the Nullifiers "have press'd the principles advanced by Mr. Madison much farther, than either he or Virginia intended to carry it." Ritchie stated bluntly that nullification was not "conformable to the Virginia School of Politics." To make sure everyone understood where the leading Jacksonians of Virginia stood on this matter, he added that "We deny that nullification is a legitimate conclusion from our State Rights Doctrines." The editor hoped that these strong words would keep people from associating the Jacksonians of Virginia with the Nullifiers

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<sup>32</sup>RE, July 27, 1830.

of South Carolina.<sup>33</sup>

While taking great pains to distance themselves from the political arguments of the Nullifiers, the Junto continued to condemn the protective tariff system on economic grounds. Here the rhetoric employed by the group was similar to that of South Carolinians. Ritchie stated emphatically that Virginia and the South would never accept as a "settled policy" a tariff that made the region the "hewers of wood and the drawers of water, for the Northern manufactures." An anonymous writer in the Enquirer added that "Whilst Virginia loves the Union, & is willing to make new sacrifices for its preservation, there is a point of forbearance in the endurance of wrongs, beyond which she will not go. She must look out for her own safety."<sup>34</sup> Ritchie, in fact, hinted strongly that Virginia might join with its southern neighbor if the federal government used force to subdue South Carolina. In letters to Washington, members of the Junto urged Jackson to adopt a conciliatory stance toward the Palmetto State and warned of the consequences if he did not. Jackson must be "forbearing" toward the Nullifiers, John Brockenbrough argued, because

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<sup>33</sup>Nicholas to John Campbell, July 23, 1830; David Campbell to Arthur P. Hayne, May 16, 1831, both in CFP, Duke; RE, Sept. 14, 1832. William H. Roane told his constituents that he opposed the "restive, wincing movements" of the South Carolina Nullifiers. Roane, "To the Voters of Hanover," [1831], Broadside, VHS.

<sup>34</sup>RE, Sept. 14, 1832; Feb. 8, 1831; "Henry," RE, Feb. 1, 1831.

"any precipitation on his part would unite Virginia to S. Carolina. There is a rumbling in our Atmosphere about the Sovereignty of the States." Ritchie agreed with this assessment in a letter to William Cabell Rives. "Impress upon our friends in the Administration," the Junto leader wrote, "the necessity of pursuing a forbearing as well as decided course towards S. Carolina. This must be done, he insinuated, "lest the flame of discontent should spread."<sup>35</sup>

The tariff and nullification questions placed Virginia Jacksonians in a decidedly uncomfortable position. To maintain loyalty to their party and to the Union, they were called upon to denounce the Nullifiers and their actions. Yet, at the same time, their state rights ideology demanded that they condemn the protective tariff system and work for its eradication. One observer's comment that the "State Rights party ... appears to be completely distracted between the principles of the state and devotion to General Jackson," captured the essence of the dilemma exactly. "We are now laboring between two extremes," Ritchie lamented,

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<sup>35</sup>John Brockenbrough to John Randolph, Nov. 8, 1832, Kenneth Shorey, ed., Collected Letters of John Randolph of Roanoke to Dr. John Brockenbrough, 1812-1833 (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1988), 140-141; Ritchie to Rives, Dec. 1, 1832, Rives Papers, LC; Richard E. Parker to Littleton Waller Tazewell, Feb. 6, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL. In the April 24, 1832, issue of the Enquirer, Ritchie told his readers that "If South Carolina should resort to nullification, Virginia will be loth [sic] to send a man or a musket for her subjection." Still, he continued to work for a peaceful solution, constantly calling on all parties to be deliberative and calm. See RE, April through October, 1832, *passim*.

"the wrong and the remedy - the Tariff and Nullification."<sup>36</sup>

The Junto hoped that the way out of this sticky situation would be a compromise acceptable to both sides. The group looked anxiously to Jackson for relief from the perplexing problem that threatened to tear apart all that it had worked for.<sup>37</sup>

Initial signs from Washington were encouraging. In his fourth annual message to Congress, delivered on December 4, 1832, Jackson acknowledged the validity of South Carolina's claims and promised to work for a peaceful resolution of the crisis, including a downward revision of tariff rates.<sup>38</sup>

Ritchie was elated by Jackson's temperate words. "The President's Message has given the highest satisfaction," he told William Cabell Rives. "His tone about S.C. is precisely what it should be." Perhaps the crisis could be resolved without destroying the Democratic party or the Union. The people's hero, Andrew Jackson, would once again preserve the Union and the rights of the states.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>John Murdaugh to John Tazewell, Dec. 13, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; RE, Dec. 8, 1832.

<sup>37</sup>For a complete account of the Nullification Crisis, see Freehling, Prelude to Civil War, and Richard Ellis, The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States' Rights, and the Nullification Crisis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>38</sup>Robert Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845 (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 10-11.

<sup>39</sup>Ritchie to Rives, Dec. 6, 1832, Rives Papers, LC; RE, Dec. 6, 8, 11, 1832.

The hopes of Ritchie and others for a peaceful solution received a heavy blow just one week later, when Jackson's "Proclamation to the People of South Carolina" was published. In one bold sweep, Jackson attacked South Carolina, nullification, and the compact theory of government. "I consider," he stated flatly, "the power to annul a law of the United States, assumed by one State, *incompatible with the existence of the Union, contradicted expressly by the letter of the Constitution, unauthorized in its spirit, inconsistent with every principle on which it was founded, and destructive of the great object for which it was formed.*" Further, the Union had been formed by the people, not the states, and the Constitution had created a government, not a league. The states had surrendered "essential parts of sovereignty" in joining this government. As President and the direct representative of the American people, Jackson explained that he would act to stop anyone who attempted to deny the sovereignty of the people or the perpetuity of the Union.<sup>40</sup>

Virginians were stunned by Jackson's Proclamation, especially his remarks about the origins and nature of the Union. "Many of the doctrines of the President's grand manifesto," one writer noted, "are as obnoxious as Nullification itself." Another suggested that "its

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<sup>40</sup>"Proclamation to the People of South Carolina," as cited in Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 20-23.



principles ... are at war with all our opinions of state power & the character of our confederacy." John Randolph, on his deathbed, roused himself to curse the "ferocious and blood-thirsty proclamation of our Djezza Pacha."<sup>41</sup> The Virginia General Assembly responded to the Proclamation by electing John Tyler, a known enemy of the administration, to the United States Senate.<sup>42</sup>

The Junto was much more restrained in its comments. John Brockenbrough admitted that the Proclamation contained some dangerous ideas, but remained sanguine about the safety of the Union. Ritchie told his readers that he agreed with Jackson on the unconstitutionality of the doctrine of nullification, but felt compelled to add that "there are some doctrinal points ...to which we think it our duty to state that we cannot subscribe." Despite these differences, there was no reason to abandon the President or to stop working for a peaceful settlement to the dispute. The editor's conciliatory attitude roused one Virginian to condemn the "Ritchie and Co. party" for their devotion to the administration. They consider it "high treason," he

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<sup>41</sup>"Hampden," Richmond Constitutional Whig, Dec. 18, 1832; William F. Gordon to Thomas W. Gilmer, Dec. 11, 1832, John Tyler Scrapbook, Tyler Papers, College of William and Mary; Randolph to John Brockenbrough, Dec. 16, 1832, Shorey, ed., Collected Letters of John Randolph, 144. Pleasants, editor of the Constitutional Whig, praised the Proclamation for its "fervent devotion to the Union, prosperity and glory of our country," but admitted that it boded ill for friends of the state rights persuasion. Constitutional Whig, Dec. 14, 1832.

<sup>42</sup>Ambler, Thomas Ritchie, 152.

added, "to utter aught in opposition to the sovereign will of his most august majesty, our good master the autocrat of all the Americas."<sup>43</sup>

John Marshall effectively summarized the impact of the Proclamation on Jackson's supporters in Virginia when he told Joseph Story that "that paper astonished, confounded, and for a moment silenced them." Van Buren was also aware of this, and begged Jackson to pursue "toleration and magnanimity" toward the state until they regained their political bearings. The Junto's course should, in fact, be seen as an effort to limit defections within the party and to control the damage done by the Proclamation.<sup>44</sup>

After the initial shock of the Proclamation, the Junto worked hard to convince Virginians that the President's message was only mildly offensive and that the crisis would soon be resolved. Instead of chastising Jackson, the state should pour all of its resources into mediating a compromise between South Carolina and the federal government. Ritchie even published a lengthy defense of the Proclamation penned

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<sup>43</sup>Brockenbrough to Rives, Jan. 11, 1833, Rives Papers, LC; RE, Dec. 13, 15, 25, 1832; John Murdaugh to John Tazewell, Jan. 12, 1833, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL. Pleasants attacked Ritchie for standing by Jackson and protecting his own narrow party interests, instead of working to save Virginia and the doctrine of state rights. See the Constitutional Whig, Dec. 28, 1832.

<sup>44</sup>Marshall to Story, Dec. 25, 1832, Marshall Papers, William and Mary (typescript copy of original in Massachusetts Historical Society); Van Buren to Jackson, Dec. 27, 1832, Van Buren Papers, LC.

by his former partner, Claiborne W. Gooch.<sup>45</sup> But the damage had already been done. The Jackson party in Virginia was weakened by the Proclamation, Ritchie admitted, and if Jackson took further action, it would be "shivered to pieces." Despite these developments, Ritchie continued to insist that his main concern was to avoid the use of force in settling the dispute between South Carolina and the federal government.<sup>46</sup>

Jackson's Force Bill and Clay's Compromise, signed into law by Jackson on March 2, 1833, provided one more test of the Junto, its devotion to Jackson, and its control of the Democratic party in Virginia. The intent of the Force Bill was to insure that federal law could be enforced in South Carolina. It provided for the extension of federal protection to tariff collection centers, the creation of federal courts to hear tariff cases, and the establishment of jails to house offenders. The Bill also gave Jackson full power to use military force if these actions did not prove sufficient to enforce the law.<sup>47</sup> Ritchie and other Virginians focused on the military provisions of the bill and on the powers that it conferred upon the President. "All

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<sup>45</sup>RE, Jan. 1, 3, 8, 10, 12, 17, 29, 1833; "Cato," [C.W. Gooch], Jan. 31, Feb. 2, 9, 14, 21, 1833.

<sup>46</sup>Ritchie to Rives, Jan. 6, 1833, Rives Papers, LC. Ritchie also told Rives that "We are in an embarrassing situation - But prudence & firmness will yet save us." Ritchie to Rives, Feb. 2, 1833, Rives Papers, LC.

<sup>47</sup>Freehling, Prelude to Civil War, 284-286.

the provisions about using force ought to be stricken out," the editor told his readers. There was no need for such a measure at this time. "We stand upon the brink of a precipice," he noted, and the Force Bill threatened to push the South over the edge.<sup>48</sup>

Ritchie had kinder words for Clay's Compromise Bill, which gradually lowered tariff rates over a nine year period in exchange for a revocation of South Carolina's Ordinance of Nullification. The editor made clear that his support for the compromise did not mean that he was now in favor of a protective tariff system. But the country had come close to disunion over this question, and Ritchie favored any measure that would end the crisis peacefully.<sup>49</sup> When word arrived in Richmond of the passage of the so-called Compromise of 1833, Ritchie gladly informed his readers that "the Tariff Bill has passed - and Nullification is dead.... The *friends* of Liberty may no longer tremble for the preservation of the only Republic on Earth."<sup>50</sup>

The Nullification Crisis of 1832 and 1833 severely tested the ability of the Junto to hold together the coalition that had elected Jackson in Virginia in 1828. Despite their own disappointment with the President's

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<sup>48</sup>RE, Feb. 9, 1833; Jan. 22, 1833. See also issues of Jan. 19 and 26, 1833.

<sup>49</sup>RE, Feb. 16, 28, March 2, 5, 1833.

<sup>50</sup>RE, March 5, 1833.

course, the members of the group continued to profess their devotion to him and to the Democratic party.<sup>51</sup> Ritchie had done everything in his power to minimize the damage caused by the Proclamation and the Force Bill. For the most part, the Junto managed to weather the storm and to maintain its hold over political affairs in the state. But many Virginians left the party during the crisis, frightened by the specter of Jackson assuming unprecedented powers as chief executive of the land. A prominent Williamsburg citizen insisted that Jackson held "consolidating & despotic principles which we had supposed were finally overthrow by the revolution of 1800." C.W. Gooch, who at the height of the crisis criticized Ritchie for abandoning Jackson, lamented that "since his [Jackson's] admirable proclamation I have heard him more vilely abused & denounced, by recently open mouthed friends, than at any other period in his life."<sup>52</sup>

An anonymous writer in the Enquirer summed up the

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<sup>51</sup>See William H. Roane to Peachy Gilmer, Jan. 1833, Randolph Family Papers, UVA; Mark Alexander to Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, Feb. 6, 1833, William and Mary Quarterly, series 1, Vol. 12 (1903), 85-86 (on Stevenson's loyalty to Jackson); Richard E. Parker to Van Buren, March 21, 1833, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>52</sup>J.A.G. Davis to Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Feb. 17, 1833, Thomas Jefferson Randolph Papers, UVA; Gooch to Rives, Feb. 16, 1833, Rives Papers, LC. Lynwood Dent overemphasizes the fallout over the Proclamation and the Force Bill when he wrote that Jackson's actions "severly damaged his party in Virginia." Lynwood Miller Dent, Jr., "The Virginia Democratic Party, 1824-1847" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1974), 139.

experiences of many Virginians during the Nullification Crisis. He had supported Jackson in 1828 and 1832, "because I thought he could and would do more to sustain the sinking cause of State Rights and Virginia principles, than any other man.... His course did not disappoint me ... [and] my voice was given for his re-election: and again his opening message, calm, wise, conciliatory and statesman-like, satisfied me that I had voted rightly. Five or six days later, (what a revolution!) the proclamation came.... It contains matter at variance with all the President's former measures." Despite his differences of opinions, the writer insisted that he would continue to support the President.<sup>53</sup> The main reason for this continuing loyalty was undoubtedly Jackson's personal popularity in Virginia during this period. The Junto's role in keeping the Jacksonian party together, however, should not be underestimated. The group provided the leadership and guidance needed to weather the storm of the Nullification Crisis.

National problems were not the only ones facing the Junto in the years between 1829 and 1833. In Virginia, a protracted and divisive constitutional convention attracted everyone's attention for much of 1829 and early 1830. Then Nat Turner's Rebellion led some state leaders to question the state's need for the peculiar institution. All the

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<sup>53</sup>"No Nullifier," RE, Jan. 8, 1833.

while, opponents of the administration harangued the public and harassed the Junto about Jackson's policies and actions. When it appeared that the northerner Van Buren would capture the vice-presidential nomination in 1832, some Virginians balked and pledged themselves to support Virginian Philip P. Barbour instead. Each of these developments challenged the Junto's leadership and forced it to take actions to shore up the Jackson party in Virginia. While it was able to contain much of the discontent within the state, the clique was unable to prevent further defections from the Jacksonian cause.

The undemocratic features of the 1776 Virginia Constitution had never set well with many in the state, and since its adoption reformers, including Jefferson, had tried unsuccessfully to call a convention and make the state's constitution more democratic. Advocates of reform had grown more insistent as the years passed without any favorable response from the General Assembly. The main points of contention centered on suffrage requirements and the distribution of representatives in the state legislature. Virginia was among the last of the states to maintain a freehold requirement for voting, and reformers argued that the democratic spirit of the era demanded that it be dropped. The western portions of Virginia had been underrepresented in the General Assembly for decades, and as the population continued to shift westward, these

disparities became even more glaring. Since the biggest complaint of reformers was that slaves continued to count toward representation, the debate in 1829 and 1830 revolved ultimately around the institution of slavery. The "struggle for political power" in Jacksonian Virginia, one historian noted, "centered on slavery."<sup>54</sup>

The Junto, which held considerable political power itself, was split over the desirability of a convention. Ritchie had supported constitutional reform for years, and continued to do so. Those members of the clique more closely associated with the old planting class of eastern Virginia, Andrew Stevenson, Philip N. Nicholas, and William H. Roane, resisted efforts to tamper with the state constitution.<sup>55</sup> Opponents spoke ominously of the dangers of "innovation," and intimated that westerners would use their new political power to place a hefty tax on slaves, most of whom lived east of the Blue Ridge. The easterners' chief spokesman was

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<sup>54</sup>Alison Goodyear Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), xii, 47. Along with Freehling's study, Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., The Rhetoric of Conservatism: The Virginia Convention of 1829-1830 and the Conservative Tradition in the South (San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1982), offers the best overview of the debate surrounding the calling of a convention.

<sup>55</sup>Francis Fry Wayland, Andrew Stevenson: Democrat and Diplomat, 1785-1857 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 82; Nicholas to Joseph C. Cabell, Sept. 20, 1825, Cabell Family Papers, UVA; While Roane admitted that slavery was "an irremediable drawback to her [Virginia's] growth and prosperity," he opposed efforts to restructure fundamentally the existing Virginia constitution. RE, April 17, 1829.



Benjamin Watkins Leigh, a Richmond lawyer not connected with the Junto, who began a vigorous campaign to stop all efforts at calling a convention. Leigh wrote incessantly to his friends and to prominent leaders describing the dangers of meddling with the state constitution, and assuring them that more than redistribution of representatives was at stake. Once those people who lived west of the mountains received proportional representation, Leigh argued, they would immediately move to "take the government out of the hands of the slaveholders, and make them pay the expense of it!" To ensure his points were clear, Leigh denounced proponents of reform for kindling the "spirit of faction, incarnate and embodied," in the state.<sup>56</sup>

The question of calling a convention consumed considerable time in the years between 1825 and 1829. Each year the General Assembly discussed the issue before packed galleries while commentators debated back and forth in the columns of the state's newspapers. When the state legislature finally agreed to ask the electorate if they desired a constitutional convention in 1828, the issue had become a truly sectional one in the state. The older regions of the state, the Tidewater and the Piedmont, generally opposed reform because it threatened to reduce their representation in the legislature. The goal of the men who

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<sup>56</sup>Leigh to Tazewell, Aug. 22, 1825, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; Leigh to Peachy R. Gilmer, Aug. 17, 1825, M.S., VSL.

represented these areas during the convention was to prevent a significant shift in power to the western sections of the state, the Valley and the Trans-Allegheny region. The people of the west resented the aristocratic features of Virginia's constitution, and believed that slaveholders in the east were largely to blame for the declining status of the state. If they could succeed in democratizing the state's laws by equalizing representation and achieving white male suffrage, Virginia could be revitalized and reclaim its rightful position in the Union.

After Virginia voters overwhelmingly supported the call for a convention in 1829, the state's newspapers printed letter after letter filled with suggestions, demands, and recommendations for the upcoming convention, scheduled to convene in Richmond in early October. Both Ritchie and Pleasants, the two most influential editors in the state, supported the convention and calls for reform. Upon hearing of Jackson's victory in November of 1828, Pleasants had suggested that "while the spirit [of reform] is abroad, let the broom also be used in Richmond and the State Government." Pleasants's connection of national and state issues, contrived as it may have been, was nevertheless significant. The editor of the Constitutional Whig wanted to know if the advocates of "Jackson and Reform" were serious when they spoke of change and of returning power to the people. It was a valid question, and one which the Junto

failed to answer decisively during the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829-1830.<sup>57</sup>

Many writers urged Virginians to take the necessary steps to bring their constitution in line with the spirit of the age. "A Freeholder" found it "worse than idle, to talk about the necessity of having a piece of land ... in order to give you the privileges of freemen in the State." Owning land "adds nothing to the intellect, integrity, or patriotism, of the possessor [sic]." The provision calling for a freehold requirement was "an odious badge of genuine aristocracy, and ought to be despised and ridiculed by every man who has a just regard for Liberty and Equality of political rights." Peachy Harrison expressed shock at the "rank aristocracy" and "oligarchic" nature of those who defended the existing constitution. Several commentators pointed out that under the current system, slaves counted more toward representation than many white men. Reformers agreed that the times demanded change.<sup>58</sup>

Conservatives responded quickly and strongly to the charges of reformers. They argued that Virginia's 1776 constitution, the first written constitution ever, imparted

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<sup>57</sup>Richmond Constitutional Whig, Nov. 22, 1828. For examples of Ritchie's support for reform, see RE, Oct. 17, Dec. 3, 1829.

<sup>58</sup>"A Freeholder," RE, Feb. 14, 1829; Peachy Harrison to Gessner Harrison, Nov. 4, 1829; Richmond Constitutional Whig, July 21, Nov. 13, 1829. The debate on the upcoming convention can be traced in the Enquirer, February through October, 1829.

special dignity to the state. While it might be flawed, as all man-made laws must be, there was no reason to scrap it or to adopt rashly a new constitution. No guarantee existed that the new charter would be any better than the old; in fact, it probably would not be as good. Virginia's "freehold suffrage has enabled her to retain character," Thomas Ruffin explained to William H. Brodnax. Widening suffrage would necessitate giving the vote to "Yankee shopkeepers" and other undesirables. Besides, Ruffin asked, "Is it not our experience that every new Constitution ... gets worse & worse"? James Mason saw no reason to extend the franchise "to every squatter, who pays one cent of tax." William H. Crawford warned Leigh, who needed no reassuring, that if Virginia adopted a white population basis for representation, it would divorce itself "from the rest of the slave holding states."<sup>59</sup>

Once the convention opened, it quickly became apparent that a long and bitter struggle over the questions of suffrage and representation, what Ritchie called the "engrossing and paramount subject," lay ahead. For the better part of four months, delegates argued over these

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<sup>59</sup>Thomas Ruffin to William H. Brodnax, Oct. 22, 1829, Brodnax Letters, VHS; John Y. Mason to James Henry Rochelle, Dec. 18, 1829, James Henry Rochelle Papers, Duke; William H. Crawford to Leigh, Dec. 24, 1829, Benjamin Watkins Leigh Papers, VHS.

questions, neither willing to concede too much to the other.<sup>60</sup> Clearly frustrated at the lack of consensus, James Madison was overheard saying "that he believed if a motion were made, that two & two would make four, it would produce a division in the house." Another delegate noted that the Convention was "so equally divided into geographical parties that every question is decided by nearly the same vote." While Ritchie privately fretted that the convention had devolved into a "struggle for power" instead of a "contest of principle," he kept the state's readers informed as to all developments and continually called on the delegates to reach an acceptable compromise.<sup>61</sup> By early December, Ritchie was deeply concerned about the increasingly strident tones of the delegates' speeches and actions. He worried aloud that such bitterness and lack of unity might lead to a call for another convention or even talk of separating the state. "We are literally a volcano at rest," Philip P. Barbour wrote as debate dragged on, "but with a vast mass of combustible matter within." Like others, Ritchie knew that the most "combustible matter" was slavery, and he was haunted by the specter of an extended debate on the issue.

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<sup>60</sup>RE, Dec. 3, 1829; Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution, 36-81. Proceedings and Debates of the Virginia State Convention of 1829-1830 (Richmond: Thomas Ritchie, 1833) offers a full account of the debate.

<sup>61</sup>John Y. Mason to John H. Rochelle, Dec. 18, 1829, Rochelle Papers, Duke; Ritchie to John [?] Campbell, Oct. 26, 1829, CFP, Duke.

His conciliatory nature led him to push aggressively for some compromise to bring the proceedings to an end.<sup>62</sup>

When the convention finally agreed to a compromise constitution that granted reformers practically none of their demands, Ritchie's relief was obvious. Despite its shortcomings -- representation remained skewed in favor of the eastern parts of the state and a significant portion of the adult white males in Virginia remained ineligible to vote -- the editor heartily endorsed the new frame of government and repeatedly called upon his fellow citizens to adopt it. Both in public and private, Ritchie asserted that the new constitution was not perfect, but was rather "the best which could be got." He remained confident that the state would approve it, and his assessment proved correct. Virginians voted that spring to accept the new constitution, although bitter westerners opposed it and pledged to call another convention. After a protracted and divisive struggle, the state had "held back white-basis democracy and opted instead for slaveholders political ascendancy."<sup>63</sup>

Ritchie hoped that the adoption of a new state constitution in 1830 would bring to an end the sectional

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<sup>62</sup>P.P. Barbour to John J. Ambler, Jan. 9, 1830, Papers of the Ambler and Barbour Families, UVA; RE, Nov. 17, 19, Dec. 1, 25, 1829. Pleasants shared his concern: Richmond Constitutional Whig, Nov. 12, 1829.

<sup>63</sup>RE, Jan. 16, 26, Feb. 2, 1829; Ritchie to Rives, April 15, 1830, Rives Papers, LC; Freehling, Drift toward Dissolution, 80.

tensions that threatened to divide the state and lessen his power as party leader. In truth, the convention had been a traumatic experience for him. Unburdening himself to William Cabell Rives on the subject, Ritchie noted the "painful" activities that went on behind the scenes. "Much harsh language was employed. Many threats of disunion thrown out. Many friends alienated from each other - and a nasty and intemperate spirit of proscription began to show itself." Once a compromise had been effected, Ritchie's mood changed: "My own spirits are high - and my confidence in the principles of the Republican Party & the sound sense of the people remain unshaken." Perhaps now, Ritchie hoped, Virginians could turn their energies to the larger national problems facing them.<sup>64</sup>

Ritchie's desire for a return to national politics proved elusive. Westerners remained bitter and angry over the questions of representation and suffrage. Easterners pledged to guard their rights and interests zealously. Then, in August of 1831, the actions of a small group of slaves in Southampton County stunned Virginia and the South. In the wake of Nat Turner's Rebellion, which cost the lives of over 50 whites and 100 blacks, Virginians were forced to reevaluate their commitment to the institution of racial

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<sup>64</sup>Ritchie to Rives, April 15, 1830, Rives Papers, LC. As secretary to the Convention, Ritchie was privy to private sessions and discussions.

slavery.<sup>65</sup> Fear of insurrection had always haunted southerners, but the suddenness and brutality of the Southampton uprising shocked everyone. Ritchie wrote excitedly of the actions of the "monsters" and "blood-thirsty wolves," and of efforts to capture Turner, the acknowledged leader of the rebels. Editorials attempted to explain the uprising, demanded action from the state legislature, and suggested ways of preventing it from happening again.<sup>66</sup>

Virginians also wrote and spoke more openly about ending the curse of slavery in the state. Some argued that the only way to avoid another bloody insurrection was to begin gradually freeing all bondsmen so that slavery could be eradicated in Virginia. Ritchie's public approval of such plans helped pave the way for the General Assembly's intensive, three-week public discussion on the future of the institution in Virginia during the 1831-32 session. With the scenes from Southampton still fresh in their minds, reformers such as Thomas Jefferson Randolph, grandson of the Sage of Monticello, and William Preston clashed with conservatives such as James Gholson over the advisability and constitutionality of abolishing slavery in the state.

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<sup>65</sup>Stephen B. Oates, The Fires of Jubilee: Nat Turner's Fierce Rebellion (New York: Mentor Books, 1975).

<sup>66</sup>RE, Aug. 26, 30, 1831. For examples of the response to the rebellion, see the Richmond Constitutional Whig and Enquirer for the period August through December, 1831.



Moderates like William Brodnax and Archibald Bryce proposed compromise measures that would appease both sides and end the tense debate.<sup>67</sup> For a brief time in early 1832, Ritchie opened the columns of the Enquirer to discussions about the future of slavery in Virginia. But he also continued to discuss the key national problems facing the nation, and when the House of Delegates decided against instituting plans to end slavery in the state, the editor fired a final salvo and happily moved on to other matters. He rarely discussed the topic of slavery in his paper again for the next several years.<sup>68</sup>

Another irritating problem for Ritchie was the continuing attacks on the Junto by Pleasants and others. Foes of the group delighted in describing its members as both haughty oligarchs of state power and fawning sycophants of Jackson and Van Buren. During the 1828 presidential campaign, attacks on the "Richmond Party" had become a staple of Virginia political rhetoric. After Jackson's election, those attacks continued and widened in scope. Papers from across the nation informed their readers that a Junto in Richmond sternly ruled the Old Dominion and kept it allied with the administration. Occasionally, in the heat of

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<sup>67</sup>RE, Oct. 25, 1831; Jan. 7, 1832; Freehling, Drift Toward Dissolution, 122-169. See also Joseph Clark Robert, The Road From Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832 (Durham: Trinity College Historical Society, 1941; reprint New York: AMS Press, 1970).

<sup>68</sup>RE, Jan. 7, 1832.

party battle, an opposition editor would claim that the President or his chief minion, Van Buren, consulted with the Junto before implementing a new policy or making a major decision. Ritchie, as usual, dismissed these claims as absurd.<sup>69</sup>

Attacks on the Junto, however, continued to emanate chiefly from Virginians upset about the supposed power of the group. Those opposed to "Ritchie & Co." or to Jackson missed few opportunities to rail against the undemocratic club in Richmond that ran state politics with an iron hand.<sup>70</sup> Alfred Powell confessed that one of the reasons he supported the calling of a constitutional convention was because he believed that it would "annihilate the Richmond Junto with all its power and influence." Even though the "party has dwindled and declined in talent" since its founding by Spencer Roane, under Ritchie's guidance it still exerted an undue influence in state matters. Patrick Cabell was hardly less vehement in denouncing "that miserable Junto, who claim an exclusion of republicanism," and who are

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<sup>69</sup>Ritchie would often reprint these charges before refuting them. See, for example, RE, Dec. 25, 1829, Nov. 19, 1830, June 28, 1831. For a typical example of accusations about Van Buren and the Junto, see the Richmond Constitutional Whig, Dec. 15, 1829, and Ritchie's response in the Enquirer of Dec. 25, 1829.

<sup>70</sup>John Pleasants to John Tyler, Jan. 1, 1833, Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers (3 vols. Richmond and Williamsburg, 1884-1896; reprint New York: De Capo Press, 1970), 1:451-452; "Extracts of a letter to W.M. Rives," Jan. 8, 1829, Rives Papers, LC.

attempting to enforce a "new political Faith" that is "reprobated by the venerable standards of 98-9." Cabell confessed that he was filled with "feelings of utter scorn and contempt" when he dwelled on the "arrogant and insulting dictation of some half a score of barely third rate men, residing in, and about, the Metropolis."<sup>71</sup>

Cabell's description of the group was as precise as anyone cared to get in their assaults on the Junto. Everyone assumed that Ritchie headed the clique, and that Peter V. Daniel and Andrew Stevenson were among his closest advisors. But other names were rarely mentioned. These three men, and in particular, Ritchie, came in for the lion's share of abuse and condemnation. Apparently Stevenson was not well liked, even by his some of his political allies. While it might be expected that Pleasants would devote much attention to blasting Stevenson and his actions as Speaker of the House, it was somewhat surprising to hear David Campbell and his brother John, friendly to the Junto at the time, criticize him. Stevenson's "vanity is beyond all calculation," David told his wife. "To hear him talk, you would suppose he was decidedly the greatest man in this nation." The Speaker's disappointment at not receiving the French ministry, David added, has made him a pouting "mal-content." When brother John heard of Stevenson's appointment

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<sup>71</sup>Notes of Alfred Harrison Powell, n.d. [probably mid-1829], Byrd Family Papers, VHS; Patrick H. Cabell to James C. Cabell, March 21, 1829, Cabell Family Papers, UVA.

as minister to Great Britain, he told David that "a more selfish vain windy & vapouring blockhead I have never known to get as high as he has gotten already." He was sure the appointment would be laughed at throughout Virginia. Only "his clan at Richmond" supported him.<sup>72</sup> Daniel, longtime member of the Executive Council and Lieutenant Governor, also received sharp criticism as a member of the Junto. Opponents denounced him as "that chief of hypocrites" and worked to get him removed, or "scratched," from the Council. Daniel seemed proud that opponents of the administration found him "odious," and Richard Parker would later note that the Whigs "cordially hate[d]" Daniel. Despite Ritchie's support, Daniel failed to win the gubernatorial race in 1830, due in part to his unpopularity.<sup>73</sup>

The favorite target of criticism and party venom, however, was Ritchie. Critics never tired of attacking him or of concocting stories about his influence in Richmond and Washington. Between 1829 and 1833, Ritchie's fiercest foes were John Hampden Pleasants and John Floyd. Pleasants was

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<sup>72</sup>Richmond Constitutional Whig, Nov. 26, 1828, April 28, 1829; David Campbell to Mary Campbell, May 21, 1829; John Campbell to David Campbell, April 6, 1832, both in CFP, Duke.

<sup>73</sup>John Floyd Diary, Feb. 1, 1832, in Charles Ambler, The Life and Diary of John Floyd (Richmond: Richmond Press, Inc., 1918), 176; Jacob Lynch to William B. Campbell, Jan. 6, 1832, CFP, Duke; Richmond Constitutional Whig, July 18, 1831; Daniel to Jackson, Dec. 7, 1834, Andrew Jackson Papers, LC; Richard E. Parker to Van Buren, Dec. 25, 1835, Van Buren Papers, LC. For Daniel's general unpopularity, see John P. Frank, Justice Daniel Dissenting: A Biography of Peter V. Daniel, 1784-1860 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 76, 102.

already well versed at tweaking Ritchie's nose, and he had been almost continually denouncing Ritchie and the Junto for years. Floyd, a Jacksonian who left the party when he did not receive the office he thought himself entitled to, was elected governor of Virginia in 1830, beating out Daniel. During his three year tenure, Floyd made life difficult for all administration men, but especially Ritchie and his clique. "Ritchie and Stevenson and the Junta are harnessed to the Van Buren car," Floyd noted disgustedly in his diary, and he aimed to derail them.<sup>74</sup>

By the time he was elected governor in 1830, Floyd had joined those Virginians who openly opposed Jackson during his first term. Among these defectors were Littleton Waller Tazewell and John Tyler, Virginia's two United States Senators, who objected to some of Jackson's policies, particularly his decision to negotiate a treaty with Turkey before consulting Congress. Tyler, sensing the growing displeasure towards Jackson in Virginia, claimed in March of 1830 that the state supported Jackson only out of the "fear of greater ill under the auspices of another." A few observers in Richmond agreed with this assessment.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>John Floyd Diary, April 28, 1832, Ambler, Life and Diary of Floyd, 184. See also entries for Mar. 8, 1831 (132) and Feb. 1, 1832 (176).

<sup>75</sup>John Tyler to John Rutherford, March 14, 1830, Tyler, Letters and Times of Tylers, 3:61-63; John Wickham to Tazewell, Jan. 5, 1831, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL. For Tazewell and Tyler's break with Jackson, see Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, April 24, 1831, Bassett, ed., Correspondence of

Tazewell, disappointed by Jackson and disgusted by the state of affairs in Washington, yearned to retire from public life. Benjamin Watkins Leigh urged him to stay on, explaining that Ritchie would only "supply your place with a Senator from Virginia likely to be more manageable." When Virginia backed Van Buren as the vice-presidential nominee in 1832, Tazewell resigned from the Senate, claiming that he no longer spoke for the state and was unwilling to contribute to the conversion of the government "into a military despotism."<sup>76</sup>

Floyd took dissatisfaction with Jackson to another level. He gloated that Jackson "has disappointed friends and foes; all his enemies said of him before his election, has been realized." Pleasants admitted that Floyd was the only man in Virginia more hostile to Jackson than himself. "Floyd is up to the highest button hole of anti-Jacksonianism," he told one friend.<sup>77</sup> Floyd, Pleasants, Tazewell, and Tyler formed the leadership on an emerging anti-Jackson party whose impact was felt immediately. Stevenson let slip the state of affairs in Virginia when he told Van Buren that the

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Jackson, 4:268-269; Ritchie to John Campbell, Oct. 26, 1829; John Campbell to James Campbell, April 23, 1830; John Campbell to David Campbell, n.d. [April 1831], all in CFP, Duke.

<sup>76</sup>Leigh to Tazewell, Feb. 22, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; Tazewell to John Wickham, Dec. 17, 1832, John Wickham Papers, UVA.

<sup>77</sup>John Floyd Diary, March 8, 1831, Jan. 2, 1832, Ambler, Life and Diary of John Floyd, 123, 173; Pleasants to J.C. Cabell, Nov. 14, 1831, Cabell Family Papers, UVA.

state would support Jackson in the upcoming election, "apostates to the contrary notwithstanding." The unity that had marked Jackson's ascendancy in Virginia in 1828 was already showing signs of falling apart.<sup>78</sup>

Discontent with Jackson in Virginia during this period can be traced to three sources. First, the President's actions in removing officeholders and replacing them with friends and newspaper editors soured some Virginians dedicated to reform, or, in the case of Floyd, intent on securing a prestigious post in the new administration. Second, the acrimonious and protracted dispute between Jackson and Calhoun cost Old Hickory support among those in the state who looked favorably upon the South Carolinian. Some argued that Jackson's petulance in this matter increased Calhoun's strength in Virginia enough to turn the state against the administration.<sup>79</sup> Ritchie at first denied that Calhoun was quarreling with Jackson and Van Buren, and then chided the South Carolinian for airing his private matters in public. As always, Ritchie worried most about the impact the feud would have on the Jacksonian party. In the midst of the Jackson-Calhoun feud, he informed his readers that they should not commit themselves to supporting anyone

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<sup>78</sup>Stevenson to Van Buren, April 4, 1831, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>79</sup>Leigh to Tazewell, Feb. 22, 1831, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; "Clinton," RE, Feb. 24, 1831; William S. Archer to Van Buren, March 12, 1831, Van Buren Papers, LC; J. Burton Harrison to Rives, Aug. 30, 1831, Rives Papers, LC.

who challenged Jackson's leadership. The "course of the Republicans of Virginia fortunately admits of no confusion," he noted. "The landmarks are laid down, as straight as a ray of light from Heaven." Virginia must support the President and refuse to "bind herself at this time to the ear of any man who aspires to be the successor of A. Jackson."<sup>80</sup>

The third and most significant factor in weakening the unity of the Jackson party in Virginia involved the political future of the Secretary of State, Martin Van Buren. Many Virginians cast suspicious eyes on the New Yorker, not just because of his place of birth, but also because of his stance on key issues like internal improvements and the Missouri Compromise. Given the developments of the past decade, William M. Rives told his brother, Virginians are "disposed to favour a southern candidate in disregard of other considerations."<sup>81</sup>

Van Buren's reputation as an ambitious political manipulator, a "trimmer," also cost him support in the state. His "personal character," one observer noted in 1831, "is at this date held in much aversion by all parties."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>RE, May 21, 1830; Feb. 19, 24, March 10, 12, 1831. Quotes in March 10 issue; Lynwood Miller Dent, "The Virginia Democratic Party, 1824-1847" (Ph.D. diss, Louisiana State University, 1974), 88.

<sup>81</sup>William M. Rives to William Cabell Rives, April 30, 1830, Rives Papers, LC.

<sup>82</sup>J. Burton Harrison to William Cabell Rives, Aug. 30, 1831, Rives Papers, LC.



More than one Virginian expressed the idea that Van Buren had precipitated the spat between Calhoun and Jackson in order to strengthen his position in the administration. When Van Buren decided to resign his office in April of 1831, with the notion that the remainder of the Cabinet, but especially those allied with Calhoun, would step down as well, Virginians marvelled at the machinations of the Little Magician. Ritchie hoped Van Buren's resignation would ease party tensions and dispel rumors that he was the power behind the throne, while other members of the Junto were less sanguine.<sup>83</sup> For their part, Pleasants and Floyd needed little time to decide that the whole affair had been designed to punish Calhoun and to position Van Buren for the vice-presidential chair.<sup>84</sup>

Such a notion was apparently widespread among Virginians, for Ritchie told Van Buren that he would seriously damage the party if he chose to run as vice-president. The Junto leader flatly stated that neither he nor the state could support Van Buren in this endeavor.

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<sup>83</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, April 20 and 21, 1831, Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, April 22, May 3, 13, 1831; Daniel to Van Buren, April 22, 1831; Parker to Van Buren, April 23, 1831, both in Van Buren Papers, LC.

Van Buren only informed three people in advance of his decision to resign. Ritchie was one of them. This fact confirms Van Buren's high opinion of Ritchie's influence in the party. Van Buren to Ritchie, April 17, 1831, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>84</sup>John Floyd Diary, April 21, 1831, Ambler, Diary of John Floyd, 139; Richmond Constitutional Whig, April 22, May 30, 1831.

Ritchie repeatedly told his subscribers that the New Yorker had not, and would not, seek the second highest chair in the land. He would instead continue to serve the country as minister to the Court of St. James.<sup>85</sup>

The continued attacks on Van Buren in Virginia forced Ritchie to admit that the administration was losing supporters in the state. John Randolph, never one to mince words, bluntly informed Jackson that the "great defection on the part of your supporters in Virginia" stemmed from the influence that Van Buren and other northerners had over affairs. Richmonder John Rutherford gloomily noted the "schisms in the republican ranks" brought on by the dissolution of the cabinet and other events. Jackson's popularity was "wholly ruined," another added. "In Virginia every one is mortified & chagrined," and the "abandonment of the President has been very extensive."<sup>86</sup>

Despite growing criticism, Jackson remained extremely popular in Virginia. Few doubted in 1831 that the President would win reelection in the upcoming election, and even Floyd believed that Jackson would "still get the vote of the

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<sup>85</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, April 30, 1831, Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, April 8, 22, May 20, 24, Dec. 2, 30, 1831.

<sup>86</sup>RE, June 24, 1831; Randolph to Jackson, Nov. 8, 1831, Bassett, ed., Correspondence of Jackson, 4:369-370; John Rutherford to Rives, Nov. 6, 1831; J. Burton Harrison to Rives, Aug. 30, 1831, both in Rives Papers, LC.

State because he is now less odious than Clay."<sup>87</sup> Within the Virginia Jackson party, however, considerable dissatisfaction existed with the idea of Jackson choosing Van Buren as his running mate. The Senate's rejection of the New Yorker as minister to the Court of St. James, engineered by Calhoun and Clay, "excited ... universal indignation" in the state and moved many to support a Jackson-Van Buren ticket. Stevenson wrote from Washington and encouraged Ritchie to throw his weight behind Van Buren's candidacy. Virginia must "take a strong and bold part" in this matter. "If she does, all is safe." Ritchie, sensing the displeasure such a development would cause among certain portions of his party, wisely withheld acting publicly on Stevenson's advice. While privately he had already decided to support Van Buren, he continued to plead with Virginians to abide by the decisions of the national party convention which would meet in Baltimore in May of 1832.<sup>88</sup>

A significant number of Jacksonians ignored Ritchie's pleas and moved to place Philip Pendelton Barbour in nomination for the vice-presidency. Barbour, who had ties

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<sup>87</sup>John Floyd Diary, Jan. 2, 1832, Ambler, Diary of Floyd, 173; RE, June 24, 1831; Arthur Campbell to David Campbell, Sept. 2, 1831, CFP, Duke.

<sup>88</sup>Parker to John Campbell, Feb. 3, 1832; Stevenson to Ritchie, Feb. 4, 1832, both in Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, Jan. 31, Feb. 4, 18, 24, 28, 1832; Parker to Tazewell, Feb. 6, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL. For the Junto's support for Van Buren at this time, see John Campbell to Van Buren, Feb. 10, 1832; Daniel to Van Buren, July 12, 1832; Parker to Van Buren, Sept. 5, 1832, all in Van Buren Papers, LC.

with the Junto, possessed all of the qualities that Van Buren lacked; that is, he was an orthodox Southerner. His popularity had risen since he had ably presided over the Constitutional Convention of 1829. Voters in Piedmont Virginia were especially enamored of Barbour, but he attracted supporters throughout the state. As the campaign progressed, it seemed that support for the Virginian outstripped that for Van Buren.<sup>89</sup>

The Barbour movement proved to be a tremendous headache for the Junto. There was no way that it could support Barbour publicly, regardless of its private regard for him. To abandon Van Buren at this stage would have amounted to political suicide. For the past decade, the Junto and the Regency had worked together, first with Crawford and then with Jackson. Van Buren had always been the prime mover behind the coalition. Loyalty to him dictated that the Barbour movement be turned back and the path laid clear for the Little Magician. Besides, Barbour's supporters threatened to split the party vote in the state, thereby allowing the nascent opposition party to sweep into power. Party unity demanded, Ritchie and the Junto claimed, that Virginians abide by the decision made at the upcoming national convention. The group was beginning to realize

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<sup>89</sup>William M. Rives to William Cabell Rives, April 30, 1830; Thomas Walker Gilmer to William Cabell Rives, Sept. 29, 1830, both in Rives Papers, LC; Dent, "Virginia Democratic Party," 107-113.

first-hand the necessity of party discipline and loyalty.<sup>90</sup>

At the Baltimore Convention, Andrew Stevenson, P.V. Daniel and Philip N. Nicholas all represented Virginia. Despite this strong Junto influence, the delegates from the Old Dominion were determined to cast their ballots for Barbour as vice-president. At a caucus of the state's delegates, Daniel and Nicholas proposed a compromise that most of the men in attendance accepted. The state would support Barbour initially, but should it become clear that he lacked sufficient votes to gain the nomination, Virginia would accept the convention's choice for vice-president without dissent. Everyone understood that that meant backing Van Buren. This is what eventually happened, but not before hard-core Barbour supporters, unwilling to accept the Little Magician on the party ticket, walked out of the proceedings.<sup>91</sup>

Barbour's forces in Virginia were exceedingly bitter about the action of the state's delegates, and refused to abide by the convention's decision to support Van Buren.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup>RE, Nov. 11, 1831, Feb. 28, March 4, 1832; Roane and Daniel both worked to keep the Virginia legislature from endorsing Barbour, and Stevenson asked Ritchie to put pressure on Barbour to withdraw from consideration. See RE, March 1, 1832; Stevenson to Ritchie, Feb. 4, 1832, Van Buren Papers, LC. See also the "Message of the Jackson Central Committee," RE, Oct. 16, 1832.

<sup>91</sup>RE, May 25, 29, 1832.

<sup>92</sup>Littleton W. Tazewell to John Tazewell, May 23, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL.

Within a month a "Jackson and Barbour Convention" convened to Charlottesville to plan for the upcoming election. In their address, delegates insisted that they did not want to fractionalize the Jackson party in the state or the nation. They desired peace and unity. But the possibility of Van Buren becoming vice-president prompted them to take matters into their own hands. The New Yorker was hostile to "every principle and interest which has been justly held dear by Virginians," they claimed. Furthermore, he had been foisted upon the people by the oligarchic Richmond Party. Voting for Van Buren, they concluded, would represent the first step in subjecting the state to the "control of a northern regency."<sup>93</sup>

Throughout the summer of 1832, Ritchie and the Junto worked to bring Barbour's supporters back into the fold. The group worried above all about the potentially disastrous implications of splitting the party vote in November. Defeating the unnatural coalition of Clay and Calhoun required strength, unity, and harmony. Ritchie stressed these themes repeatedly in the Enquirer and made every effort to assuage the fears of the Barbourites about Van Buren. The state would not fall under the sway of any

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<sup>93</sup>"Resolution and Address of the Charlottesville Jackson and Barbour Convention," (Charlottesville: Cary & Watson, 1832), VHS; RE, June 8, 1832. The Alexandria Gazette (May 9, 1832) also believed that the Junto was forcing Van Buren upon the South, as did Littleton Waller Tazewell. Tazewell to John Tazewell, May 23, 1832, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL.

"northern regency." Nor had the "Richmond Party" forced Van Buren upon the state; no such organization existed. There was, however, a real crisis facing Virginia and the nation. The tariff controversy in South Carolina and the debate over the Bank of the United States were both far more significant than petty squabbles over the second place on a party ticket. Supporters of the Union and of the Jackson administration must unite to end the crisis and preserve the integrity of the Union.<sup>94</sup>

As the election neared and the focus of discussion turned increasingly to the situation in South Carolina, Barbour's support dwindled, leading him to withdraw from the race in October.<sup>95</sup> By then it was clear that a Jackson-Barbour ticket had no chance of winning, even in Virginia. Moreover, many political commentators had crippled Barbour's chances by linking his supporters with the Nullifiers of South Carolina. Barbour's friends, John Marshall noted, were "secretly for Calhoun" and among the "most violent of the state right party." He had no doubt that they were also "attached to nullification in principle." But Marshall, already at odds with Jackson, found no cause to celebrate the split in the Virginia Democratic party. "There might be

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<sup>94</sup>RE, June 8, 12, 19, 1832.

<sup>95</sup>Duff Green to Thomas W. Gilmer, Sept. 24, 1832, Duff Green Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Gilmer to Barbour, Oct. 2, 1832, Papers of the Ambler and Barbour Families, UVA.

some difficulty in managing this tangled business were not the Jackson majority so overwhelming as to leave his friends nothing to fear from a division."<sup>96</sup> The Chief Justice, removed as he was from the intricacies of party politics in Virginia, misjudged the anxiety caused by the movement to keep Van Buren off of the ballot. But he did not misread public sentiment for Old Hickory. Jackson swept to a commanding victory in Virginia, capturing 75% of the popular vote, even with the northerner Van Buren as his running mate.<sup>97</sup>

Marshall's connection of the Barbour movement with the nullification debate brought together nicely the two greatest problems facing the Junto in the years between 1829 and 1833. After successfully exerting its influence to elect Andrew Jackson to the presidency, the group found itself almost immediately embroiled in a number of minor and some not so minor disputes. If Jackson's cabinet selections, his patronage policies, and his uneven record on stifling internal improvement bills all gave cause for concern among his supporters in Richmond, the President's handling of the Nullification Crisis and Van Buren's crafty efforts to inherit the throne caused outright panic. On top of all

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<sup>96</sup>Marshall to Joseph Story, Aug. 2, 1832, (typescript copy of original in Massachusetts Historical Society), Marshall Papers, William and Mary.

<sup>97</sup>Congressional Quarterly, Presidential Elections, 94.



this, developments within the state produced bitter division and controversy. Faced with these distressing occurrences, the Junto responded by maintaining and even strengthening both its loyalty to Jackson and Van Buren and its position as leader of the Virginia Democratic Party.<sup>98</sup> While continuing to insist upon their independence from party leaders in Washington -- they were only interested in following the principles of state rights -- the members of the Junto were gradually accepting the need for effective party discipline and loyalty, the hallmark of the second party system.<sup>99</sup> Jackson's resounding victory at the polls in 1832, coming as it did after four years of bickering, agitation, and compromise, gave the Junto reason to celebrate. Despite complaints, defections, and an attempted rebellion within the ranks, the group somehow managed to hold the Jacksonian party together. Ritchie and his group

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<sup>98</sup>Ritchie to Rives, Oct. 12, 1831, Rives Papers, LC. Ritchie admitted that "my heart & hand are with" Jackson because he will "restore ... the right reading of the Constitution - and bring back the spirit of Union & harmony to our people." Lynwood Dent has argued that the Junto remained "Jackson's one constant source of support in Virginia" during this period. Dent, "Virginia Democratic Party," 81.

<sup>99</sup>Daniel and Stevenson were the best examples of this. I do not, however, agree with Dent, "Virginia Democratic Party," 122, that the Junto had completely accepted "Van Buren's new concept of party" by 1833, or with William Cooper's assertion that "the Junto men were much more concerned about party in general and about loyalty to the Democratic party in particular" than republican principles. William J. Cooper, Jr., The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 12. Only after 1837 does this statement have any validity.

realized, however, that four years of almost constant struggle had produced much bitterness in Virginia, and they hoped that Jackson's second term would be marked by peace and harmony.

## Chapter IV

### Party Warfare: 1834-1840

Despite the fallout caused by the Proclamation and the Force Bill, the Richmond Junto had managed to keep the Virginia Democratic party fairly unified during Jackson's first administration. The clique realized, however, that the growing opposition to Jackson presented a threat that could not be ignored. Jackson's second term, the Junto hoped, would proceed more smoothly than the first, and the President would not provide Virginians with any further reasons to abandon the Democratic party.

In this hope, the Junto was to be profoundly disappointed. The years between 1834 and 1840 were marked by some of the most ferocious party struggles ever seen in Virginia. The Junto found itself fighting not only an organized opposition party, the Whigs, but also factions within the Democratic party that challenged the group's leadership. After suffering several setbacks in 1834 and early 1835, the Junto regrouped and reexerted its control in 1836, contributing to Martin Van Buren's victory that year.

Van Buren's election, however, brought no calm to political affairs in Virginia. The Whigs controlled the

state legislature and continued their attacks on the administration. They were joined by a group of dissident Democrats, known as the Conservatives, who disagreed with Van Buren over his proposal for a sub-treasury banking scheme that would divorce the federal government from banking. While the Junto itself was split over the usefulness of the sub-treasury scheme, it remained united enough to insist on party unity and support for Van Buren as the leader of the Democrats. This call for cohesion became even more imperative when Calhoun Democrats in Virginia began challenging the Junto's control of the party.

In the bitter partisan battles that took place during Van Buren's administration, the Junto's power was sorely tested and ultimately broken. The group worked hard to see Van Buren capture Virginia's electoral votes in 1840, albeit by the slimmest of margins. But this triumph represented the last major achievement of the Junto. Dismayed by the election of William H. Harrison, weakened by attacks from both within and without their party, and their ranks thinned by death and appointment to federal offices, the remaining members of the Junto were losing their influence and slowly fading from the political scene. By late 1840, the group's control over the Virginia Democratic party had become tenuous at best, and it was clear that the end of an era was rapidly approaching.

With Jackson reelected and a compromise reached on the Nullification Crisis, the Junto fervently hoped that a spirit of harmony and cooperation would take hold of Virginia and the nation. Commenting upon Jackson's second inaugural address, Ritchie thought he saw a new era dawning in America. "Who can despair of such a Republic," he asked rhetorically. "Who will not lend a hand to the accomplishments of the great destinies which are opening before us? Let us then be true to our country, and we shall be blessed indeed." The future held great promise if only the American people could unite and bend their energies toward constructive, rather than destructive, ends. "Every thing, we now hope," Ritchie concluded, "will return to its usual channel."<sup>1</sup>

Ritchie's dream of political harmony proved illusory. By the end of 1833, debate over slavery had flared up again, Jackson was embroiled in another controversy, this time surrounding the removal of the deposits from the Bank of the United States, and the opposition party in Virginia was rapidly gaining strength as the spring elections approached. There was to be no respite after the tumultuous first years of the Jackson administration, and some Virginians believed that Jackson himself was partially to blame. It seemed to one observer that the "atmosphere in which he breaths must be agitated to give him life and health." Ritchie disagreed

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<sup>1</sup>Richmond Enquirer, March 7, 12, 1833.

with this assessment, but was forced to admit in the summer of 1833 that instead of peace and prosperity, "this is the day of excess, of political fanaticism, of violent feeling, of ultra abuse."<sup>2</sup> With a hint of annoyance, Ritchie informed his brother that "we cannot get every thing smooth in the political world." To another friend, he wrote simply, the "times are out of joint in politics."<sup>3</sup>

Throughout 1833 and 1834, the Junto found itself battling a familiar enemy: John C. Calhoun. The members of the group had repeatedly expressed their hostility toward the South Carolinian ever since his break with the Jackson administration in 1830. Calhoun's course during the election of 1832 and the Nullification Crisis had sealed his fate in the eyes of the Junto as a trouble-maker and political opportunist. Now they were convinced that the former vice-president was attempting "to rally a Southern Party around the Slave Question" and to present himself as the spokesman for the region.<sup>4</sup> Since the Junto believed that Calhoun did not represent the true southern state rights position, it moved decisively to condemn him. The Junto offered a variety

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<sup>2</sup>David Campbell to James Campbell, Sept. 15, 1833, Campbell Family Papers (hereafter cited as CFP), Duke University; RE, Aug. 6, 1833.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Ritchie to Archibald Ritchie, Nov. 23, 1833, John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph Macon College, Vol. 3, no. 3 (June 1911), 214; Thomas Ritchie to William Cabell Rives, Jan. 6, 1834, William Cabell Rives Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>4</sup>RE, July 26, 1833.

of reasons for attacking Calhoun. By seeking to create a purely sectional alliance, the South Carolinian was undermining the strength and integrity of the Union. He was also attempting to weaken the state's beneficial relationship with the national Democratic party, and thereby lessen the influence of Virginia in Washington. Calhoun's message appealed to the fears of southern slaveholders, not to their reason, and was therefore dangerous. All of this meant that Virginians must take a stand against Calhoun and his plans for a southern party. Ritchie told William Cabell Rives that he would "battle with the Calhoun party as long as I can" in the hopes of minimizing the influence it would have in Virginia and across the South. Calhoun must be stopped at all costs, he informed his readers. "No one deals more in metaphysics and mystification, and no one is so utterly unsafe and unfit to be trusted."<sup>5</sup>

The Junto's goal of discrediting Calhoun proved to be a delicate task. Since the South Carolinian was proclaiming the need for southern solidarity on the slavery question, an attack on him might be perceived as an attack on the peculiar institution and on the South itself. Therefore, Ritchie and other opponents of Calhoun tempered their criticism of him with frequent defenses of the slave system and with menacing threats to those outsiders attempting to

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<sup>5</sup>Ritchie to Rives, Aug. 26, 1833, Rives Papers, LC; RE, April 4, 1834.

meddle in the South's affairs. In the midst of chiding Calhoun for his destructive ambition, Ritchie paused (somewhat gratuitously) to remind his readers that "If ever the Federal Government pretends to control this species of property [slavery], the Union itself is gone. We, devoted as we are to the Union, would be the first to cry for its dissolution."<sup>6</sup> Ritchie's words reveal the hardening orthodoxy on the slavery question that was coming to characterize the South in the 1830s. Although he insisted that he was dedicated to the preservation of both the Union and the rights of the state, it was increasingly clear where his ultimate loyalty lay.<sup>7</sup>

A second source of concern for the Junto was Andrew Jackson's decision to withdraw federal deposits from the Second Bank of the United States in late 1833. Even though the Bank's charter was set to expire in 1836, and a recent Congressional investigation had cleared the institution of any wrong-doing and declared that the public deposits were safe, Jackson moved aggressively to slay the Bank dragon. When his Secretary of the Treasury, William Duane, refused to issue the order calling for the withdrawal, Jackson demanded his resignation. He soon elevated Roger Taney, the Attorney General, to the position, who immediately began to

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<sup>6</sup>RE, July 26, 1833. See also, Aug. 2, Oct. 8, 11, Nov. 1, 1833.

<sup>7</sup>For an example of this sentiment, see RE, Feb. 12, March 12, 1833.



make the necessary arrangements. To many observers, even those friendly to Jackson, the President's actions were perceived as unnecessary and quite possibly illegal. Those who had broken from the Jacksonian coalition during the first administration quickly raised the cry of executive usurpation and warned the country of the dangers of allowing Jackson to exercise virtually unchecked power.<sup>8</sup>

In Virginia, the removal of the deposits quickly became the leading topic of debate. Reaction to Jackson's attack on the Bank was largely negative. Most argued that he had acted precipitately and without proper reflection. The President had let "his zeal ... get the better of his judgment," David Campbell thought. More importantly, he had failed to respect the authority of the other branches of the federal government. This was the "very essence of despotism."<sup>9</sup> Others agreed with Campbell. The Virginia legislature passed a resolution denouncing the withdrawal of the deposits as an unconstitutional act, and instructed Virginia's Senators, William Cabell Rives and John Tyler, to support legislation calling for the restoration of the deposits. Rives, strongly

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<sup>8</sup>Robert Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845 (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 84-131. After Taney's promotion, Jackson asked Junto member Peter V. Daniel to be Attorney General. Daniel declined. RE, Oct. 29, 1833.

<sup>9</sup>David Campbell to William B. Campbell, Oct. 29, 1833, CFP, Duke. See also, Littleton Waller Tazewell to John Wickham, Jan. 14, 1834, John Wickham Papers, University of Virginia.

allied with the administration, refused to obey these instructions and resigned his seat. The Virginia legislature replaced him with Benjamin Watkins Leigh, a known enemy of Jackson.<sup>10</sup> Even Ritchie criticized Jackson and doubted if he had acted within the realm of his executive powers. More importantly, Ritchie worried that Jackson's rash actions would revive sympathy for the nearly dead Bank of the United States. John Campbell, a Junto associate and Treasurer of the United States, echoed Ritchie's sentiment when he complained that the "Bank was kill'd dead & he [Jackson] has brought it bank to life."<sup>11</sup>

Not all Junto members disagreed with Jackson and his removal policy. Andrew Stevenson, who had stuck with the President throughout the Nullification Crisis and was now angling for a diplomatic mission, expressed his support for Jackson's plan to kill the Bank. Stevenson kept in constant touch with John Brockenbrough in Richmond in an effort to control the damage caused by the removals. Richard E. Parker, Ritchie's cousin, insisted that the removal of the

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<sup>10</sup>RE, Feb. 22, 25, March 1, 1834; Raymond C. Dingleline, Jr., "The Political Career of William Cabell Rives," (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1947), 211-213; Lynwood Miller Dent, Jr., "The Virginia Democratic Party, 1824-1847," (Ph.D. diss, Louisiana State University, 1974), 151-154. For Leigh's "viper-hatred of Gen. Jackson," see C.W. Gooch to John Campbell, Sept. 5, 1833, Gooch Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.

<sup>11</sup>RE, Feb. 22, 1834; Sept. 27, 1833; Ritchie to Rives, Aug. 26, 1833, Rives Papers, LC; John Campbell to David Campbell, March 21, 1834, CFP, Duke.

deposits was "prudent and necessary," and Peter V. Daniel defended the President and spoke out against Ritchie and other administration men who criticized Jackson.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever their personal feelings about Jackson's removal policy, the members of the Junto realized that they had to move quickly to deflect attention away from the President's controversial actions. The group understood that anti-administration forces, which had been slow to coalesce in the past, were capitalizing on Jackson's sudden unpopularity in Virginia and attempting to forge a coalition that could control the state legislature. Speaking of the radical state rights advocates and the nationalistic supporters of Henry Clay, Ritchie wrote early in 1834 that "It is obvious that the two fragments of the opposition in the Legislature are approaching each other & forming a Combination against the Administration." John Brockenbrough expressed concern that the "Nullifiers and Clayites combined" would carry the day at the upcoming spring elections, and Parker confirmed these suspicions. "A great effort is making now in Virginia by the party opposed to Genl. Jackson, to raise an outcry against him for the removal of the deposits," Parker wrote one friend, adding

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<sup>12</sup>Francis Fry Wayland, Andrew Stevenson: Democrat and Diplomat, 1785-1857 (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1949), 93-100; Richard E. Parker to Martin Van Buren, Nov. 29, 1834, Van Buren Papers, LC; John P. Frank, Justice Daniel Dissenting: A Biography of Peter V. Daniel, 1784-1860 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 119-126.

that "it will partially succeed."<sup>13</sup>

Parker's assessment proved to be an accurate one. As Harold Moser has noted, the "timing and methods of the removal of the deposits ... shook the Junto to its foundations."<sup>14</sup> Split over Jackson's policy and caught off-guard by the strong reaction against it in Virginia, the Junto suddenly found itself fighting for its political existence. In a series of letters to Andrew Stevenson, Junto members described the frenzied political scene in Richmond as they battled to hold off the opposition forces. "You have no idea of the excitement among parties here," one correspondent wrote. Ritchie told Stevenson that "I never was so much absorbed by politics in all my life," and William H. Roane kept Stevenson informed of his heated contest in Hanover County, just outside the city. In March of 1833, Roane noted, the political situation in Virginia was so calm that he had refused to stand for reelection the following spring. But the removal of the deposits had roused such fury across the state that he had reconsidered and

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<sup>13</sup>Ritchie to Rives, Jan. 6, 1834, Rives Papers, LC; John Brockenbrough to Andrew Stevenson, April 5, 1834, Branch Historical Papers, Vol. 3, no. 3 (June 1911), 253-254; Richard E. Parker to Edward Lucas, Jr., Jan. 12, 1834, Edward Lucas and William Lucas Letters, Duke.

<sup>14</sup>Harold D. Moser, "Subtreasury Politics and the Virginia Conservative Democrats, 1835-1844," (Ph.D. diss, University of Wisconsin, 1977), 46.

decided to run.<sup>15</sup>

While Roane was fighting for his political life in Hanover County, tempers flared in Richmond and Ritchie and Daniel faced physical attack. Ritchie's "temporizing course" on the Bank question, a former partner, C.W. Gooch, explained to Van Buren, had so enraged Richmonders that they nearly destroyed his office at the Enquirer. Fortunately, "cool heads" prevailed before any damage was done.<sup>16</sup> Daniel was less lucky. Late in March 1834, Daniel unburdened himself to Stevenson, describing his hellish life in Richmond. The Whigs were following his every move and seemed bent on destroying him. "I am watched throughout the day; every door I enter, every person with whom I speak is a subject of jealous scrutiny. I am even, it is said, threatened with being hunted to ruin in my business, and with personal violence." The worst offender was John Pleasants, the editor of the Richmond Whig, but there were plenty of others as well, Daniel told Stevenson. But they would never stop him from doing his duty. "Damn the contemptable [sic] slaves of the Bank ..., I put them all at

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<sup>15</sup>John Rutherford to Andrew Stevenson, March 19, 1834; Ritchie to Stevenson, n.d. [probably late 1833, early 1834]; [William H. Roane] to Stevenson, March 27, 1834, all in Stevenson Papers, LC.

<sup>16</sup>C.W. Gooch to Martin Van Buren, March 24, 1834, Van Buren Papers, LC.

defiance."<sup>17</sup>

Daniel's concern about his safety was well founded. In the summer of 1833, after lambasting Pleasants in the Enquirer, Daniel was attacked by Pleasants and Joseph Selden as he left the state capitol. The assailants were armed with pistols and a dirk, and Daniel was "hurt ... a great deal." Pleasants and Selden were arraigned by a grand jury for assault, and tension in Richmond reached new heights. "God knows what we are coming to," Ritchie sighed.<sup>18</sup>

Stunned by the strong and hostile attacks of the opposition forces, the Junto mounted an extensive counterattack. Its central strategy was to defend Jackson and his removal policy by claiming that the Bank of the United States continued to pose a threat to the country because of its undue power and influence. Attacks on Jackson for usurping power were uncalled for and misdirected, they argued. The President was merely using the constitutional means at his disposal to protect the country from the "monster" Bank. Evidence would soon be disclosed that revealed the "immense power of the Bank & the great abuse of it," Richard Parker confidently predicted. The people's eyes would be opened to the dangers posed by the unconstitutional

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<sup>17</sup>Peter V. Daniel to Stevenson, March 29, 1834, Stevenson Papers, LC.

<sup>18</sup>Littleton Waller Tazewell to John N. Tazewell, Aug. 19, 1834, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; Ritchie to Rives, Aug. 23, 1834, Rives Paper, LC; Daniel to Van Buren, Aug. 8, 1838, Van Buren Papers, LC.

institution. By criticizing the removal of the deposits, Jackson's foes were overlooking the real issue at stake. "The constitutionality of the institution, seems to be entirely lost sight of," John Rutherford complained.<sup>19</sup> If this was in fact the case, it was not the fault of Thomas Ritchie. He flooded the Enquirer with attacks on the Bank, always describing the alarming influence it continued to wield and highlighting the continued threat that it posed to the liberties of the people and the very existence of the Union. The real question facing the nation, he insisted, was whether the people would rule the Bank, or the Bank would rule the people. Virginians must "choose between the Rights of the States, and the Liberties of the People[,] or a tremendous Institution, which threatens and mocks at both." No compromise could be made on the question, Ritchie continued. "This ground of the *unconstitutionality* of the Bank is like adamant. No republican can surrender it. He cannot compromise it." To make sure the dangers of the Bank were clearly laid out, Ritchie offered a blunt summary to his readers: "Subscribe to the Bank, and we sign the death-warrant of the true principles of the government." The only question worth considering in the upcoming election, he

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<sup>19</sup>Parker to Edward Lucas, Jr., Jan. 12, 1834, Lucas Letters, Duke; John Rutherford to Stevenson, March 19, 1834, Stevenson Papers, LC.

insisted, was "Bank or no Bank."<sup>20</sup>

Despite the efforts of the Junto to deflect attention away from Jackson's removal policy, the opposition forces in Virginia, now known as the Whigs, were able to capitalize on anti-Jackson sentiment in the state. The first sign of the growing power of the Whigs came when the General Assembly selected Littleton Waller Tazewell, a strong anti-Jacksonian, over Daniel in the 1834 gubernatorial contest. Tazewell, an extremely private man, agreed to run only because he believed that the times demanded that everyone do their part to end the misrule of Jackson. Ritchie maintained, however, that Tazewell had been elected by a broad coalition of delegates, including Jacksonians, because of his services to the state, not his political opinions. But other observers interpreted Tazewell's election differently. Hugh Mercer claimed that not only had the Junto been "put down," but Van Buren's chances of carrying Virginia in 1836 had been dealt a serious blow. John Strode Barbour told a kinsman that "the Richmond Junto are broken down and thrown into the most contemptible and spiritless minority. Even Ritchie and Peter V. Daniel are fawning and begging for quarter."<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>RE, Dec. 24, 1833; March 6, 1834. For similar expressions of these ideas, see RE, Sept. 27, Nov. 1, 1833; Feb. 8, 15, 1834.

<sup>21</sup>Tazewell to John Floyd, Nov. 25, 1833, John Floyd Papers, LC; RE, Jan. 9, 1834; Hugh Mercer to Tazewell, Jan. 20, 1834, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL; John S. Barbour to



Shortly after Daniel's defeat, the Junto suffered another setback. When Rives resigned from the Senate rather than vote to restore the deposits, the Junto hoped to replace him with Philip P. Barbour, back in good graces after his abortive vice-presidential bid in 1832. But the Whigs mustered enough support to defeat Barbour and appoint Benjamin Watkins Leigh to the vacant seat instead.<sup>22</sup>

These reverses in the state legislature did not bode well for the Jacksonians as the annual spring elections neared. They had controlled the General Assembly for several years and had not been seriously challenged since 1829. Now it appeared that the Whigs would not only give the administration party a strong fight, but might actually defeat them and assume power in the state. "We are in a state of inexpressible anxiety about the results of the elections," John Brockenbrough told Andrew Stevenson. In the columns of the Enquirer, Ritchie fretted over the complacency of the Jacksonians and worked frantically to rouse the faithful to victory.<sup>23</sup>

As the elections approached, the Junto began to speak more confidently of success. Ritchie predicted that the

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James Barbour, Jan. 22, 1834, cited in Charles D. Lowery, James Barbour, A Jeffersonian Republican (University, Al: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 227.

<sup>22</sup>RE, Feb. 27, 1834.

<sup>23</sup>Brockenbrough to Stevenson, April 5, 1834, Branch Historical Papers, Vol. 3, no. 3 (June 1911), 253-254; RE, March 28, April 1, 8, 11, 1834.

administration party would be vindicated at the polls, and Brockenbrough assured Stevenson that everything was safe. The group was also convinced that fellow member William H. Roane, running for office in Hanover County, would be "elected by a triumphant vote."<sup>24</sup> Then disaster struck. Jackson, angry about the Senate's censure of his course during the removal controversy, issued a Protest to that body on April 15, 1834. Jackson defended his actions, insisted that the president's only responsibility was to the people, and condemned the unconstitutional nature of the Senate's censure.<sup>25</sup> Jackson's Protest sent shock waves through the Senate and had an immediate impact on the elections in Virginia. "Richmond is all agog about the President's protest," Brockenbrough told Stevenson. He had already met with Ritchie and Philip N. Nicholas, and would soon meet with Roane, to discuss possible responses. All agreed that "something must be done at once or the party will be dissolved." Brockenbrough closed by notifying Stevenson that "news from the elections [was] bad, very bad."<sup>26</sup>

The news was "very bad" for the Junto and the

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<sup>24</sup>RE, April 8, 11, 1834; Brockenbrough to Stevenson, April 11, 1834, Stevenson Papers, LC.

<sup>25</sup>Remini, Course of American Democracy, 152-160.

<sup>26</sup>Brockenbrough to Stevenson, April 20, 1834, Stevenson Papers, LC. Ritchie mildly criticized Jackson for the Protest in the April 22, 1834, edition of the Enquirer.

Jacksonian party in Virginia. The Whigs won enough seats to gain control of the state legislature. Both parties agreed that Jackson's Protest had played a key role in the outcome. Ritchie laid part of the blame on the President, but also criticized his fellow party members for their apathy. Governor Tazewell thought that the "dose administered in the President's Protest, proved even too drastic for the strong stomach of Jacksonians."<sup>27</sup> Even more disheartening to the Junto was Roane's defeat in Hanover. Ritchie confessed that "Roane's defeat stung me more than any other election I ever knew.... I don't know when I have experienced such bitter feelings - I could think of nothing else."<sup>28</sup>

The election had been a complete disaster for the Junto, but there was more bad news yet to come. In the summer of 1834, Andrew Stevenson, the group's representative in Washington, had been nominated by Jackson to be the new minister to Great Britain, only to be rejected by the Senate. Stevenson had recently been criticized in Virginia for supporting the removal of the deposits despite the objections of his constituents. Instructions sent from the state legislature demanding that Stevenson vote for the

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<sup>27</sup>RE, April 25, 1834; Littleton W. Tazewell to John N. Tazewell, April 29, 1834, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL.

<sup>28</sup>These quotes can be found in two undated letters from Ritchie to Stevenson, Stevenson Papers, LC. See also William Pope to Stevenson, April 28, 1834, Stevenson Papers, LC, where Pope blamed the "Richmond and bank influence" for Roane's defeat.

restoration of the deposits, coupled with his recent nomination, had convinced Stevenson to resign his seat in the House of Representatives.<sup>29</sup> When the Senate rejected his nomination, Ritchie and other Jacksonians argued that Stevenson was being punished for his political views, and they sharply criticized those senators who had voted against him. Ritchie condemned the "slanderous persecution" of Stevenson by his "remorseless enemies." Richard Parker argued that the Senate's actions "exceeds in highhanded injustice the rejection of Mr. Van Buren on a former occasion." Stevenson felt scorned and mistreated. "I gave up a lucrative position, with the prospect of increased wealth," he wrote in a letter published in the Enquirer, "to devote myself to public service, and now I am to be re-paid with denunciation and abuse!"<sup>30</sup>

The hard times continued for the Junto when the Whig-controlled legislature convened in Richmond in December of 1834. One of the first actions of that body was to strip Ritchie and Daniel of their official positions in the state government. Ritchie had served as state printer for twenty years, but suddenly found himself denied that lucrative office. The Junto leader thought it was obvious that he had been replaced for political reasons, and he considered

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<sup>29</sup>RE, May 13, 27, 1834; Wayland, Andrew Stevenson, 101-106.

<sup>30</sup>RE, July 4, 1834; Parker to Stevenson, July 21, 1834, Stevenson Papers, LC; RE, May 27, 1834.

himself the first "martyr" of Whig oppression.<sup>31</sup> Daniel's removal from the Executive Council after a protracted debate in January convinced the Junto that the Whigs were set on following a vindictive and intemperant course. "The spirit of proscription never prevailed with more ruthlessness than it does here at this time," Daniel informed Jackson.<sup>32</sup>

The removal of Ritchie and Daniel marked the low point of the Richmond Junto's career. Between late 1833 and early 1835, the group had suffered a series of reverses that severely weakened its standing in Virginia. Unprepared for the ferocity of the opposition attack, its members were derided, turned out of office, and publicly attacked. Worse, the Junto had been powerless to prevent the Whigs from assuming control of the state legislature. Something had gone wrong, terribly wrong, but the group was unsure what it was. Perhaps it had misjudged anti-Jackson sentiment in the state. But the President remained popular in Virginia, they insisted, despite his removal policy and Protest to the Senate. More likely, the group argued, a sense of complacency among the administration's supporters, combined with the devious tactics of the Whigs, had caused its downfall. But the people were now roused by the intemperance

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<sup>31</sup>RE, Dec. 9, 11, 1834.

<sup>32</sup>RE, Jan. 17, 19, 1834; Daniel to Andrew Jackson, Dec. 7, 1834, Andrew Jackson Papers, LC; Daniel to Thomas Jefferson Randolph, Jan. 13, 1835, Thomas Jefferson Randolph Papers, UVA.

of the Whigs, and the Junto had learned its mistake. Never again would it let down its guard or take anything for granted. The key to victory lay in hard work, party unity, and an unrelenting attack on its enemies. Politics in Virginia would never be the same.

Despite its miserable record in 1834, the Junto continued to speak optimistically about the future. Ritchie rejected David Campbell's claims that Jackson had "nearly destroyed the Republican Party in Virginia by his political sermons" and ruined any chance of Van Buren winning the presidency in 1836. Instead, the editor believed that both Jackson and Van Buren remained strong throughout the state. Once the people realized that the Whigs were the party of the aristocracy and the Bank, they would oust them from power. As for himself and the other members of the Junto, "I am doing all I can for the cause ... [and] nearly all my ancient friends are warmer than ever." Parker was sanguine as well. "I think I see indications that the tide is turning in Virginia," he noted in July of 1834.<sup>33</sup>

One reason for the Junto's confidence was its belief that the Whig coalition would soon fall apart. Ritchie explained to his readers that the lack of shared principles and the consuming ambition of the party ensured its failure.

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<sup>33</sup>David Campbell to James Campbell, May 6, 1834, CFP, Duke; Ritchie to Stevenson, May 15, 1834; Parker to Stevenson, July 21, 1834, both in Stevenson Papers, LC.

"The combination must eventually dissolve in its own weakness," he argued. Daniel agreed with Ritchie, while Parker maintained that the Whig movement would be short-lived because of the antipathy party members had toward the common man. Without this support, the party would soon fade into insignificance. Ritchie picked up on this theme when he described the Whigs as the party of aristocrats and Federalists. The people would never allow such men to rule over them for long. A writer in the Enquirer expressed this idea in melodramatic fashion when he claimed that "returning spring will dissipate those lowering clouds of Whiggery, which threaten the destruction of our dearest rights ..., [and] the Republicans, the virtuous yeomanry of Virginia, will stand forth before the world, redeemed by the strong power of their own invincible will."<sup>34</sup>

The first issue that the Junto seized upon in its battle to defeat the Whigs involved the senatorial election of Benjamin Watkins Leigh. The Junto-led Jacksonian forces supported William Cabell Rives, who they claimed had been unfairly forced to resign from the Senate in 1833. They flooded the legislature with petitions praising Rives and instructing their delegates to vote for him. During the selection process, huge crowds packed the state capitol.

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<sup>34</sup>RE, Aug. 5, 1834; Daniel to Andrew Jackson, Dec. 7, 1834, Jackson Papers, LC; Parker to Van Buren, Nov. 29, 1834, Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, Nov. 25, 1834; "Publius Curtius Junius," RE, Feb. 3, 1835.

Ritchie solemnly announced that the people's will must be obeyed and Rives elected. When Leigh won a narrow victory, the administration party accused the Whigs of ignoring the instructions of their constituents and using their power for purely partisan reasons. "The question at issue, in April next," Ritchie informed his readers, "will be Leigh, or no Leigh? Instruction, or no Instruction? Are we freemen, or are we slaves?"<sup>35</sup>

The Junto also moved to shore up support for Jackson. At a public meeting held in Richmond in late February, Daniel was elected chairman and Ritchie introduced resolutions praising Jackson for his struggle against the Bank. The meeting also condemned the Whigs for electing Leigh and called on all friends of the Constitution to rally behind the administration. Before adjourning, the members selected John Brockenbrough and Philip N. Nicholas as delegates to the upcoming Democratic Congressional Convention.<sup>36</sup> When the convention met the following week, the Junto was once again in control. Nicholas was elected president and Daniel, through a pre-arranged agreement, nominated William H. Roane as the party's candidate for a seat in the House of Representatives in the upcoming election.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Richmond Whig, Jan. 28, 30, 1835; RE, Jan. 31, 1835.

<sup>36</sup>RE, Feb. 28, 1835.

<sup>37</sup>RE, March 5, 1835.



After this show of power, the Junto began preparing for the spring elections. The strategy of the Whigs in the election of 1835 was to portray Van Buren, the likely Democratic nominee for president in 1836, as unsafe on the slavery question. Should the Democrats gain control of the Virginia legislature in 1835, the Whigs argued, they would force Van Buren upon the state the following year. A vote for the Whigs, thus, was a vote against the northerner Van Buren. A Whig victory "will reunite the South. It will secure the election of a Southern President. It will restore to the ascendant, Southern principles." But defeat would bring northern rule, corruption, "the rebellion of the South, and the overthrow of the Union." The real issue at the polls, John Pleasants of the Richmond Whig wrote, was not Leigh, the right of instruction, or the Bank of the United States; it was whether the people wanted "Van Buren or no Van Buren. Submission or opposition, to New York ambition!"<sup>38</sup>

The Junto moved decisively to challenge Whig charges against Van Buren. Ritchie and others asked for assurances from the New Yorker that he would not interfere with the institution of slavery, and Ritchie repeatedly told his readers that Van Buren was "safe" on the slavery question.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Richmond Whig, March 31, Feb. 13, 1835. See also the issues of Feb. 5, March 3, 24, and April 3, 1835.

<sup>39</sup>Ritchie to Silas Wright, March 2, 1835; Parker to Van Buren, Feb. 22, 1835, both in Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, March 20, 31, 1835.

Rives apologized to Van Buren for the "pertinacious cross-examination to which you have been subjected from Virginia." If Van Buren could "bear with this (as we are a famous people for principles, you know), & indulge the humour of your querists," Rives guaranteed him that the Democrats of Virginia would triumph in 1835 and that the Old Dominion would support him in 1836.<sup>40</sup>

As the 1835 elections neared, the Junto continued to defend Van Buren and denigrate the Whigs. Ritchie compared the composition of the party to the Tower of Babel, claiming it was made up of "the Nationals and the Nullifiers, the Bank, and the Anti-Bank, the Tariff and the anti-Tariff, the Internal Improvement and the anti-internal Improvement, the friends of Clay, Calhoun, Webster -- the Spinning Jennies of the North and the Cotton Planters of the South." Such a "piebald coalition" was necessarily held together by only one thing: a desire for office. Van Buren and the Democrats, on the other hand, were dedicated to restoring the "Jeffersonian Era of State Rights." David Campbell made a more clear-cut distinction. "The struggle in Virginia," he wrote, "is between aristocracy and popular rights." Even the Richmond Whig was forced to admit that the Jacksonians were

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<sup>40</sup>Rives to Van Buren, April 10, 1835, Van Buren Papers, LC.

better organized and more zealous than the Whigs.<sup>41</sup>

The hard work of the Jacksonians paid off when they recaptured control of the state legislature in the spring elections. Ritchie estimated that the new body would be composed of 78 Republicans and 56 Whigs, a marked contrast with 1834, when there were 57 Republicans and 77 Whigs. The huge Republican victory, he claimed, was due to the haughty actions of the Whigs and their disregard for the common man. The people had "redeemed" Virginia by rejecting spurious claims against Van Buren and by reasserting their control over the government.<sup>42</sup>

Back in power in Virginia, the Junto moved to strengthen its hand in national affairs. Daniel, William Brockenbrough, Parker, and Stevenson all attended the Democratic party's national convention which met in Baltimore in May of 1835. They would, of course, support Van Buren for the presidency, but they hoped to get Rives the vice-presidential nomination. The leading candidate for the position was Richard Johnson of Kentucky, who was completely unacceptable to the Junto. Its members argued that Johnson "does not carry out or maintain the political principles Virginia ever held dear," especially its opposition to the

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<sup>41</sup>RE, April 17, 1835; David Campbell to William B. Campbell, April 8, 1835, CFP, Duke; Richmond Whig, March 3, May 12, 1835.

<sup>42</sup>RE, May 12, 1835; Ritchie to Rives, May 19, 1835, Rives Papers, LC.

Bank of the United States. Johnson was also reported to have fathered several children with a mulatto slave who lived with him. The clique was convinced that Johnson's nomination would severely weaken the Van Buren ticket in the state, and it decided to prevent that from taking place at all costs. "Ritchie writes me [that] the State will not vote for Johnston [sic]," John Campbell told Rives. "He is much concerned about the matter."<sup>43</sup>

When the convention met, it seemed clear that Johnson would be selected over Rives. Determined to prevent this, the Virginia delegation assembled to discuss their strategy. Daniel was appointed head of the delegation and Stevenson introduced resolutions affirming Virginia's commitment to Rives and calling for the state to protest if Johnson won. When the convention chose Johnson, Daniel announced that Virginia would not support the decision. Other delegates defended Johnson and pleaded with the men from the Old Dominion to make the nomination unanimous, but to no avail. The Virginia delegation cast the only dissenting vote against Johnson's nomination, marring an otherwise unified and amicable convention.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the convention's nomination, the Junto refused to accept Johnson. It was convinced that Van Buren could not

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<sup>43</sup>RE, May 26, 29, 1835; Ritchie to Rives, May 19, 1835; John Campbell to Rives, May 22, 1835; William Brockenbrough to Rives, May 13, 17, 1835, all in Rives Papers, LC.

<sup>44</sup>RE, May 26, 29, June 2, 1835.

win in Virginia with Johnson on the ticket, and the club's members quickly decided that his name would not appear on the ballot in Virginia. But the Junto would not break with the party. "We have been beaten at Baltimore," Ritchie acknowledged, "but we must not divide our party."<sup>45</sup>

Rebuffed in Baltimore, the Junto found itself in trouble back in Virginia. After the spring elections, discussion in the state had turned increasingly to the dangers posed by the rise of abolitionism in the North. Virginia Whigs went to great lengths to connect Van Buren with northern radicals who wanted to end slavery. They pointed out that Johnson had fathered several children with a mulatto woman, and they condemned Ritchie for not defending the rights of the South in his newspaper.<sup>46</sup> These attacks almost immediately yielded results for the Whigs. Ardor for Van Buren cooled as condemnations of the abolitionists became more heated. Van Buren was a "Missouri Restrictionist, and the advocate of free negro equality," the Richmond Whig claimed. Virginia could never support him for the presidency.<sup>47</sup>

The Junto moved quickly to defend itself and Van Buren

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<sup>45</sup>Ritchie to Rives, June 5, 1835; Parker to Rives, June 1, 1835, both in Rives Papers, LC; Parker to Van Buren, June 18, 1835, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>46</sup>Richmond Whig, June 9, 12, 16, 26, July 31, Aug. 4, 7, Sept. 8, 1835.

<sup>47</sup>Richmond Whig, April 21, 1835.

from the charges levelled by "that combination of all kinds of violent ingredients, called the Whig party."<sup>48</sup> Ritchie again assured Virginians that they had nothing to fear from Van Buren regarding slavery. He was not one of those northern "fanatics" endangering the Union by interfering in the private affairs of the South. The Junto leader spoke out strongly against the abolitionists and rejected claims that he was more concerned about party loyalty than defending the interests of the South. His first priority, he insisted, was to protect the rights of southerners from abolitionists.<sup>49</sup>

At the same time that he was professing his devotion to the South, Ritchie also criticized those "Political Partizans" in the region who seized upon every occurrence to "prepare the way for dissolution." If the country was going to endure, if the South was to continue enjoying the benefits of the Union, then moderation and compromises would have to be made. In two editorials entitled "A Calm Appeal from the South to the North," the editor announced that all southerners really wanted was to be left alone on the slavery question.<sup>50</sup> When a Committee of Vigilance proposed harshly worded resolutions condemning the abolitionists, Ritchie, Daniel, and Nicholas countered with more moderate

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<sup>48</sup>Daniel to Van Buren, Sept. 25, 1835, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>49</sup>RE, July 21, 24, 28, Sept. 1, 1835.

<sup>50</sup>RE, July 21, Aug. 4, Aug. 14, Sept. 8, 1835.

resolutions, only to be voted down. Patience was needed, the Junto men explained; the storm of abolitionism would surely pass.<sup>51</sup>

The Junto was not willing to wait, however, to oust Benjamin Watkins Leigh and John Tyler, Virginia's two Whig Senators, from their seats. Soon after Leigh's reelection in early 1835, Ritchie and others had hit upon the idea of using instructions to force his resignation. The people, they claimed, had not supported Leigh for the position, and he should therefore give up his office. Leigh, despite having authored a resolution defending the right of instruction in 1812, told his fellow senator, John Tyler, "I will not be instructed out of my seat. I will not obey Instructions which shall require me to vote for a gross violation of the Constitution."<sup>52</sup>

The move to unseat Leigh and Tyler accelerated once the Democrat-controlled Virginia legislature convened in December. After promptly restoring Ritchie to his post as public printer and returning Daniel to the Executive Council, the legislators proceeded to prepare official instructions calling on the two senators to vote for Thomas

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<sup>51</sup>Daniel to Van Buren, Sept. 25, 1835, Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, Sept. 29, Oct. 9, 1835.

<sup>52</sup>RE, Jan. 31, 1835; Ritchie to Rives, June 5, 1835, Rives Papers, LC; Benjamin Watkins Leigh to John Tyler, July 5, 1835, Lyon G. Tyler, The Letters and Times of the Tylers (3 vols. Richmond and Williamsburg, 1884-1896; reprint, New York: De Capo Press, 1970), 1:523.

H. Benton's expunging resolution. Benton, a senator from Missouri and strong supporter of Jackson, had repeatedly proposed that the Senate's censure of the President be expunged from the official Senate record. The reprimand was not only unconstitutional, but insulting to the Hero of New Orleans and the highest elected official in the United States. It must be removed.<sup>53</sup> Virginia Democrats in the legislature agreed with Benton, and forced through a resolution instructing Leigh and Tyler to vote for Benton's measure. If they could not carry out these instructions, they would be expected to resign. Governor Tazewell was called upon to deliver the instructions to Virginia's senators.<sup>54</sup>

Tazewell's refusal to forward the instructions to Tyler and Leigh, followed by their unwillingness to comply with them, touched off an extended debate in Virginia on the right of instruction and the responsibilities of elected officials. Ritchie and the Jacksonians castigated the governor and the state's senators for refusing to bow to the wishes of the people who had put them in office. They accused the three Whigs of imposing their wills on the majority of Virginians. "Which ought to prevail," a writer in the Enquirer asked, "two men, or the majority of the people?" Ritchie was incredulous about Tazewell's response.

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<sup>53</sup>Remini, Course of American Democracy, 376-381.

<sup>54</sup>RE, Feb. 11, 25, 1836.



"Is Mr. Tazewell the government of Virginia? Has it come to this, that nothing is now to be done ... which he does not approve?" The sacred right of instruction, fundamental to republican government, was at stake; Virginians must act to enforce it.<sup>55</sup>

While the Junto and the Jacksonians were making the most of the three men's refusal to comply with the legislative instructions, Virginia Whigs condemned the Democrat's actions as petty political vengeance. Pleasants noted repeatedly that Tyler and Leigh were being persecuted solely because of their party affiliation. The editor recommended that both men resign rather than follow the obnoxious instructions. This would prevent the Democrats from further exploiting the situation.<sup>56</sup> The right of instruction was being employed, Tyler thought, as a "mere weapon of party warfare." Still, he found himself faced with a difficult decision. He could not vote for the expunging resolution, nor could he refuse to obey explicit instructions given to him by the voice of the Virginia electorate.<sup>57</sup> Sensing that Tyler was wavering, fellow Whigs wrote to give him advice and encouragement. James Barbour told Tyler that whatever he and Leigh decided to do, they

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<sup>55</sup>"Look to the 'Alternatives'," RE, Feb. 9, 1836; RE, Feb. 25, March 8, 10, 1836.

<sup>56</sup>Richmond Whig, Feb. 2, March 4, 8, 12, 1836.

<sup>57</sup>Tyler to William F. Gordon, Jan. 8, 1836, James Henry Rochelle Papers, Duke.

must act together. "Should you and Mr. Leigh divide in your course, it will be the most fatal shock that the Whig party will have received." Tyler's close friend William Gordon explained that "obedience ... is not what your masters at Richmond desire; they want your place, and Leigh's. Obedience will disappoint them woefully.... You suggest the propriety of resigning, and appealing to the people; *discard the idea[;] power can only be controlled by power.*"<sup>58</sup>

Despite the advice of Barbour and Gordon, Tyler resigned his seat, while Leigh steadfastly refused to give in to the Jacksonians.<sup>59</sup> This action revealed the rift in the Virginia Whig party between state rights men like Tyler, who could not bring himself to disobey the legislature's orders because of his commitment to the principle of instruction, and nationalists like Leigh, who argued that he was not bound to follow instructions that forced him to vote for an act that he considered unconstitutional.

Leigh's stubborn refusal to yield his senatorial seat also provided the Democratic party of Virginia with a popular issue for the upcoming presidential election. The Senator's high-handed actions, Jacksonians argued, was further proof of the degeneracy of the Whig party. Not only

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<sup>58</sup>James Barbour to Tyler, Jan. 14, 1836; William F. Gordon to Tyler, Jan. 15, 1836, Tyler, Letters and Times of the Tylers, 1:527-529.

<sup>59</sup>RE, March 8, 10, 1836; Ritchie to Rives, March 3, 1836, Rives Papers, LC; Leigh to Tazewell, Feb. 18, 1836, Tazewell Family Papers, VSL.

did the Whigs scorn the voice of the people, they also spread falsehoods about Martin Van Buren and were attempting to cause panic throughout the South by exaggerating the influence of northern abolitionists. If that were not enough to condemn the Whigs, a writer in the Enquirer pointed out that the Whigs represented the "commercial and stock-jobbing interest," while the Democrats represented the "agricultural and labouring interest."<sup>60</sup>

Ritchie spoke out strongly against Whig efforts to portray Van Buren as an abolitionist. "The last hope of the Whigs," he wrote, "is to raise an Abolition Panic - to misrepresent the *Free Negro* vote of Mr. Van Buren ... and to exaggerate the strength and increase of the *Abolitionists*." To show the extremes to which the Whigs were willing to go on this matter, Ritchie related a story in his newspaper about a Richmond company that imported from the North some children's handkerchiefs imprinted with the letters of the alphabet and other "common figures." Upon opening the packages, the merchants discovered a few "abolition handkerchiefs" that had pictures of oppressed slaves printed on them. Immediately, Ritchie wrote, a "Whig in this City pounced upon these handkerchiefs" and displayed them to the people of Richmond as evidence of creeping abolitionism. Soon other politicians were waving the "abolition

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<sup>60</sup>"A Friend to Van Buren, Because a Friend to the South and the Union," RE, Jan. 5, 1836; "Common Sense," RE, Feb. 23, 1836.

handkerchiefs" at Whig rallies for dramatic effect. The upshot of all this, Ritchie noted with satisfaction, was that the state legislature was currently considering a law to prohibit the use "of all such pictures ... for political effect."<sup>61</sup>

Virginia Whigs, sensing their new-found political power slipping away, and horrified at the prospect of Van Buren as president, did in fact make extensive use of the abolition controversy in the campaign of 1836. Van Buren is "against us on the slave question," Abel Parker Upshur wrote Pleasants, and "very near an abolitionist."<sup>62</sup> Pleasants needed no confirmation of that. In the columns of the Richmond Whig, he levelled a vituperative attack on the New Yorker, Ritchie's blind devotion to him, and the dangers to the South posed by Van Buren's candidacy. Launching his assault in early 1836, Pleasants noted that "It is time for the Southern people to awaken from the death sleep which Jacksonism, more potent than poppies or mandragons, has cast over them, and survey their true condition.... Danger, danger, dark and ominous, threatens the independence, the safety, the very existence of the Southern States. Fanaticism threatens on one hand - political machinations whose success would usher in a central and consolidated

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<sup>61</sup>RE, April 1, 12, 1836.

<sup>62</sup>Abel P. Upshur to John H. Pleasants, Jan. 5, 1836, Abel Parker Upshur Papers, VHS.

Despotism, on the other." The editor warned against Virginians working for Van Buren's election. "What will it benefit you," he asked. "What will become of your principles and your safety, when Northern ascendancy is irrevocably established?"<sup>63</sup>

Pleasants was only getting started. He slammed Ritchie for slavishly following the dictates of Van Buren and his Albany Regency. The Junto leader, the "most depraved party hack in America," would swear "that white is black, and black white, to accommodate party interests." The "traitor Ritchie" had completely abandoned all of his republican principles to advance Van Buren's campaign. "Look at his language and course for 20 years," Pleasants told his readers, "and compare them with his language and course since his compact with Van. The bare inspection will convince you of his total apostasy to all your and his and Virginia's old principles."<sup>64</sup>

Pleasants also rebutted charges that the Whigs were attempting to throw the election into the House of Representatives by running various presidential candidates

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<sup>63</sup>Richmond Whig, Jan. 30, 1836. For other attacks on Van Buren, see the Whig on Jan. 15, 19, Sept. 23, 1836. Surprisingly, the Whigs did not make much of Van Buren's reputation as a crafty politician bereft of principle. In a letter in the May 27, 1836, issue of the Whig, however, "Northampton" reminded Virginians that Van Buren "would walk upon the ashes of the Union, if his interest could be promoted."

<sup>64</sup>Richmond Whig, March 12, Jan. 30, April 19, 1836.

in different regions of the country. The Jacksonians had claimed for months that the Whig strategy was to send the election to the House, where a deal similar to the one made in 1824 would be consummated and Van Buren would be denied his rightful place as president.<sup>65</sup> Ritchie seemed particularly concerned about this possibility, and he ridiculed the Whig strategy by referring to them as "The Polycephalous Party - Or the Whig-White-Harrison-Webster-Tyler-Granger-Anti-Van Buren-Coalition party." Pleasants denied that the Whigs were working to send the election into the House, arguing that the party lacked the representatives needed there to reach an acceptable compromise on the presidency. Besides, he pointed out, the Whigs could never match the corruption and venality of the Van Buren forces in such a struggle.<sup>66</sup>

While Pleasants was attacking Ritchie and Van Buren, the Junto completed its return to power by assuming control of the New Yorker's campaign in Virginia. At a public meeting called in Richmond on January 9 to appoint delegates to the state presidential nomination convention, Daniel was appointed chairman and Ritchie served on a select committee that prepared and delivered an address berating the Whigs and calling for vigilance on the part of Virginia Democrats. The committee further moved that three delegates be

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<sup>65</sup>RE, July 14, 1835; Sept. 2, 6, 9, 16, 1836.

<sup>66</sup>RE, June 17, 1836; Richmond Whig, June 21, 1836.

appointed to represent the city at the state nominating convention to be held on January 11. Daniel was one of the three elected.<sup>67</sup>

At the convention, Ritchie, a "special delegate" representing Loudoun County, served as secretary. The meeting praised Van Buren as a "*Northern* man with *Southern Principles*." Ritchie, Daniel, Stevenson, John Brockenbrough, and Philip N. Nicholas were all appointed to the Central Committee, which coordinated the campaign and issued addresses to the voters of Virginia. Roane, ill in Hanover County, was named as an elector.<sup>68</sup>

In the months before the November election, the Junto defended Van Buren, criticized the Whigs for "using every exertion to unite the negro question and the Fanatics with the Presidential election," and attacked Hugh Lawson White and William Henry Harrison, the two main Whig candidates, as opponents of the state rights doctrines of Virginia.<sup>69</sup> Ritchie informed his readers that he supported Van Buren because he had proven himself to be friendly to the "Virginia doctrines" and because "his election is calculated to destroy those sectional distinctions, which might prove fatal to the Union of the States." Harrison, on the other

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<sup>67</sup>RE, Jan. 12, 1836.

<sup>68</sup>RE, Jan. 12, 16, 1836.

<sup>69</sup>C.S. Morgan to Van Buren, Jan. 9, 1836, Martin Van Buren Papers, Duke.

hand, "has no pretensions to the character of a member of the State rights school." As for White, Virginians "could not have been induced under any circumstances to support him."<sup>70</sup>

In two addresses published shortly before the election, the Junto-controlled Central Committee impressed upon the citizens of Virginia the need to support Van Buren and to prevent the election from being sent to the House of Representatives. Every Republican must do his duty and vote for the party of Jefferson and Jackson. The choice, they argued, was a clear one: "Will you, in a word, prefer a Latitudinarian Federalist, or a Democratic State Rights man?"<sup>71</sup> Enough Virginians agreed with this assessment to give Van Buren a strong victory in the Old Dominion. The Vice-President captured 56.6% of the popular vote, compared with 43.4% for Hugh Lawson White. That represented a sharp decline from Jackson's 75% in 1832, but it was still a comfortable margin of victory.<sup>72</sup>

Flushed with victory, Ritchie admitted that he took "some credit" for Van Buren's victory in Virginia. By supporting the New Yorker, the state had "trampled under

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<sup>70</sup>RE, Aug. 16, July 29, 1836; David Campbell to William Campbell, Jan. 21, 1836, CFP, Duke.

<sup>71</sup>RE, Aug. 2, Oct. 25 1836.

<sup>72</sup>Congressional Quarterly, Inc. Presidential Elections Since 1789 (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1987), 94-95.



foot any sectional & local feelings" and acted in the best interests of the nation. Neither he nor Virginia expected to be rewarded for doing their duty. "All she [Virginia] asks in return, is that M.V.B. should steer the ship by the Jeffersonian Chart. Unless he does this, we have to leave him."<sup>73</sup>

While Ritchie was proclaiming his state's devotion to the republican principles of Thomas Jefferson, other members of the Junto were reaping the rewards of party service. In the spring of 1836, Jackson had renominated Stevenson as ambassador to Great Britain and nominated Philip P. Barbour to fill a vacancy on the Supreme Court. On March 16, 1836, both men were confirmed by the Senate. That same month, Daniel was appointed Federal district judge for the eastern half of Virginia. Leigh finally gave into pressure and resigned his Senate seat in July of 1836, and Richard Parker was sent to fill the office. When he stepped down after a few months, Parker was replaced by Roane, who had recently turned down the lucrative job of Postmaster of Richmond. For good measure, the legislature appointed Philip N. Nicholas as a circuit court judge in the state early in 1837.<sup>74</sup>

The sudden appointment of so many Junto members to

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<sup>73</sup>Ritchie to William B. Lewis, Nov. 20, 1836, Jackson Papers, LC.

<sup>74</sup>Wayland, Andrew Stevenson, 110-111; Frank, Justice Daniel Dissenting, 138; Dent, "Virginia Democratic Party," 215-216; Richmond Whig, March 7, 10, 1837.

state and federal offices did not go unnoticed by the group's opponents. Speaking of Roane's election to the Senate, the Alexandria Gazette noted that "he belongs to the Richmond Junto and is 'one of the family' - a relation of Mr. Ritchie's - upon which family, offices have lately been liberally bestowed." Pleasants also complained about the spread of the spoils system that Jackson had instituted. "Sharp's the word and quick's the motion - catch who catch can - help your plate or you'll be dished - are the governing impulses of the time, the blessed times of the triumph and reign of the 'Spoils System.'"<sup>75</sup> There was a good deal of truth to both of these claims. Before the bitter campaign of 1836, the Junto had for the most part declined offers of federal offices, insisting that it was working for the public good and not personal gain or glory. But the experiences of the past four years -- protracted partisan struggles, personal attacks, and lingering hostilities -- convinced many in the group to abandon their qualms about accepting spoils and to "catch who catch can." Besides, they convinced themselves, there was nothing wrong with being rewarded for helping to prevent the country from falling into the hands of the Whigs.

The Junto had dramatically improved its fortunes since

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<sup>75</sup>Alexandria Gazette, March 18, 1837; Richmond Whig, Dec. 13, 1836.

early 1835, but had little time to savor its victories. Even before Ritchie travelled to Washington to hear Van Buren's inaugural address, controversy over economic matters threatened to split the Virginia Democrat party. Debate on Jackson's Specie Circular and the redistribution of the Treasury surplus made clear that "the party was divided into a banking and anti-banking faction." The Junto attempted to avoid a showdown on the "troublesome banking and currency question," but the financial panic that struck in 1837 made that impossible.<sup>76</sup> Virginia's banks, renowned for their stability, were forced to stop specie payments in May of that year. This development threatened to bring financial ruin upon the state because, under Virginia law, suspension of specie was grounds for revoking a bank's charter. After consulting with Rives, Governor David Campbell called a special session of the state legislature to deal with the banking crisis.<sup>77</sup>

Both Campbell and Rives had recently quarreled with the Junto, Campbell over the group's opposition to his election and Rives over the issue of currency reform, and both were now committed to minimizing the group's influence in the

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<sup>76</sup>Moser, "Subtreasury Politics," 80-111; quotes on pp. 97, 111.

<sup>77</sup>James Rawlings to David Campbell, May 15, 1837; William C. Rives to Campbell, May 22, 1837, both in CFP, Duke; Richmond Whig, May 30, 1837. In this issue, Pleasants claimed that Ritchie and the "Junta" were opposed to Campbell calling the special session.

upcoming session.<sup>78</sup> As Campbell prepared his address to the special session, Daniel and Ritchie attempted to put their stamp on it. The editor borrowed a copy of the speech, kept it all day, made extensive notes, and asked Daniel to contact Campbell about suggested changes. The Governor refused both men's advice and noted their dissatisfaction to his wife. Ritchie "has been disappointed in not having a finger in the Message... He and Judge Peter V. Daniel no doubt both thought I ought to consult them.... I am no favorite with these gentlemen," he continued, "and I shall hereafter be entirely on my guard."<sup>79</sup>

The Junto, like the state Democratic party, was split on the banking question. Daniel was flatly opposed to all banks, Ritchie feared a national bank and wanted additional restrictions placed on state banks so that they could never again endanger the state's welfare by suspending specie payments, and John Brockenbrough, long-time President of the Bank of Virginia, proposed only mild reform measures.<sup>80</sup> When

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<sup>78</sup>For Campbell, see C.W. Gooch to David Campbell, Jan. 23, 1837; David Campbell to William B. Campbell, Feb. 2, 1837; David Campbell to Mary Campbell, May 14, 1837, all in CFP, Duke. For Rives, see John Brockenbrough to William H. Roane, Feb., 1837, Harrison Family Papers, VHS. Brockenbrough wrote that "Ritchie has completely given up Rives."

<sup>79</sup>David Campbell to Mary Campbell, June 14, 1837, CFP, Duke.

<sup>80</sup>Daniel to David Campbell, May 15, 1837, CFP, Duke; Daniel to Andrew Jackson, July 11, 1837, Jackson Papers, LC; RE, June 2, 1837; Brockenbrough to Rives, May 20, 1837, Van Buren Papers, LC.

Van Buren introduced his Independent Treasury, or sub-treasury scheme, which called for the separation of the federal government from banking, the rift within the Junto widened and threatened to destroy the group.

Brockenbrough and Parker had been early advocates of the sub-treasury system, and Daniel also supported Van Buren's measure, largely because of his strong party loyalty. These men believed that the Independent Treasury bill would allow the federal government to distance itself from banking, yet still exercise necessary supervision over the financial system.<sup>81</sup> Ritchie and Nicholas, however, opposed the scheme for a number of reasons. Most importantly, the editor noted, the President's proposal would probably fail and might lead to renewed calls for the restoration of a national bank. The sub-treasury plan would undoubtedly enlarge presidential patronage and endanger the "*security of the public funds*," and for these reasons Ritchie refused to endorse it, despite the consequences of differing with Van Buren and his most intimate friends.<sup>82</sup>

Concerned about the split in the Virginia Democratic party on the banking question, Ritchie worked feverishly to formulate acceptable alternatives. First he called for a "Convention of the Banks of the United States ... for the

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<sup>81</sup>Moser, "Subtreasury Politics," 123-125.

<sup>82</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, Aug. 20, 1837, Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, Aug. 18, Oct. 20, 1837.

purpose of devising means to bring about a resumption of specie payments." When that failed to achieve any results, he argued for a "Special Deposit" system, a variation on the existing pet bank program established by Jackson. Under Ritchie's plan, state banks would continue to receive federal deposits, but would be unable to "issue their paper upon the faith of these funds." This would make the state banks stronger, Ritchie argued, prevent the overspeculation that had brought on the current panic, and blunt calls for a new national bank as well. Few rushed to endorse Ritchie's proposal.<sup>83</sup>

Debate over banking produced divisions in the national party as well. An insurgent group of Democrats, known as the Conservatives and led by Nathaniel Tallmadge and William Cabell Rives, proclaimed their steadfast unwillingness to toe the party line on the sub-treasury issue.<sup>84</sup> The Conservatives were well represented in Virginia, and they gave the Junto additional cause for concern. The group worried that Rives and the Conservatives would break away

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<sup>83</sup>For Ritchie's support of a bank convention, see RE, July 18, 25, 28, Aug. 1, 4, 15, 22, Oct. 27, 1837. For the "Special Deposit" plan, see Aug. 18, Oct. 20, Nov. 28, 1837; Jan. 4, Feb. 6, 17, 24, May 4, 29, 1838; Ritchie to Rives, Aug. 10, [1837], Rives Papers, LC.

<sup>84</sup>For a good examination of the Conservative movement, see Jean Friedman, The Revolt of the Conservative Democrats, Studies in American History and Culture, No. 9 (UMI Research Press, 1976). Friedman contends that the Conservatives were primarily an "antiparty" faction upset at Van Buren's financial policies and the rise of partisanship. (54)

from the Democratic party and join with the Whigs to defeat Van Buren's measure and to gain control of the state legislature.<sup>85</sup>

The Junto soon realized the urgent need to set aside its differences on the banking question and work for party harmony. Ritchie called upon his fellow party members to "manifest ... a tolerant and conciliatory spirit" while this problem was being resolved. He reminded them that they disagreed with each other only on the Independent Treasury, while they differed with the Whigs on nearly every issue. The editor also announced flatly that he was not abandoning the party or Van Buren. He was, in fact, "disposed ... to sink or swim with his administration."<sup>86</sup> Brockenbrough now swung around to endorse Ritchie's special deposit system in the name of party unity, and Daniel and Parker travelled to Washington to impress upon Van Buren and Rives the need for compromise. Stevenson wrote from London to tell Van Buren of the Junto's devotion to him and willingness to work for a settlement. Brockenbrough urged Rives to rejoin the party so that it could prevent the Whigs from gaining control in Virginia. The banker added that Rives's fellow senator, William H. Roane, was willing "to co-operate in any measure

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<sup>85</sup>Moser, "Subtreasury Politics," 135-138.

<sup>86</sup>RE, Nov. 28, 1837, Jan. 13, 1838. See also the issues of March 24 and April 24, 1838.

that will preserve the union and integrity of the party."<sup>87</sup>

Efforts on the part of the Junto to keep the Democratic party united proved to be too little, too late. The Whigs successfully capitalized on the internal bickering of the Democrats and captured control of the Virginia legislature in 1838. Ritchie had dragged out old warnings about the dangers of a national bank, claiming that the Whigs were exploiting the political situation in an effort to recharter the Bank of the United States. "Mark the course which the Bank of the U.S. is pursuing," he informed his readers: "Mark its object! See how it attempts to sweep on to a re-charter with a step as steady as time and an appetite keen as death!"<sup>88</sup> Ritchie's rhetoric failed to rouse the Democrats of Virginia, and the editor placed much of the blame for the party's defeat on widespread voter apathy.<sup>89</sup>

Other observers were quick to fault Ritchie and Rives for the Whig victory. Jackson condemned the two as "prodigal political sons" who had done much damage to the party. Remembering Ritchie's response to the removal of the

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<sup>87</sup>Brockenbrough to Van Buren, Aug. 7, 1837, Van Buren Papers, LC; Brockenbrough to Roane, Sept. 13, 1837, Harrison Family Papers, VHS; Parker to Van Buren, Jan. 18, 1838; Daniel to Van Buren, Jan. 23, 1838; Stevenson to Van Buren, Jan. 5, 1838; Brockenbrough to Rives, Aug. 5, 1837 (copy), all in Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>88</sup>RE, April 13, 1838.

<sup>89</sup>RE, May 4, 1838.



deposits, Jackson wrote that "then, as now, he went off hastily, & did us much injury." John Letcher was convinced that Ritchie and Rives had "done more in the space of six months to divide, and distract the Administration Party, than all the Whigs in the Union could have effected in a lifetime." Thomas Jefferson Randolph bluntly informed Van Buren that the Democrats had lost in Virginia because of the "course pursued by Mr. Rives and Mr. Ritchie on the Sub Treasury bill."<sup>90</sup>

More ominously, other members of the Junto were also willing to criticize Ritchie for his course during the sub-treasury debate. Brockenbrough informed Stevenson that "our friend of the Enquirer has ... done infinite mischief to our party by the middle course he has taken and I think has permanently injured his own standing."<sup>91</sup> Early in 1838, Daniel reported to Van Buren that the editor "must now be given up as incorrigible.... He is inseparably wedded to Rives and the Banks." Ritchie could no longer be trusted, Daniel wrote four months later, because "he is still dealing in his old fooleries about special deposits." By the end of

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<sup>90</sup>Jackson to Van Buren, Oct. 24, 1837; John Letcher to Ely Moore, April 28, 1838; Letcher to Van Buren, May 12, 1838; Thomas Jefferson Randolph to Van Buren, May 6, 1838, all in Van Buren Papers, LC. Pleasants took special relish in attributing the Whig victory to the "skulking course of the Enquirer, and the treacherous one of Mr. Rives." Richmond Whig, May 18, 1838.

<sup>91</sup>Brockenbrough to Stevenson, Jan. 1, 1839, Stevenson Papers, LC.

1838, relations between Daniel and Ritchie were decidedly cool.<sup>92</sup>

The Whig victory, Daniel's criticism, and the continued debate on the sub-treasury plan combined to weaken Ritchie's resolve and to lessen his enthusiasm for partisan struggles. "I am more & more sick of politics," the editor confided to Rives, "and would to Heaven! it were in my power to return to the Shade of private life."<sup>93</sup> Still, Ritchie continued to speak out for harmony, for party unity, for an end to bickering over "this vexatious question" of banking. "I go for a compromise," he noted, adding that "my whole heart is in this."<sup>94</sup>

Ritchie's desire for a compromise was given impetus by two developments. First, a union between the Conservatives and the Whigs looked more likely than ever in 1838 and 1839. Pleasants issued an invitation "To the Conservative Party of Virginia" to join the Whigs in "common cause" to defeat the administration, claiming that the "Conservatives can never again act with Mr. Van Buren's branch of the party. The gulph between them is impassable."<sup>95</sup> Rives resigned his seat and his membership in the Democratic party in March of 1839,

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<sup>92</sup>Daniel to Van Buren, Jan. 23, May 23, Aug. 8, Oct. 20, 1838, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>93</sup>Ritchie to Rives, Feb. 3, 1838, Rives Papers, LC.

<sup>94</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, July 2, 1838, Ritchie to [?], [May?, 1838], (copy), both in Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>95</sup>Richmond Whig, July 27, Nov. 20, 1838.

insisting that "I have not abandoned my party; they have abandoned me." He denied that he had formed a "corrupt coalition with the Whigs," but the Junto were not convinced. Brockenbrough noted that Rives had "given unequivocal evidence of his union with the Whigs," and Ritchie, who had worked closely with Rives throughout the sub-treasury debate, finally abandoned him in the summer of 1839.<sup>96</sup>

The second development that concerned Ritchie and the Junto was the increased influence of John C. Calhoun in the Democratic party. The South Carolinian had rejoined the Democrats on the Independent Treasury question, and moved quickly to exert control over the national party.<sup>97</sup> Ritchie remained hostile to Calhoun and his supporters, and warned Van Buren to avoid the "infatuated councils of those bitter Hotspurs." The South Carolinian, Ritchie claimed, was attempting to exploit the rift in the party for his own advantage. "Mr. Calhoun is for agitation - agitation," he notified Van Buren, "but you know him sufficiently to know, how far he is to be trusted, for motives or for measures." In an editorial, Ritchie denied that he had welcomed the South Carolinian back into party ranks. "Mr. Calhoun has not gained our confidence by his recent moves on the chess-

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<sup>96</sup>William Cabell Rives, "To the People of Virginia," March 18, 1839, Broadside, VHS; Brockenbrough to Stevenson, Jan. 1, 1839, Stevenson Papers, LC; RE, June 28, 1839; Ritchie to Stevenson, April 14, 1839, Stevenson Papers, LC.

<sup>97</sup>Remini, Course of American Democracy, 437-439.

board.... He is too much of a metaphysician for us."<sup>98</sup>

Faced with Calhoun's ambition, Rives's defection, and an upcoming presidential election, Ritchie slowly yielded his objections to the sub-treasury scheme in an effort to solidify the Virginia Democratic party.<sup>99</sup> "Ritchie's recent conduct has merit enough in it to cover all his past sins," James Buchanan informed Van Buren in May of 1839, and Parker was convinced that his brother-in-law had resumed his position as leader of the administration forces in Richmond.<sup>100</sup> To preserve the party and atone for his past actions, Ritchie worked especially hard in the elections of 1839 and 1840, winning further praise. "I have never felt a deeper interest in my life," he told Stevenson in 1839, and more than one observer credited the editor with strengthening the influence of the Democratic party during those two campaigns. "Mr. Ritchie ... is all zeal & action," Van Buren was informed, "endeavoring to stimulate others by efforts that are almost supernatural."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, July 2, 1838, Van Buren Papers, LC; RE, Oct. 3, 1837.

<sup>99</sup>Ritchie to Stevenson, Aug. 4, 1839, Stevenson Papers, LC.

<sup>100</sup>James Buchanan to Van Buren, May 11, 1839; Parker to Van Buren, June 4, 1839, both in Van Buren Papers, LC. See also John Rutherford to Stevenson, June 4, July 28, 1839, Stevenson Papers, LC.

<sup>101</sup>Ritchie to Stevenson, April 14, 1839, Parker to Van Buren, April 6, 1840, both in Van Buren Papers, LC; Rutherford to Stevenson, April 10, June 4, 1839, Stevenson Papers, LC.

Ritchie's "supernatural" exertions were not enough, however, to put the Democrats back in control of the Virginia legislature between 1838 and 1840. After the party's defeat in the spring elections of 1840, the Junto grew worried about the upcoming presidential election. The Whigs were unified, organized, and eager to excoriate Van Buren on the banking question and on his aristocratic pretensions. The "zeal of our opponents has run into a species of fanaticism," Ritchie told Van Buren. Roane thought that "at no past time have our adverseries [sic] manifested more zeal, or been perhaps so well organized as now."<sup>102</sup> Despite such ominous signs, the Junto remained optimistic that Van Buren would defeat the Whig candidate, assumed to be Clay until the national convention selected William H. Harrison, a popular military hero from Ohio.

In the campaign, the Democrats portrayed the Whigs as a new brand of Federalists whose sole object was "to swell the powers of the Federal Government at the expense of the States, and the great body of the People." They argued that the "great principles which our democratic ancestors struggled to establish by the civil revolution of 1801" were at stake. Only the Democrats could protect and preserve those fundamental principles. The party stood for strict construction, opposition to a national bank and "all other

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<sup>102</sup>Ritchie to Van Buren, June 1, 1840; Roane to C.W. Gooch, Feb. 8, 1840, Gooch Family Papers, UVA.

incorporations by the Federal Government," the Independent Treasury, and the "supremacy of the popular will."<sup>103</sup> The Whigs, on the other hand, represented corruption, the abuse of power, and aristocratic rule. That made the choice facing the voters an obvious one. The "old war is renewed between the friends of an equal and well-regulated liberty, and the partisans of privilege and monopoly." Virginia must support Van Buren and the Democrats.<sup>104</sup>

In case these platitudes did not have their intended effect, the Democrats borrowed a page from the Whigs and attacked Harrison as an abolitionist sympathizer. In response, the Whigs revived charges of Van Buren's support of free black suffrage, and the campaign soon degenerated into name-calling, shameless accusations, and gaudy pageantry.<sup>105</sup> When the smoke finally cleared, Van Buren had eked out the slimmest of victories in Virginia, tallying 43,757 votes to Harrison's 42,637.<sup>106</sup> Once again, the Junto

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<sup>103</sup>"Proceedings of the Democratic Republican Convention, Held at Richmond Feb. 20, 1840," Broadside, VSL. Ritchie, Daniel, and Brockenbrough all played keys roles in this meeting.

<sup>104</sup>"Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention Held at Charlottesville, Va., September 9 and 10, 1840," Broadside, VSL. Both Ritchie and Daniel attended this convention, and Roane delivered a speech there.

<sup>105</sup>See, for instance, Daniel to Van Buren, Sept. 28, 1840, Van Buren Papers, LC; Daniel to William Brent, Jr., Oct. 14, 1840, Cabell Family Papers, UVA; Dent, "Virginia Democratic Party," 274-281.

<sup>106</sup>Congressional Quarterly, Inc., Presidential Elections, 96.

had been influential in pushing the state towards a Democratic candidate. But the role of another group, the Calhoun Democrats, was perhaps equally important in securing Van Buren's victory in Virginia. The South Carolinian's reentry into the party had led some prominent Virginians, men like Littleton Waller Tazewell, Robert M.T. Hunter, and William O. Goode, to abandon their flirtation with the Whigs and rejoin the Democratic fold. These men followed Calhoun's lead and supported the New Yorker, and the "Calhoun-Van Buren alliance ... probably saved Virginia [for] the Democrats."<sup>107</sup> As a consequence, the Calhoun Democrats moved to increase their power within the Virginia Democratic party at the expense of the Junto.

The Junto prevailed in 1840, but just barely and at a terrible cost. Unlike its remarkable comeback in 1836, reversing two years worth of defeats, the Junto was unable to sustain the attacks of the Whigs and the Conservatives, the challenge posed by the Calhoun Democrats, and the painful division over the sub-treasury scheme. Barbour's appointment to the Supreme Court and Stevenson's selection as ambassador to Great Britain in 1836, coupled with Parker's death in 1840, left the Junto even weaker. Brockenbrough largely retired from political affairs after his brother William and his adopted daughter died in late

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<sup>107</sup>Dent, "Virginia Democratic Party," 286-287; quote on page 287.

1838, and Daniel and Ritchie were still distrustful of each other after their bitter quarrel over the banking question. When Daniel was selected to replace Barbour on the Supreme Court after the latter's death in 1841, only Ritchie remained to represent the group in Richmond.<sup>108</sup>

Looking back on political developments since 1834, Ritchie was dismayed and saddened. He had spent too much time attempting to reestablish "harmony & peace ... in our ranks," he told his old friend Stevenson. But the worst part had been the divisiveness of the banking controversy. "No circumstance of my whole political life has given me so much pain as differing from you, Mr. Van Buren, Judge Parker, D[octor] Brockenbrough & other friends" on this matter.<sup>109</sup> In truth, the sub-treasury debate had "splintered the Virginia Democratic party and initiated the disintegration of the Richmond Junto."<sup>110</sup> From the heights of its success in 1836, the group found itself practically defunct in 1840. Nor could it take much satisfaction in Van Buren's triumph in Virginia, its crowning achievement, for Harrison had won the national contest. The Whigs controlled the White House, and the Junto faced the beginning of a hostile administration for the first time since 1825.

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<sup>108</sup>Brockenbrough to Stevenson, Jan. 1. 1839, Stevenson Papers, LC; Frank, Justice Daniel Dissenting, 154.

<sup>109</sup>Ritchie to Stevenson, Aug. 4, 1839, Stevenson Papers, LC.

<sup>110</sup>Dent, "Virginia Democratic Party," 215.



#### CONCLUSION:

##### The Richmond Junto and Politics in Jacksonian Virginia

After the election of 1840, the Junto's influence in Virginia politics declined steadily. The Whigs had controlled the state legislature since 1838, and when the Democrats finally regained control in 1842, it was largely because of the actions of the Calhoun Democrats and not the Junto. In fact, the group spent most of its time between 1841 and 1844 fighting the Calhoun branch of the party and attempting to restore Van Buren to the presidency. Ritchie worked especially hard for his old friend. The editor regarded Van Buren's election in 1844 "as essential to the purity of Republican principles," John Letcher told Thomas Hart Benton, and "as the only fitting and proper rebuke to the log cabin and coonskin fooleries of 1840." Other members of the Junto, including Roane, Brockenbrough, and Nicholas, supported Van Buren as well. "There are at least two things I never change," Roane informed Van Buren in late 1843, "the one - a well tried old friend - the other my politics." He closed by saying he would travel to Richmond to "see what I

can do towards keeping our crew steady."<sup>1</sup>

Just a few months after Roane's statement, the Junto dropped its endorsement of Van Buren over the question of the annexation of Texas. There were indications that Virginians would not support the New Yorker in 1844, even before he made clear his opposition to Texas annexation. Van Buren's position on the protective tariff question, once again an issue, caused concern among his supporters in the state, and Ritchie, as head of the Democratic Central Committee, received numerous letters in early 1844 detailing the lack of support for Van Buren around the state. "They wish for a new man," one elector wrote of his fellow citizens.<sup>2</sup>

The biggest issue facing Van Buren, however, was the question of what to do with Texas. Southerners had made annexation of the independent nation the primary goal of the 1844 campaign. Whigs and Democrats across the region held public meetings supporting annexation, and by late 1843, the

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<sup>1</sup>John Letcher to Thomas Hart Benton, Dec. 15, 1842; William H. Roane to Martin Van Buren, Feb. 9, 1843; Samuel Denoon to Van Buren, June 14, 1843, all in Martin Van Buren Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>2</sup>For the tariff issue, see R.B. Gooch to Auguste Davezac, Dec., 1842; H.L. Hopkins and others to Van Buren, Feb. 17, 1843; R. Wallace to Van Buren, Feb. 18, 1843; Peter V. Daniel to Van Buren, July 6, 1843, all in Van Buren Papers, LC. For comments about Van Buren's general unpopularity, see Austin Brockenbrough to Thomas Ritchie, April 21, 1844; William Byars to Ritchie, April 27, 1844; James Hoge to Central Democratic Committee, May 3, 1844; R.J. Paulson to Ritchie, May 3, 1844, all in Ritchie-Harrison Papers, College of William and Mary. Quote from Brockenbrough to Ritchie, April 21, 1844.

issue had swept all other questions aside as insignificant. At first the Junto considered the fuss over Texas to be a ploy by the Calhounites to discredit Van Buren, but they quickly discovered the potency of the controversy.<sup>3</sup> "This Texian question has grown up rapidly in the whole South to a size and extent of which you can form no just idea," Roane informed Van Buren in late April of 1844, "and it is still increasing." Silas Wright was convinced that it was the only question that mattered in the presidential race in Virginia. No man could hope to win who did not strongly and without reservations endorse annexation.<sup>4</sup>

Van Buren's letter detailing his opposition to the annexation of Texas in April of 1844 ended his chance of victory in the Old Dominion. Virginians instantly spoke out against the New Yorker and began searching for another candidate. Letters flooded Ritchie's office demanding that the party drop Van Buren and select someone in favor of annexation; this was "the only means of saving Virginia and keeping up a united Southern party."<sup>5</sup> Even the Junto parted

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<sup>3</sup>Andrew Stevenson to Van Buren, Oct. 8, 1843; John Letcher to Ritchie, Sept. 23, 1843, both in Van Buren Papers, LC. For an expression of southern unity on the Texas question, see I.N. Powell to Van Buren, March 27, 1844, Van Buren Papers, LC.

<sup>4</sup>Roane to Van Buren, April 30, 1844; Silas Wright to Van Buren, April 1, 1844, both in Van Buren Paper, LC.

<sup>5</sup>James McDowell to the Members of the Central Democratic Committee, May 6, 1844; W.M. Watkins to Ritchie, May 7, 1844; John R. Edmunds to Ritchie, May 12, 1844; S. Bassett French to Ritchie, May 23, 1844, all in Ritchie-Harrison Papers, College

company with its old colleague. "You are deserted" in Virginia, an observer told Van Buren on May 1. "Ritchie, Roane, & Stevenson are all out against you on the Texas question; positively, openly, and unequivocally against you. Arrangements are now, at this very hour, being made, to take up some other candidate, and of this be assured if there be a God in Heaven." Official confirmation of the group's break came four days later when Ritchie wrote to the ex-president. The editor told Van Buren that it pained him to admit that "we cannot carry Virginia for you" in the upcoming election. The furor over his anti-annexation stance compelled the Junto to seek another candidate more suited to the temper of the times. Of course, Ritchie added, should Van Buren capture the party nomination at the Baltimore convention, the clique would support his campaign.<sup>6</sup>

When the Democratic convention met in late May, however, Roane delivered a rousing speech announcing Virginia's support for James K. Polk, who went on to capture the nomination. Ritchie's work on behalf of Polk's campaign was rewarded after his victory, when the editor and long-time Junto leader accepted an offer in early 1845 to edit

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of William and Mary. Quote from Edmunds to Ritchie, May 12, 1844.

<sup>6</sup>"Q in the corner" to Van Buren, May 1, 1844; Ritchie to Van Buren, May 5, 1844, both in Van Buren Papers, LC. Daniel, now in Washington, broke with his Richmond friends and supported Van Buren. See Daniel to Van Buren, June 11, 1844, Van Buren Papers, LC.

the administration's paper in Washington, the Union. With Roane's death that same year, and with Stevenson and Brockenbrough retired from public affairs, the Richmond Junto ended its long tenure as a key player in political affairs in Virginia.<sup>7</sup>

The careers of the remaining Junto members after 1845 were marked by a noticeable turn to the politics of sectionalism. Ritchie edited the Union for nine years, until his death in 1854. During his time there, he strongly supported the expansionist policies of the Polk administration and became increasingly defensive about the South and the institution of slavery.<sup>8</sup> Daniel sat on the Supreme Court until his death in 1860, described by his biographer as the "last Jeffersonian to hold public office in the United States." He too became a fervent spokesman for the southern cause, and was the only justice to agree completely with Taney's arguments on the *Dred Scott* case (1857).<sup>9</sup> Stevenson, after briefly trying to win the vice-

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<sup>7</sup>Joseph H. Harrison, Jr., "Oligarchs and Democrats: The Richmond Junto," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, Vol. 78 (1970), 188.

<sup>8</sup>For Ritchie's later career, see Thomas R. Hietala, Manifest Design: Anxious Aggrandizement in Late Jacksonian America (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985); Charles Ambler, Thomas Ritchie: A study in Virginia Politics (Richmond: Bell Book & Stationary Co., 1913), 219-300.

<sup>9</sup>John P. Frank, Justice Daniel Dissenting: A Biography of Peter V. Daniel, 1784-1860 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), vii-viii; Don E. Fehrenbacher, Slavery, Law, and

presidential nomination in 1844, retired from politics and died in 1857. According to Francis Wayland, Stevenson's last years provided "an example of how the slavery question gradually changed a Jacksonian nationalist into a conditional secessionist."<sup>10</sup> As a final irony, Parker's son, also named Richard, presided at the trial of John Brown, and John Brockenbrough's mansion on Shockhoe Hill, where the Junto held many of its meetings, became the White House of the Confederacy.

Perhaps this association with militant sectionalism and the defense of slavery represents the ultimate tragedy of the Richmond Junto. The members of the Junto considered themselves to be Jeffersonian republicans fighting not only for the rights of the states, but also for the preservation of the Union. The group formed its political philosophy from an older generation and attempted to apply it to the issues and debates of a rapidly changing society. During the Junto's reign, political, social, and economic matters were all transformed, and try as it may, the Junto failed to adapt completely to the new order. It was slow to accept the dynamics of the second party system, with its emphasis on party discipline, control from the national level, and

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Politics: The Dred Scott Case in Historical Perspective (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 216-222.

<sup>10</sup>Francis Fry Wayland, Andrew Stevenson: Democrat and Diplomat, 1785-1857 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1949), 249.

elaborate organization. The group did acknowledge that sectional compromise was an integral part of national politics, and debate over such issues as the tariff, banking, and the relative merits of presidential candidates "provided for the formation and subsequent development of the second party system in Virginia" during the 1820s, 1830s, and 1840s.<sup>11</sup>

For almost thirty years, the Richmond Junto was the most potent political force in Jacksonian Virginia. While the group's political fortunes rose and fell throughout the period, it remained an accurate gauge of the mood and sentiment of many Virginians. In this respect, the group's ideas and actions serve as a window through which the historian can view the ways in which Virginians, and Southerners, responded to the challenges posed by the maturation of the American political, economic, and social system in the decades before the Civil War.

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<sup>11</sup>Lynwood Miller Dent, Jr., "The Virginia Democratic Party, 1824-1847" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1974), 358.

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