1824 John Quincy Adams vs. Andrew Jackson vs. Henry Clay vs. William Crawford vs. John C. Calhoun

The election of 1824 was decided by the House of Representatives under terms of the Twelfth Amendment. All five leading contenders claimed to be Democratic-Republicans and for the first time, all the candidates came from a generation too young to have participated in the Revolutionary War. Given an apparent lack of ideological differences, the role of sectionalism — loyalty to the different sections of the country and their diverse economic interests — played a prominent role in the election.

The Context and the Candidates

During most of President James Monroe's second term (1821-25), the U.S. economy was mired in slow economic growth. Some voters blamed the policies of the Second Bank of the United States, while others blamed high tariffs for their economic difficulties. Still others believed that national politicians had strayed from the principles of republicanism that had guided the Founders in establishing the United States.

The United States had been at peace during President Monroe's second term, and international relations were not a strong issue in the election of 1824. The famous "Monroe Doctrine" of 1823, declaring that European nations should have no role in the Western Hemisphere, was not an issue in the election.

There was no single obvious candidate for the presidency in 1824. Instead, the campaign featured five ambitious men running for office, each with a unique claim to the White House. All five declared themselves to be Democratic-Republicans. There was no candidate from the rapidly fading Federalist party, and the Whig Party had not yet emerged.

John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts had been secretary of state under President Monroe, and could claim many years of diplomatic experience; he was also the son of the second president, John Adams. He had begun government service as a teenager, while his father represented the United States in France, and he later filled a long string of diplomatic posts in Europe before becoming secretary of state under Monroe. Although his résumé was impressive, Adams' personality was far from that of a typical office-seeker; he was generally reserved and formal, the opposite of a genial, friendly politician. In effect, Adams' candidacy for president was based on his extensive experience as a successful diplomat.

Andrew Jackson of Tennessee was a hero of the War of 1812, in which he had successfully defended New Orleans from British attack in the last days of the war. He later gained fame as a military leader who subdued Native American tribes, and as the man who helped acquire Florida by invading the territory and establishing temporary bases before Spain ceded the area to the United States. Jackson had no experience in office, although his friends and political supporters helped arrange his election as a senator from Tennessee in 1823. Throughout the campaign Jackson avoided taking stands on most specific issues. He was not initially regarded as a likely candidate.

Henry Clay of Kentucky was a prominent member of the House of Representatives and author of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 that admitted Missouri and Maine as states, and barred slavery north of 36°30' latitude (see p. 29). Unlike Adams, Clay had a magnetic personality. He had been elected Speaker of the House of Representatives in his first term, beginning in 1811. He was also strongly associated with the "American System," policies designed to encourage economic expansion, especially in the West.

John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, President Monroe's secretary of war, had been associated with the "hawks" who favored the War of 1812 against Britain. Like Clay, he favored government policies designed to help the national economy grow. It was not until later that Calhoun became closely associated with protecting slavery and a position of promoting the rights of states over the rights of the federal government.
William Crawford of Georgia had been secretary of war under Monroe and later secretary of the treasury. In the midst of the election, Crawford suffered a stroke, from which he never fully recovered and which effectively took him out of the running.

The Issues
In the absence of a unifying foreign conflict, the issues in the 1824 presidential election were related to the sluggish economy and different ideas put forward to stimulate growth. Economic solutions took on a sectional flavor in 1824, with politicians from different regions — notably the Northeast, the South and the West — putting forth differing programs and solutions based on regional economic interests.

The most clear-cut proposal was the "American System" advocated by Clay. This system comprised protective tariffs to help U.S. producers compete effectively with foreign competitors, federal financing of internal improvements, like highways, to encourage settlement and expansion in western territories, and continuation of a national bank that would help finance government projects and establish some central control over the currency.

Protective tariffs in particular emphasized regional differences. In New England and the Middle Atlantic states, tariffs helped protect young industries from competition from Britain, while in the largely agricultural southern states high tariffs represented higher prices for imports with no obvious benefits for the local economy.

The tug-of-war between the relative power and influence of state governments versus the federal government — the "states' rights" issue — also began to emerge in 1824; the issue of slavery, dealt with in the Compromise of 1820, continued to divide the northern states from the southern.

The Campaign and Outcome
The real centerpiece of the 1824 election was the personal ambition of the leading candidates, and their efforts — and the efforts of their supporters — to maneuver their way into the White House. It was recognized early on that the election would be likely to be decided by the House of Representatives under terms of the Twelfth Amendment, adopted in 1804 in reaction to the 1800 presidential contest between Thomas Jefferson and his nominal vice presidential running mate, Aaron Burr (see p. 12).

Campaigning began early. In December, 1821, South Carolina's legislators met in a caucus and nominated John C. Calhoun as their preference for the Democratic-Republican candidate. (In fact, there would not be a candidate from any other party, so party designation was largely meaningless in 1824.) Seven months later, a caucus in the Tennessee legislature nominated Andrew Jackson. In November 1822 Missouri's legislative caucus nominated Clay, and Kentucky, Ohio, and Louisiana soon added their support. Partisans of Adams in Maine put forward his name in January, 1823, followed by Massachusetts. The last name entered into the race was Crawford. In February, 1824, New York Representative Martin Van Buren organized a caucus of Democratic-Republican members of Congress with the intention of naming the party's candidate for the White House. Only 68 members of Congress attended the caucus (out of 261 members), and they nominated Crawford. His nomination was effectively cut short in late 1823 when he suffered a stroke from which he recovered slowly and only partially.

The strategies of the five candidates were quite different:

Adams took the public position that the country should request his services, rather than expecting him to request popular support. Although he did not campaign for office, he tried unsuccessfully to persuade President Monroe to nominate his chief rivals, Jackson, Calhoun, and Clay, for foreign diplomatic posts, which would have removed them from the scene.

Jackson also professed lack of interest in becoming president, although he conceded that he would accept the position if it were offered. But his supporters realized that it was precisely
Jackson's lack of political experience that most appealed to voters who distrusted power and suspected political corruption among the other more experienced candidates. The fact that Jackson had never been to Europe and was not part of the political scene in Washington made him seem untainted and more purely "American." During the campaign, Jackson took care not to voice strong positions on the main issues, such as Clay's American System, slavery, or states rights.

Calhoun was the first candidate to recognize that he stood no chance of winning the presidency after he was soundly beaten in a state convention of Democratic-Republicans in March, 1824. He withdrew from the race and announced that he would happily serve as vice president.

Crawford's campaign was rendered largely ineffective by his stroke. Although he was the early starter, he did not wage an effective campaign.

Clay turned out to be the weakest candidate, which was surprising in light of his skill as a politician in Washington. He was highly critical of Monroe's foreign policy, which offended Adams, the secretary of state under Monroe. Clay also attacked Jackson, his fellow Westerner and rival for support from western Congressmen. The Kentuckian also lost support in the South, which did not endorse his American System of economic development but instead was beginning to support the idea of a weaker federal system and stronger rights for the states.

Presidential voting in 1824 did not take place on one day, but was spread over a period of weeks. In six states (Vermont, New York, South Carolina, Louisiana, Delaware, and Georgia), the state legislators chose members of the electoral college. In five other states, electors were chosen by voters on the basis of congressional districts. In the thirteen remaining states, presidential electors were chosen on a statewide basis. The election of 1824 was also the first time that popular vote totals were widely recorded.

At the end of voting by all eighteen states, in December, 1824, it was clear that no candidate had captured a majority of the electoral college. The electoral college totals were:

- **Jackson**: 99
- **Adams**: 84
- **Crawford**: 41
- **Clay**: 37

Under the Twelfth Amendment, the election then shifted to the House of Representatives, where each state had one vote. The result was a kind of second presidential campaign that ran from December, 1824 to March, 1825. Clay, whose fourth place finish in the electoral college made him ineligible for the House vote, plunged into a campaign to elect Adams, rather than Jackson. The deadline for a vote in the House of Representatives was March 4, 1825; after that, the Twelfth Amendment provided that the vice president would assume the presidency. Calhoun had easily won enough electoral votes to become vice president and stood to benefit if the House failed to select a president.

The House voted on February 9, proceeding from north to south. Adams won the 13 states he needed to be elected. Adams received six votes from the New England states, plus New York, Maryland (where Adams had defeated Jackson in the popular vote), Kentucky, Missouri, Louisiana, Ohio, and Illinois (thanks at least in part to the efforts of Clay). Jackson won seven states. Crawford received four votes.

Although the election had been decided according to the Constitution, a subsequent act by Adams tainted the outcome and raised the charge of a "corrupt bargain." After he had been elected president, Adams nominated Clay to become secretary of state and Clay accepted, suggesting to people at the time that there had been a political deal struck for Clay's support in Congress.
Although Adams and Jackson had admired one another at the beginning of the campaign, after Adams gained the presidency by means of the Twelfth Amendment they soon became bitter political enemies. The campaign of 1828 was already in motion.