

**The Inadvertent Inheritors of the Moon and Stars:  
Accidental Presidents and the Vice Presidency <sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>This title is inspired by Vice President Harry S. Truman's statement upon hearing the news of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's death: "I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

## Table of Contents

<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Research and Methodology.....	8
Thesis Statement.....	8
Significance.....	13
Overview.....	16
<b>Chapter Two: Theoretical Discussion and Literature Review .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Literature Review.....	17
Theory Building and Discussion of Variables.....	21
Theory Summation.....	30
<b>Chapter Three: The Rogues.....</b>	<b>33</b>
John Tyler.....	33
Millard Fillmore.....	48
Andrew Johnson .....	62
Chester Arthur .....	75
Theodore Roosevelt.....	90
<b>Chapter Four: The Emulators .....</b>	<b>102</b>
Calvin Coolidge.....	102
Harry Truman.....	115
Lyndon B. Johnson.....	131
Gerald Ford.....	147
<b>Chapter Five: Concluding Remarks and Thoughts .....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>References and Bibliography .....</b>	<b>165</b>

## Chapter One: The Most Insignificant Office Ever Contrived

*“Once there were two brothers; one ran away to sea, the other was elected vice president – and nothing was ever heard from either of them again.”*

*– Vice President Thomas Marshall*

### Introduction to the Problem: The Development of an After-thought

*Henry Clay was livid. For the second time in nine years, God had failed to save the Whig Party from an uncontrollable vice president. It had first happened in 1841 with the death of President Harrison and the arrival of “His Accidency” John Tyler. Determined to dismantle Clay’s Congressional agenda, Tyler spent his three years and eleven months in the Executive Mansion forsaking the principles of President Harrison and enacting programs that undermined core Whig beliefs. And now, in 1850, history was repeating itself as Vice President Millard Fillmore seemingly repudiated his predecessor’s policies....*

It was not intended to happen this way. The notion of a disobedient vice president had not entered the minds of the Constitution’s framers. In fact, the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention in 1787 did not discuss the Office of the Vice President until ten days prior to the Convention’s adjournment.<sup>2</sup> Even then, very little was debated. In truth, the vice presidency did not attract much debate or contention during the Constitution’s ratification wars. Within “Federalist No. 68,” Publius argued that the office resolved the problem of presidential succession and ensured that an impartial individual would preside over Senate proceedings and

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<sup>2</sup> Gordon Lloyd, “The Constitutional Convention: Day by Day Summary,” *TeachingAmericanHistory.org*, 2012, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/convention/summary.html>.

serve as a tie-breaker vote if needed.<sup>3</sup> Yet aside from these two explicit provisions, the subject of vice presidential duties and responsibilities remained one of the great mysteries of the Early Republic.

Although prominent Americans such as John Adams (1789-1797) and Thomas Jefferson (1797-1801) served as the nation's first vice presidents, the office failed to attain prestige. As Vice President, a frustrated John Adams bickered with the Senate over the amount of discretion he would have as the chamber's presiding officer. Adams sparked a constitutional crisis when he attempted to propose legislation as "President of the Senate." Guarding their power with jealousy, Senate leaders retaliated by relegating Adams' role to a procedural one and prevented him from introducing bills.<sup>4</sup> This fallout with the Senate limited the purview of the vice presidency. Not only did the Senate spurn the office but also the executive branch largely ignored the position. Vice President Jefferson's refusal to assist with President Adams' policies (due to theoretical and partisan concerns) alienated the Office of the Vice President from the White House.<sup>5</sup> The executive branch further distrusted the vice presidency because it deemed it a creature of the legislature. The vice president's physical office was maintained at the Capitol and not within any executive departments. By the onset of President Jefferson's second term in 1805, the vice presidency had become an institutional no-man's land – neither part of the legislative branch nor an active component of the presidency.

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<sup>3</sup> The Office of the Vice President is only mentioned twice in all of *The Federalist* essays. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, Clinton Rossiter, ed., (New York, Signet Classic, 1999), 418.

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Lott, *The Warm Bucket Brigade: The Story of the American Vice Presidency*, (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2007), 17.

<sup>5</sup> Irving Williams, *The Rise of the Vice Presidency*, (Washington D.C., Public Affairs Press, 1956), 25.

Following the tenures of Adams and Jefferson, the nineteenth century occupants of the vice presidency wallowed in obscurity and powerlessness. Due to the ramifications of the 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment, the runner-up in the presidential election no longer assumed the vice presidency. As a result, rather than have the second-best man for the presidency occupy the Office of the Vice President, the position, for most of the 1800s, was filled by second-rate men.

However, Vice President John Tyler's sudden ascendancy to Commander-in-Chief in 1841 changed everything. While the nation mourned the passing of the beloved President Harrison, Tyler quickly assumed the reins of power, asserting his authority as the new President of the United States. President Tyler rejected almost every major legislative program advanced by the Whig-dominated Congress, which the late Harrison had intended to pass. Tyler's precedent of ignoring the policies of his predecessor was followed by accidental Presidents Millard Fillmore (1850-1853), Andrew Johnson (1865-1869), Chester A. Arthur (1881-1885), and Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909).

Although these "accidental presidents" executed different policies from those of their predecessors, this phenomenon has been largely ignored by vice presidential and presidential scholars. What is more intriguing is that this "going rogue" behavior is mainly confined to the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The 1800s provide several examples of accidental presidents unabashedly pursuing agendas that run counter to those of their immediate predecessors. John Tyler "killed" attempts to resurrect the National Bank despite support for the institution from his

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<sup>6</sup> Although Theodore Roosevelt inherited the presidency in 1901, after extensive research, I have determined that his accidental presidency falls under the going rogue category. A further exploration of Roosevelt is provided at the end of Chapter Three.

predecessor and a vast majority of the Whig Party. Chester Arthur reversed his stance on party patronage and pushed for civil service reform under the auspices of the Pendleton Act. Although he entered the presidency in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt's completion of William McKinley's term closely followed the model of a rogue accidental president. Shortly after McKinley's death, Theodore Roosevelt declared, "I want you to understand at the start – I feel myself just as much a constitutionally elected President...as McKinley was."<sup>7</sup> The New York cowboy then upended the ideology and programs of the late President McKinley, bringing grief to Mark Hanna and other Old Guard Republicans.

However, by the time Calvin Coolidge took the Oath of Office following the death of President Harding in 1923, the fear of vice presidents trailblazing their own paths had dissipated. In contrast to Theodore Roosevelt's statement, the taciturn Coolidge insisted, "[I]t is a sound rule that when the President dies in office it is the duty of his successor for the remainder of that term to maintain...the policies of the deceased President."<sup>8</sup> Although Coolidge's viewpoint seemed incongruous with the historical record, the New Englander remained true to his word. Rather than depart from Harding's call for "normalcy," Coolidge became its greatest defender, continuing many of the Ohioan's pro-business policies.

Coolidge's shift from "going rogue" to one of emulation characterizes the administrations of Harry Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Gerald Ford, three other vice presidents who unexpectedly assumed the presidency. As President,

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, 84.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 126.

Truman preoccupied himself by thinking about what FDR would have wanted or what FDR would have done if he were still president.<sup>9</sup> Like Coolidge and Truman, LBJ adopted a similar agenda to that of his predecessor, John F. Kennedy. In his autobiography, LBJ admitted, “I felt from the very first day in office that I had to carry on for President Kennedy...I never lost sight of the fact that I was the trustee and custodian of the Kennedy Administration.”<sup>10</sup> Even Gerald Ford, the only Vice President to enter the White House upon the resignation of a president, “followed closely Nixon’s policies with few exceptions.”<sup>11</sup> Although at times morbid, presidential deaths function as important reminders that the Office of the Vice President should not be disregarded. While succession to the presidency in the event of death or resignation is the most important aspect of the vice presidency, there is little extant literature addressing the variation between accidental presidents. My thesis will address this gap in presidential and vice presidential scholarship.

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<sup>9</sup> Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Putnam’s, 1973), 249.

<sup>10</sup> Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 19.

<sup>11</sup> Joel K. Goldstein, *The Modern American Vice Presidency*, (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1982), 215.

## Research Inquiries and Methodology

Based on the preceding observations, my main research questions include:

(1) What factors shape whether a vice president, who has accidentally obtained the presidency (i.e. due to death or assassination), will emulate the policies of his immediate predecessor or enact a completely different route?

(2) Why did a shift occur between the going rogue strategy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the emulation strategy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?

(3) How have the institutional capabilities and development of the Office of the Vice President (i.e. amount of interaction with the President, the expansion of the Vice Presidential staff, the inclusion of Vice Presidents in Cabinet meetings) been affected by the decisions of certain Vice Presidents to either “go rogue” or to continue the agenda of their predecessors?

In order to successfully address these questions, a diverse and large amount of qualitative data has been compiled. A significant portion of my evidence is derived from primary and secondary sources that I obtained through multiple trips to the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. I also scoured through multiple historical archives and electronic databases including: the Miller Center at the University of Virginia, the Buffalo Historical Society’s Archives, and the Indiana State Library’s Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection. My qualitative sources also consist of autobiographies, correspondences, oral biographies, party platforms, speeches, and newspaper articles. Certain aspects of my methodology are also quantitative in nature.



During my discussions on party unity and the policy preferences of presidents and their successors, I will rely upon the DW Nominate Scores Database compiled by Royce Carroll, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal. Unless otherwise noted, all of the quantitative data included within my tables and graphs are derived from the DW Nominate Scores Database. Synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative data will enable me to better tackle each of the above-mentioned inquiries.

### **Thesis Statement**

Accidental presidents of the 1800s and early twentieth century engaged in a “going rogue” strategy due to a number of factors including: *party instability*, *nomination practices*, and *institutional isolation*. The first five vice presidents who unexpectedly became president presided during eras when their respective political parties were in turmoil (i.e. there were numerous factions/divides or the party seemed to lack ideological focus). While the 1800s was the century of the American party, this did not always translate to a strong sense of party cohesion or stability. During the administrations of the first five accidental presidencies, a political issue tended to internally splinter the parties. Such a divide often obscured the party’s views on a particular issue and underscored the weakness of party discipline. Multiple factions, coupled with a lack of institutional organization, foiled party leaders’ attempts to articulate an overarching theme to unify the party. This made it further difficult to punish members for not upholding the party’s universal themes. Without a clear party line to adhere, accidental

presidents were generally free to craft their own ideologies and policies. Typically, the accidental president was either (1) able to gain control over an entire wing of the party and divert that section of the party away from the predecessor's stance or (2) able to exploit the lack of ideological harmony within the Congress to bring new coalitions of support.

Through the use of DW Nominate Scores, one can empirically measure the strength of party identification and cohesion that existed within the chambers of Congress. The DW Nominate system assesses the strength of party identification (party unity) by tallying the number of roll call votes in which Congressmen voted along the lines of their party. This scoring system also determines the policy preferences of both presidents and Congressmen by analyzing their support for certain pieces of legislation, their general political philosophy (conservative versus liberal), and their stance on certain important issues of their time (slavery, bi-metallism, or civil rights).<sup>12</sup> Overall, the general trends from the DW Nominate database indicate that party cohesion and ideological distinctions amongst the national parties within the 19<sup>th</sup> century Congresses were often in flux when compared to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Congresses.

Furthermore, the political parties' domination of the nomination conventions (i.e. the parties' ability to handpick the presidential and vice presidential candidates) often resulted in the pairing of running mates who were from different ideological wings of the party and unfamiliar with each other. The

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<sup>12</sup> When constructing my graphs based on the DW Nominate scores, the two dimensions I utilized included: conservative/liberal ideology (the horizontal axis) and support of an important political issue (the vertical axis).

vast majority of nineteenth century presidents had relatively poor relationships with their vice presidents. This was largely the case, too, with the accidental presidents and their predecessors.<sup>13</sup> A negative relationship between the president and the vice president often led to the vice president's exclusion from executive branch proceedings. In many instances, particularly for Chester A. Arthur and Theodore Roosevelt, this exclusion sparked the flame that inspired these nineteenth century accidental presidents to engage in rogue behavior.

Finally, due to institutional constraints (i.e. lack of access to the President) and the historically negative view of the Office of the Vice President, accidental presidents, during their tenures as vice presidents, often had little to no interaction with their predecessors. Naturally this made it difficult to ensure continuity following the death of a president. Nineteenth century vice presidents also faced a number of institutional obstacles that separated them from their presidents. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century creation of the Executive Office of the President or the White House Staff, Cabinet officials ruled the executive branch, were highly territorial, and viciously defended their clout. As was the case with John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, and Theodore Roosevelt, the Cabinet often barred the vice president from gaining access to the president or offering counsel. In addition to dealing with Cabinet officials, vice presidents often had to navigate through "kitchen cabinets" or informal groups of presidential advisors such as President Harding's K Street Gang. Simply put: going rogue may have been the only option for a nineteenth

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<sup>13</sup> Vice President Theodore Roosevelt reportedly once remarked, "[President] McKinley shows all the backbone of a chocolate éclair."

century accidental president because he did not have the ability to access his predecessor's opinions nor learn his predecessor's policy stances and beliefs.

The shift from going rogue to the emulation style of Coolidge or Truman during the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a consequence of greater party discipline, ideological cohesiveness, and institutional reforms that were brought to the vice presidency. As nominating conventions shifted away from the parties and toward individuals, presidential candidates enjoyed greater autonomy in picking their running mate. Providing the presidential candidate with greater agency in choosing who joined him on the ballot led to more cooperative and congenial relationships between presidents and their vice presidents. The party's outlook also transitioned from the local to the national level. Power was diverted away from state chapters of the Republican and Democratic parties and funneled to the Republican and Democratic National Committees, respectively. Greater party power at the national level opened more pathways to ensure greater party discipline, primarily in the form of allocating funds and resources. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, political parties became more organizationally coherent. Ideological cohesiveness and party lines were more clearly defined. The professionalization of parties decreased the probability of party members going rogue. Lastly, the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed significant institutional reform to the vice presidency. Vice presidents experienced an increase in their workload and responsibilities, becoming an integral component to the Office of the President. As the vice presidency moved, both institutionally (and physically) away from the Senate and closer to the White

House, greater harmony between the policies of accidental presidents and their predecessors can be observed.

### **Significance**

Political scientists have largely dismissed the American vice presidency. Those who do study the office, such as Jody Baumgartner and Paul Light, have typically focused on the role that the vice president plays in coordinating foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> However, such analyses typically begin with Nelson Rockefeller's vice presidency (1974-1977). Other academics, such as Hiller and Kriner have explored how much of an impact a vice presidential nominee has on the electability of his running mate.<sup>15</sup> Yet, with the exception of Irving William's expertly-crafted *The Rise of the Vice Presidency*, few academics have engaged in a historical overview of the vice president. Moreover, the subject of accidental presidents is often not discussed in conjunction with the vice presidency.

My research will help rectify this dearth of vice presidential scholarship. Not only is my thesis historical in nature but it also provides a joint study of the presidency, the vice presidency, and the interaction between these two offices. More importantly, my research addresses the variation between accidental presidents who employed a rogue strategy and those who followed in their predecessors' footsteps. As I will show, the extant literature is relatively silent on

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<sup>14</sup> Jody Baumgartner, *The American Vice Presidency Reconsidered*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006); Paul C. Light, *Vice Presidential Power*, (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> Mark Hiller and Douglas Kriner, "Institutional Change and the Dynamics of Vice Presidential Selection," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 3, (September 2008), 401.

what causes this variation to occur. The literature also provides little to no explanation as to why the rogue strategy faded away only to give rise to the emulation strategy. Additionally, my research traces the evolution of the vice presidency as an institution. It will assess the bureaucratic factors that enabled the Office of the Vice President to transition from the “most insignificant office that...man contrived” to the influential role that it is today.<sup>16</sup>

Essentially, my theory contributes the following:

1. It establishes a new approach to not only thinking about the rarely discussed concept of accidental presidents but also recognizes that there are ways to categorize the 9 accidental presidents into one of two categories (rogue or emulator).
2. My model works both across (i.e. between the rogues and the emulators) and within the two groupings. Under my theory, I provide historical explanations and empirical evidence for why some of the rogue presidents were able to diverge more from their predecessor than other rogues. Conversely, my theory can assess which emulator did a superior job in following the views of his predecessor.
3. Lastly, my theory understands that institutions rarely work independently of each other. It analyzes not only the presidency and vice presidency but also it pays attention to how party

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<sup>16</sup> Baumgartner, 3

organization, party identity, and party cohesion impact the relationship between presidents and their vice presidents.

Aside from the theoretical contributions that my thesis will make, the argument I've crafted carries practical implications as well. As often stated, the vice president is but a heartbeat away from the most powerful political position in the nation. This makes the rogue strategy all the more fascinating particularly given the complexity of domestic and foreign policy. Moreover, as history has shown, the policies enacted by accidental presidents can be groundbreaking and controversial (i.e. Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb or Ford's decision to pardon Nixon). The decisions and policies enacted by these inadvertent inheritors of the nation's highest office have impacted the presidency and have affected how the vice presidency is viewed. Presidential candidates today are mindful of the significance behind their vice presidential choices. This has often led to a protracted vetting process where the field of candidates is comprised of highly capable individuals. From my research, one can hopefully make predictions for the future such as whether the Office of the Vice President will expand in its potency and prestige.

Finally, from a normative perspective, this research is vital because it addresses how the historical record has interpreted the legacies of these accidental presidents. With the exception of Theodore Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Lyndon Johnson, accidental presidents have rarely been ranked as great or near-great presidents. My research will attempt to offer explanations as to why these accidental presidents were, for the most part, failures. More fundamentally, this

discussion raises issues concerning democratic transitions. How troubling is it if an accidental president – who has inherited the office – abandons the principles on which he and his running mate were elected? Is emulation an effective leadership strategy? Lastly, my research should function as a guide, offering assistance to vice presidents who may find themselves in a situation similar to the position John Tyler faced 170 years ago.

### **Overview**

In Chapter Two, I shall assess the existing literature on accidental presidents and also further expand upon my various theories. Then, I will move on to my evidence chapters (Chapters Three and Four). Throughout these chapters, I shall rely predominately on the qualitative research that I compiled from the Library of Congress. Within the evidence chapters, I will include the DW Nominate party unity scores compiled by Poole, et.al, when analyzing the relationship between party stability and the differing strategies utilized by accidental presidents. Chapter Three will be devoted to the “rogues,” who include: John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, Andrew Johnson, Chester A. Arthur, and Theodore Roosevelt. In Chapter Four, I will discuss the emulators – Calvin Coolidge, Harry Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Gerald Ford. The concluding chapter will address my research’s implications on the study of the vice presidency and presidency.



## **Chapter Two: Exploring Theoretical Understandings of the Vice Presidency and Accidental Presidents**

*“It will be thought proper in a book of 175 pages on the Presidency to devote four or five to the Vice Presidency.” – Clinton Rossiter*

### **Chapter Overview**

Within this chapter, I briefly summarize the arguments advanced by scholars who have discussed accidental presidents and their impact on the Office of the Vice President. After reviewing the literature, I outline my theory and variables. Each variable will be discussed in detail within its own sub-section. At the end of the chapter, I have included a table highlighting my findings.

### **Literature Review**

As the above quote from Clinton Rossiter suggests, scholarly discourse on the vice presidency is limited. An examination of the extant literature reveals that vice presidential scholars have rarely focused on the main questions that I wish to address. Contemporary discussions on the vice presidency tend to focus on Vance R. Kincade Jr.’s, “Vice-Presidential Dilemma” (Why have vice presidents been mostly unsuccessful in obtaining the nation’s highest office?) or on posing Constitutional hypotheticals related to the Twenty-Fifth Amendment.<sup>17</sup> Overall,

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<sup>17</sup> Vance R. Kincade, Jr. *Heirs Apparent: Solving the Vice Presidential Dilemma*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 6-7.

there seems to be little to no discussion on the topic of accidental presidents, despite their surprising frequency.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, there have been some scholars who have substantively grappled with the questions that I have raised. In his detailed and at times humorous overview of the Office of the Vice President, historian Jeremy Lott notes that vice presidents, “have a tendency to go their own way as president, upsetting political coalitions and the party faithful and reshaping American society in the process.”<sup>19</sup> Lott provides an institutional-focused theory to explain why one sees policy changes between accidental presidents and their predecessors. For Lott, it is the Office of the President itself that convinces individuals to alter their beliefs. He explains, “the presidency often changes people.” As presidents, individuals, even if they were former vice presidents, had to dismiss their own provincial interests and assume a new mindset.<sup>20</sup> It is the nationalistic character of the Chief Executive that explains shifts in individuals’ preferences. For example, Lott would argue that it was presidential accountability to the public that convinced accidental president Millard Fillmore to suppress his Northern disdain for slavery and pass the Compromise of 1850 despite his predecessor’s refusal to negotiation with Southerners.

However, Lott’s theory is faulty for numerous reasons. First, factors other than the nationalist tone of the presidency compel individuals to change their beliefs and opinions when they occupy the Oval Office. His thesis is silent on the

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<sup>18</sup> Since the election of George Washington, the nine accidental presidents have occupied the White House for 39 of 223 years. This is including accidental presidents who were then elected to their own term.

<sup>19</sup> Lott, xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 128.

potential impacts that elections, parties, and public opinion may have on an individual's decision to change once he becomes president. Lott's theory additionally fails to address why President Zachary Taylor was unwilling to acquiesce to the demands of the South if it meant preserving the national character of the United States. It also ignores the historical fact that President John Tyler retained a sectional rather than national viewpoint. During his tenure, Tyler's personal views echoed that of the Old South, which deeply emphasized states rights and advocated for the perpetuation of slavery. Clearly, some presidents do not necessarily inherit a nationalist point of view. More significantly, while Lott's theory may be useful in explaining why certain accidental presidents became rogues, it fails to address the accidental presidents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who emulated the policies of their predecessors. If the Office of the President alters viewpoints and beliefs, why then did Coolidge, Truman, Johnson, and Ford all advance their predecessors' programs?

Phillip Abbott's 2008 work, *Accidental Presidents: Death, Assassination, Resignation, and Democratic Succession*, addresses the issues I have raised in more detail than Lott's history on the vice presidency. Abbott's primary thesis insists that legitimacy, or the need to assert oneself as the Chief Executive, predominately explains why accidental presidents went rogue and established their own agendas. As Abbott writes in his introduction, "Without assuming office through direct elections these presidents must find ways to replicate legitimacy conferred by election...[they] must hastily find ways to establish their

qualifications as rex.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in order to avoid being perceived as merely clerks and to preserve their legacies within the historical record, accidental presidents must engage in what Abbott calls “an independent strategy,” (his version of the rogue strategy).<sup>22</sup> Abbott highlights accidental presidents’ decisions to take the Oath of Office and their requests that their predecessors’ Cabinet members resign. For Abbott, such actions help to bolster the accidental president’s sense of legitimacy when he first enters office. Additionally, Abbott maintains that accidental presidents have capitalized on the ability to enact a new agenda (such as Theodore Roosevelt’s Square Deal) in order to project their legitimacy as President of the United States.

However, there are a number of faults with Abbot’s argument. While qualms about legitimacy certainly affected how accidental presidents acted, in my opinion, the legitimacy concern only had a significant impact during the Tyler Administration. The Virginian’s insistence that he was President as opposed to “Acting President” ignited a brief constitutional crisis. Tyler’s opponents questioned the necessity and legality of his decision to assume the title, President of the United States. Even then, the controversy surrounding Tyler’s legitimacy as the new Chief Executive has been hyperbolized. As has been suggested by historian Edward Crapol, Tyler acknowledged the strong likelihood that Harrison (who was 68 when he entered office) would die and that Tyler would complete his term.<sup>23</sup> Tyler’s forceful insistence that he was President rather than “Acting

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<sup>21</sup> Phillip Abbott, *Accidental Presidents*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Crapol, *John Tyler: The Accidental President*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 8-9.

President,” further made the debate a moot point. Lastly, correspondences addressed to the “Acting President of the United States,” went unanswered. By the time Millard Fillmore assumed the presidency in the wake of Zachary Taylor’s demise, there were no constitutional brouhahas.

Another deficiency in Abbott’s argument is that his legitimacy thesis does not explain why Vice Presidents Coolidge, Truman, Johnson, and Ford all engaged in emulation. If Abbott’s independent strategy functioned as the road to presidential legitimacy, why then did a shift away from this strategy occur in the 20th century? Additionally, like Lott’s thesis, Abbott’s work is fairly limited in scope. It isolates the Offices of the Vice President and the President and fails to address the influence that entities such as the other branches of government, the media, lobbying groups, national opinion, and political parties may have in shaping an accidental presidents’ decision to either become a rogue or an emulator. Lastly, Abbott fails to comment on the relationship between the accidental presidents and their predecessors.

### **Theory Building**

Based on the weakness of Abbott’s thesis, I shall posit that there are other variables that one should consider in order to understand both the “going rogue” behavior and the emulation strategy. My theory will be an improvement upon earlier arguments that have been advanced because it provides a rationale for why this shift from the rejection to the mimicking of the predecessor’s policies took

place. It will provide a better depiction of the actual relationship between the accidental presidents and their predecessors. Lastly, my theory addresses the significant impact that institutional design and political parties have on the Offices of the President and the Vice President.

As I mentioned within my introductory chapter, there are three main factors that I believe determine whether or not an accidental president engaged in the rogue or emulation strategy: party instability, nomination practices, and institutional isolation. Changes within these factors between the nineteenth and twentieth century explain why the rogues disappeared with the unplanned ascension of Calvin Coolidge to the presidency in 1923.

### ***Party Instability***

For my first variable, I will argue that a positive correlation exists between party instability and the frequency of the rogue strategy. Party instability can be defined as lack of ideological unity or an inability to ensure conformity amongst members. Essentially, the less ideologically stable and coherent a party is, the more likely one should expect to see an accidental president adopt the “going rogue” strategy. For a comparative example, this phenomenon has been discussed by political scientists who study Latin American democracies. Cox and Morgenstern note that when political parties within Latin American assemblies are unable to coalesce ideologically, the legislative body weakens. This weakening forces the assembly to become largely reactionary to whatever policies

the president pursues. In the absence of a well organized party, Latin American presidents, particularly in Argentina and Venezuela, are provided the latitude to act unilaterally and dictate policy.<sup>24</sup>

Amongst American scholars, this claim that a dearth of ideological cohesion weakens political parties is supported by the exhaustively well-researched *History of the Whig Party*. Within the text, R.McKinley Ormsby details the challenges that opposition parties (i.e. the Whigs) face in their attempt to oust the party in power (the Jacksonian Democrats). Ormsby asserts that opposition parties are loosely connected and are, “anxious for success for the mere sake of success.”<sup>25</sup> So desirous is the opposition party to achieve victory that internal ideological divisions are often overlooked. An unwillingness to confront internal ideological divides leads to vague party principles. As Ormsby notes, in the Whigs’ 1840 presidential campaign, the party failed to draft a platform. During the election of 1848, the Whigs again neglected to establish a platform and merely presented themselves as the anti-Democrat party.<sup>26</sup> More significantly, Ormsby depicts how ideological vagueness can foment factions and a lack of party discipline; this enables rogue-like behavior to occur. Ormsby emphasizes that such a pattern occurred with the Compromise of 1850. The Whigs’ inability to come together on the slavery question led to intra-party fighting across geographic divisions. Whig Party in-fighting provided President Fillmore with enough maneuvering space to renounce President Taylor’s anti-

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<sup>24</sup> Gary W. Cox and Scott Morgenstern, “Latin America’s Reactive Assemblies and Proactive Presidents,” *Comparative Politics*, Vol 33, No.2, (2001), 178.

<sup>25</sup> R.McKinley Ormsby, *A History of The Whig Party*, (Boston, Crosby, Nicholas & Company, 1859), 294.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 304.

compromise position, strike a bargain with the South, and act without much impediment from the Congress.<sup>27</sup>

Like the Whigs, the Republicans' inability to remain ideologically cohesive on a certain issue led to the formation of factions that ultimately enabled roguish behavior. President Andrew Johnson initially muscled through his plans for Reconstruction as Congressional Republicans split amongst conservatives, moderates, and Radicals. Arthur confronted the Stalwarts and Half-Breeds who fought interminably over civil service reform. Theodore Roosevelt concentrated power within the executive branch as Old Guard and Progressive Republicans grappled over control for the Congress. In all three instances, party fisticuffs permitted these accidental presidents to have a free reign in developing policies.

Lastly, while instances of party instability and disunity may be exemplified through qualitative data, such information may also be depicted quantitatively through DW Nominate Scores. Compiled by political scientists Royce Carroll, Keith T. Poole, Nolan McCarty, and Howard Rosenthal, DW Nominate Scores quantify the policy preferences of Congressmen based on their roll call votes records. The scores have recently been converted to additionally reflect the policy preferences of presidents. These policy preferences/ideological viewpoints are expressed along a conservative-liberal spectrum, with 1.0 representing the highest conservative score and -1.0 representing the highest liberal score. They also gauge where a congressman or president stood with respect to their support of a hot-button issue of their day (i.e. slavery, silver

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 306.



coinage, etc.).<sup>28</sup> DW Nominate Scores also track the level of unity within each of the Congressional parties.<sup>29</sup> Later in my analysis, I will depict these scores when discussing party cohesion and how this helped determine whether an accidental president developed a rogue or emulation strategy.

### *Nominating Practices*

Throughout the 1800s, the party's presidential candidate often had little to no say over who his running mate would be. With the exception of Andrew Johnson, who was highly sought after by President Lincoln, all of the 19<sup>th</sup> century vice presidents (who later became accidental presidents) were foisted upon the presidential candidate by party leaders. Joel Goldstein explains in *The Modern American Vice Presidency*, "Presidential nominees...were unable to dictate who would fill the second spot...They lacked necessary control over the body [the conventions].<sup>30</sup> As a result, the working relationship between presidents and their vice presidents throughout the 1800s and into the early 1900s was not necessarily productive or beneficial. For example, despite his personal wishes, President William McKinley was virtually powerless to prevent the Republican Party bosses from nominating Theodore Roosevelt to the vice presidential slot during the Republican National Convention of 1900.

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<sup>28</sup> Royce Carroll, et.al, "Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112<sup>th</sup>," *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm>

<sup>29</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, "DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses," *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).

<sup>30</sup> Joel K. Goldstein, *The Modern American Vice Presidency*, (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1982), 47.

Daniel Klinghard maintains that as the twentieth century developed, both parties subscribed to the idea of presidential party leadership. (i.e. the president became the national spokesman for the party and defined party principles).<sup>31</sup> William Carleton posits that since the turn of the twentieth century, the clout of the powerful party bosses had declined. As individuals actively sought their parties' nominations by competing in primaries and caucuses, the number of Thurlow Weeds, Mark Hannas, and other "king-makers" steadily dropped.<sup>32</sup> The 1920 Republican National Convention validates Carleton's claims. Angered over the maneuverings of the Republican Senate leaders to appoint Harding as the presidential candidate, floor delegates revolted against the party bosses' attempt to declare Irvine H. Lenroot as the vice presidential nominee. Rather, delegates successfully nominated Massachusetts Governor Calvin Coolidge. The Coolidge cabal indicated that the seat of power had shifted away from party bosses and towards the greater party delegations.<sup>33</sup>

Klinghard and Carleton's argument regarding the nominating conventions' shift to individuals is bolstered by Jody Baumgartner's work, *The American Vice Presidency Reconsidered*. Baumgartner suggests that the new focus on individuals rather than on the party provided presidential candidates with greater means in choosing their vice presidential running mate. As Baumgartner writes, providing presidential candidates with the ability to select their running mate "resulted in vice presidential candidates who were more competent, loyal to, and compatible

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<sup>31</sup> Daniel Klinghard, *The Nationalization of American Political Parties, 1880-1896*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010) 234-235.

<sup>32</sup> William Carleton, "The Revolution in the Presidential Nominating Convention," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol 72, No. 2, 1957, 224.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, 118.

with [the presidential candidate].”<sup>34</sup> As the twentieth century progressed and presidential candidates obtained greater say over whom their running mate would be, the personal relationships between many of these men improved. Goldstein supports Baumgartner’s claim. Within his work, Goldstein contends that permitting the presidential nominee to pick his running mate offered the nominee more time to consider his options rather than rushing through a decision. Perhaps more importantly, the presidential nominee could potentially consider other factors besides simply geography when deciding upon a vice presidential candidate.<sup>35</sup> In one chart, Goldstein contends that considerable ideological cohesion existed amongst Kennedy and LBJ as well as Nixon and Ford.<sup>36</sup> From a normative standpoint, it is logical that a candidate would desire a running mate who embraced similar ideals and philosophies about government. I will argue that the emphasis on loyalty and fostering a strong bond between the president and the vice president functioned as another blow to the “going rogue” strategy, making emulation more appealing for accidental presidents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Institutional Outlook and Reform***

The institutional reform and development of the Office of the Vice President has been extensively discussed by numerous scholars including Baumgartner and Paul C. Light. The third component of my argument will show that the institutional relationship, as well as how the Office of the Vice Presidency

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<sup>34</sup> Baumgartner, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Goldstein, 66-67.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 73.

was perceived, impacted whether or not accidental presidents pursued the “going rogue” or the emulation strategy. For Baumgartner, the institutional development of the vice presidency can be characterized into three eras: traditional (1789-1896), transitional (1896-1960), and modern (1960 – present).

During the traditional era, the vice presidency remained relatively isolated from the Chief Executive. Moreover, the 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment, ratified in 1804, affected the institutional makeup of presidential elections, which ultimately hampered the vice presidency. The 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment’s requirement that candidates run on a ticket essentially meant that vice presidents no longer had to be the second most-qualified individual for the job of president. As a result, the “traditional era” saw the proliferation of, “cranks, criminals...a rogue gallery of personal and political failures.”<sup>37</sup> Given both the vice presidency’s isolation from the Chief Executive as well as the office’s poor standing in the eyes of most Americans, I shall assert that during the “traditional era” accidental presidents were far more likely to become rogues due to institutional constraints as well as the lack of access and connection to their predecessors.

Nevertheless, as the vice presidency became institutionally linked to the Executive Branch, emulation rather than “going rogue” became the strategy of choice amongst the accidental presidents. However, this institutional closeness did not begin until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, during what Baumgartner refers to as the “transitional era.”<sup>38</sup> The “transitional era” was characterized by vice presidents obtaining greater access to the presidents, serving as formal advisors, functioning

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<sup>37</sup> Baumgartner, 14.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 23.

as chairs on various commissions, and regularly attending Cabinet meetings. Relyea and Arja, in *The Vice Presidency of the United States: Evolution of the Modern Office*, point to the modest reforms of the Wilson and Harding Administrations that started Baumgartner's "transitional era." Indeed, President Harding was the first president since George Washington to formally invite his vice president to consistently attend Cabinet meetings, a tradition that Coolidge continued when he obtained the presidency in his own right in 1924.<sup>39</sup>

The "transitional era," according to Baumgartner, reached its peak during the FDR/Truman years. Joel Goldstein similarly states that the "seeds of an active vice presidency" were steadily planted during this time period as well.<sup>40</sup> Fully aware that he had only privately met with FDR twice during his tenure as vice president, Truman sought to enact true reform to the vice presidency. Through Truman's Congressional wrangling, the vice president was made a statutory member of the National Security Council under the National Security Act of 1947. Moreover, Truman, through a variety of executive orders, increased the number of commissions within the Executive Branch, and he quickly appointed Vice President Barkley to head many of these new boards.<sup>41</sup>

By 1960, Baumgartner asserts that the Office of the Vice President had finally entered the modern age as exemplified by President Kennedy's decision to establish a second vice presidential office in the Old Executive Office Building

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<sup>39</sup> Harold C. Relyea and Charles V. Arja, *The Vice Presidency of the United States: Evolution of the Modern Office*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, 2002), 12.

<sup>40</sup> Goldstein, 137.

<sup>41</sup> Lott, 165.

nearby the White House.<sup>42</sup> The modern age of the vice presidency witnessed a string of highly capable individuals within that office (Nelson Rockefeller, Walter Mondale, Al Gore, etc.) as well as an expansion in duties. Communication and interaction between the president and the vice president increased significantly. The reforms of the “transitional era” contributed to the decline of the going rogue strategy. With the exception of the roguish Roosevelt, the 20<sup>th</sup> century vice presidents who inherited the presidency due to their predecessors’ deaths (or resignation) continued the spirit of the former presidents’ administrations. Institutional reform and closeness to the president compelled accidental presidents to emulate rather than eject the policies of their predecessors.

### **Theory Summation**

The next two chapters will provide evidence to support the following: accidental presidents are prone to go rogue when party instability is high, institutional interaction between the president and the vice president is low, and vice presidential candidates are determined by the parties. Conversely, when parties retain their cohesion, institutional factors promote high interaction between the president and the vice president, and individual candidates have the freedom to select their running mates, accidental presidents will generally emulate the policies of their deceased predecessor. On the following pages, I have included a table that summarizes each of my nine case studies.

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<sup>42</sup> Relyea and Arja, 19.

*Table One: Summary and Trends amongst the Rogues and Emulators*

<b>Accidental President</b>	<b>Years Served</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Tipping Point*</b>	<b>Party Cohesion**</b>	<b>Nomination</b>	<b>Level of Institutional Isolation from Predecessor</b>
John Tyler	1841-1845	Rogue	Veto of the National Bank (Sept. 1841)	Moderate: Some intra-party fighting over bank and economic issues	Party nomination – selected for regional balance	High
Millard Fillmore	1851-1853	Rogue	Compromise of 1850	Minimal: Party torn apart over slavery	Party nomination – selected for regional balance	Low then High
Andrew Johnson	1865-1869	Rogue	Lenient Reconstruction plan (late 1865) Veto of the Freedmen's Bureau Bill and Civil Rights Act (1866)	Minimal: Factions emerged amongst Republicans	Selected by Lincoln	High
Chester A. Arthur	1881-1885	Rogue	Differences in civil rights and economic policies.	Minimal: Bitter party in-fighting amongst the Stalwarts and Half-Breeds	Party nomination – selected from other wing of the party	High
Theodore Roosevelt	1901-1909	Rogue	Brokered the United Mine Workers strike; passed the anti-trust Elkins Act (1904)	Moderate: Growing divide between the Progressives and the old guard	Forced on the ticket by Senator Platt	High

Calvin Coolidge	1923-1929	Emulator	Retention of Harding's business policies; December 6, 1923 radio address	Strong: Tenor of the Republican Party was mostly pro-business	Selected as surprise replacement to retaliate against party bosses	Low
Harry Truman	1945-1951	Emulator	Moved forward with the UN proceedings (1945); creation of the Fair Deal	Strong: Democrats retained control of the government for over a decade	Hand-picked by FDR	Low
Lyndon Johnson	1963-1969	Emulator	Retention of JFK's cabinet, continuation of Vietnam war policy, passage of the Civil Rights Act (March 1964)	Moderate: Growing divide amongst Democrats over civil rights legislation and Great Society	Tapped by JFK to run on the ticket	Low
Gerald Ford	1974-1977	Emulator	Retention of some of Nixon's advisors; concluding the war on Vietnam and other foreign policy goals; similar economic policies (WIN)	Moderate: Republicans still able to rally behind Ford; later on there would be a fallout between Ford and the more conservative wing of the party	Selected by Nixon	Low

\*By tipping point, I am referring to a certain moment or indicator wherein the accidental president either adopted the rogue strategy or the emulation tactic. Of course it is difficult to pinpoint an exact moment, but often the signing or vetoing of a piece of legislation is ordinarily a good marker for assessing whether or not an accidental president will go rogue.

\*\*Party cohesion will be quantitatively measured through DW Nominate Scores.



## Chapter Three: The Rogues

*“I feel myself as much a....president as McKinley was...”*

*– Theodore Roosevelt, 1901*

### Part I: John Tyler

#### *Overview*

On April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1841, the United States faced a novel tragedy. After only a brief month in office, President William Henry Harrison, the famed hero of the War of 1812, passed away, leaving the nation, “overwhelmed...by an event so unexpected and so melancholy.”<sup>43</sup> Harrison’s death stifled the triumphant atmosphere surrounding the fledgling Whig Party. The Whigs had just achieved their first presidential victory and had swept the Congressional elections, obtaining majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Throughout the presidential campaign of 1840, Harrison indicated his willingness to follow Congressional leadership, particularly that of Henry Clay, the Kentucky statesman who dominated the Whigs in the Senate. Clay and his Senate colleagues had planned to rely on Harrison’s compliant nature to finally push through their “American System” agenda, which called for internal improvements, a protective tariff, and most importantly, the reinstatement of the Bank of the United States (BUS).

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<sup>43</sup> The National Intelligencer, “Public Announcement: Death of President Harrison, April 5, 1841,” *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, Vol.4, James D. Richardson, ed., (Washington D.C., US Congress Joint Committee on Printing, 1897), 22.

However, now confronted with the death of their standard-bearer, Whig leaders were uncertain how the first “accidental president,” John Tyler, would behave. Upon receiving word of Harrison’s demise, Vice President Tyler decisively asserted his new position. On April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1841, Tyler took the oath of office and issued an inaugural address.<sup>44</sup> Within his speech, the staunch supporter of states’ rights conveyed his commitment to Whig principles. Tyler advocated for, “A complete separation between the sword and the purse...I shall promptly give my sanction to any constitutional measure which, originating in Congress, shall have for its object the restoration of [our economic system].”<sup>45</sup> Tyler’s speech won the admiration of the *National Intelligencer*, one of the Whig Party’s principal newspapers. Tyler’s record in Congress painted him as a proponent for a strong legislative branch and a limited executive. The *Virginian* routinely criticized President Jackson’s unilateral actions surrounding the 1833 Nullification Crisis and the dismantling of the Second BUS.<sup>46</sup> Based on Tyler’s adherence to Congressional supremacy, Clay believed that they could exert enough control over accidental President Tyler to accomplish their legislative agenda. Initially, President Tyler perpetuated the Whigs’ image of him as “caretaker” of Harrison’s policies. He retained the late President’s Cabinet.<sup>47</sup> In a letter to Clay, President Tyler expressed his willingness to defer to Congress, stating, “It will not be expected that I shall come before Congress with matured

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<sup>44</sup> Norma Lois Peterson, *The Presidencies of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler*, (Lawrence, KS, University Press of Kansas, 1989), 49.

<sup>45</sup> John Tyler, “Address Accepting Office, April 6<sup>th</sup> 1841,” *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, Vol.4, James D. Richardson, ed., (US Congress Joint Committee on Printing, Washington D.C., 1897), p.37-39.

<sup>46</sup> Edward Crapol, *John Tyler: The Accidental President*, (Chapel Hill, NC, The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 41.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

plans of public policy.”<sup>48</sup> Emboldened by Tyler’s response, Clay revealingly implied that Tyler would function as a “regent,” a vehicle that would secure Clay’s ambitions to establish a new national bank.<sup>49</sup>

By September 1841, Clay’s dreams of establishing a regency era were shattered. Over the summer, despite Congressional attempts to compromise and Tyler’s earlier commitment, the President struck down two bills that called for the establishment of what would have been the Third Bank of the United States. Tyler’s actions posed a significant threat to Whig solidarity. In his letter to former Whig Congressman Ambrose Spencer, a gloomy Clay professed, “The Whigs present the image of a Body with its head cut off...The President [Tyler]...will leave us...it will be difficult to reunite and harmonize us all again.”<sup>50</sup> Clay’s letter proved to be prophetic. Tyler’s rejection of a national bank separated himself from the views of his predecessor and his party. Tyler’s rogue tactics revealed the lack of intra-party harmony that existed within the Whig Party.

### ***Party Unity***

Tyler’s bank vetoes shed light on the fragmented nature of the Whig Party. As Gale Collins posits, the Whig Party actually held, “many variations on theories

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<sup>48</sup> John Tyler, “Letter to Henry Clay, April 30, 1841,” *The Letters and Times of Tylers, Volume III*, Lyon G. Tyler, ed., (Richmond, VA, Whittet and Shepperson, 1884), 93.

<sup>49</sup> Carl Schurz, *Life of Henry Clay Volume II*, John T. Morse, Jr., ed., (New York, Houghton, Mifflin & Co, 1899), 201.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Clay, “Letter to Ambrose Spencer, August 27, 1841,” *The Papers of Henry Clay, Volume IX*, Robert Seager, ed., (Lexington KY, The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 594.

about a national bank.”<sup>51</sup> While Northern Whigs generally championed for a national bank, support from Southern and Western Whig members was tepid at best. As the *Richmond Whig* proclaimed in January 1840, “Nothing selfish enters the Whig party. *They want no Federal Bank; they want to reduce public burthens...not increase them.*”<sup>52</sup> A Whig consensus over the issue of a national bank had not yet been reached. Even Massachusetts Whig Daniel Webster acknowledged, “The Whigs...were still in serious disagreement about many measures, including whether or not a national bank was necessary, and if it were, what kind of a bank should be devised.”<sup>53</sup> By 1840, the Whigs resembled a loose coalition of, “followers of Clay, Webster, and Calhoun, Anti-Masons, Conservatives, Bank men, Anti-Bank men, Tariff-men, and Nullifiers,” all of whom were united in their antipathy towards Andrew Jackson.<sup>54</sup> Reflecting on the state of the Whigs in 1840, Millard Fillmore wondered how, “to melt [the various factions] into one mass of pure Whig... metal.”<sup>55</sup> Amongst this hodgepodge of politicians, a Whig could arguably deride the formation of a national bank and still proudly assert his party loyalty.

Recognizing their lack of ideological harmony, the Whigs remained silent on economic policies to avoid fracturing the Party.<sup>56</sup> Their conscious attempts to disregard their members’ disparate political views featured prominently in the

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<sup>51</sup> Gail Collins, *William Henry Harrison*, The American Presidency Series, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Sean Wilentz, eds., (New York, Times Books, 2012), 89.

<sup>52</sup> “Richmond Whig, January 13, 1840,” *The Letters and Times of Tylers, Volume I*, Lyon G. Tyler, ed., (Richmond, VA, Whittet and Shepperson, 1884), 612.

<sup>53</sup> Sydney Nathans, *Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy*, (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 157-58.

<sup>54</sup> John Fiske, *Harrison, Tyler, and the Whig Coalition*, (New York, Macmillan, 1903), 339.

<sup>55</sup> Henry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, (New York, Hill&Wang, 1990), 210-11.

<sup>56</sup> Nathans, 157-58.

1840 presidential race between William Henry Harrison and the Democratic incumbent, Martin Van Buren. Whig historian R. McKinley Ormsby blames the Whigs of 1840 for valuing Harrison's fame over the Party's commitment to political principles.<sup>57</sup> Instead of selecting a statesman as their standard-bearer, the Whigs sided with a celebrity, embracing the very populist tactics that they criticized the Jacksonians of pursuing.

In line with the carnival-like spirit of their 1840 campaign, the Whigs failed to formulate a party platform. Additionally, the Whigs nominated John Tyler as Harrison's running mate, despite the Senator's known conservatism and ideological distance from Clay, Webster, and the Northern Whigs.<sup>58</sup> Quickly, vagueness developed as the main theme of the Whigs' campaign. Former director of the Second National Bank Nicholas Biddle insisted, "Let him [Harrison] not say a single word about his principles or his creed, let him say nothing, promise nothing."<sup>59</sup> As a result, during his stump speeches, Harrison evaded issues and cryptically hinted at respect for the Constitution and a willingness to support Clay's American System.<sup>60</sup> Whig leaders enforced this moratorium on specificity on Tyler as well.

During the campaign, Whig party leaders refused to publish Tyler's October 3, 1840, message to the Virginian Democrats of Henrico County in which he indicated his less-than-enthusiastic approval for Clay's agenda and a new Bank

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<sup>57</sup> Ormsby, 292.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 26-27.

<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Biddle, "Letter to Herman Cope, 11 August 1835," *The Correspondence of Nicholas Biddle Dealing with National Affairs, 1807-1844* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 256.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999), 110.

of the United States. Although Tyler expressed his willingness to support Harrison's pro-bank stance, the vice presidential candidate conveyed his own doubts over the constitutionality of the bank.<sup>61</sup> This had not been the first time that Tyler had expressed hostility toward the bank. As early as 1832 in a letter to his close friend, Dr. Henry Curtis, Tyler repeatedly condemned the Second National Bank.<sup>62</sup> However, despite his animosity towards the Bank, Tyler refused to support President Jackson's scheme to remove national bank deposits and place them within state banks. Overall, the Virginian's record on support for a national bank was muddled at best. Incredibly, although Tyler did not accept the same vision of American Whiggery as Clay, Webster, and Harrison accepted, Whig Party members continued to sing, "We'll vote for Tyler, therefore/Without a why or wherefore."<sup>63</sup> The Whigs' lack of a unified ideology and party platform, their campaigning techniques, and their party leaders' decision to select a vice presidential candidate whose support of a national bank was hardly enthusiastic, all hampered Henry Clay's crusade to achieve his American System agenda and permitted Tyler to pursue his own route.

From his previous record, President Tyler's veto of the Senate bank bill (August 16<sup>th</sup> 1841) and the House (September 9<sup>th</sup> 1841) bank bill should not have been too surprising to Clay and the Congressional Whigs. In his August 16<sup>th</sup> veto message, Tyler maintained, "The country has been and still is deeply agitated by

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<sup>61</sup> Dan Monroe, *The Republican Vision of John Tyler*, (College Station, TX, Texas A&M University Press, 2003), 79-80.

<sup>62</sup> John Tyler, "Letter to Dr. Henry Curtis, April 13 1832," *The Papers of John Tyler, 1790-1862*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>63</sup> A.B. Norton, *The Great Revolution of 1840*, (Dallas, A.B. Norton & Co, 1888), 374.

this unsettled question.”<sup>64</sup> Tyler’s comment on the divisiveness of a national bank within his August 16<sup>th</sup> veto message referred not only to the American populace but also to the members of the Whig Party. As Peterson notes, following the Tyler vetoes in August and September, “the [Whig] party was in disarray...The pro- and anti-Tyler controversy was not sectional.”<sup>65</sup> Following Tyler’s veto messages, the Whigs fractured into three camps: the Clay-ites, supporters of the President, and moderates, who urged for reconciliation and feared that in-party fighting would weaken Whig solidarity against the Democrats in the 1842 midterm elections.<sup>66</sup> Calls for mediation, however, fell on deaf ears. The vitriol from Clay and his supporters was intense. In early September, Kentucky Governor R.P. Letcher asserted that the Whigs, “ought to hold a meeting and solemnly censure Tyler...They ought...to declare that no honest Whig should hold office under such a faithless public servant.”<sup>67</sup> Clay echoed Letcher’s sentiments in a harangue delivered before the Whig caucus where he compared Tyler to Benedict Arnold.<sup>68</sup> The attacks of the anti-Tyler wing culminated with the issuance of the Whig “manifesto,” which accused Tyler of severing his ties from the Whig Party.<sup>69</sup>

While the “manifesto” allegedly expunged Tyler from the Whigs, supporters of the President scoffed at the Clay Whigs’ reactions. “I give you my heartfelt congratulations upon your late veto of the bank bill,” wrote Philadelphia

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<sup>64</sup> John Tyler, “Veto Message of the Fiscal Bank, August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1841,” *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, Vol.4, James D. Richardson, ed., (US Congress Joint Committee on Printing, Washington D.C., 1897), 63-64.

<sup>65</sup> Peterson, 90.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>68</sup> Henry Clay, “Speech to the Whig Caucus, September 3, 1841,” *The Papers of Henry Clay, Volume IX*, Robert Seager, ed., (Lexington KY, The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 608-609.

<sup>69</sup> Peterson, 89-90.

Whig, J. Johnson to President Tyler. After proclaiming, “I have always been a Whig,” Johnson assured Tyler that the President stood, “upon the rock of the constitution...the machinations of Henry Clay will never prevail against us.”<sup>70</sup> Whig Congressman Caleb Cushing also ridiculed Clay’s tactics and the Whig manifesto. “I protest against the act itself,” proclaimed Cushing. Cushing insisted that the manifesto was not the unanimous act of the entire Whig Party and that Clay’s imperiousness within the Senate had created a, “CAUCUS DICTATORSHIP” that had driven the rift within the party.<sup>71</sup> Literary editor, Eliakim Littell, in his letter to Secretary of State Webster, also voiced his support for Tyler. Like Cushing, Littell dismissed the “manifesto” in a letter to Secretary of State Webster. In his opinion, the “manifesto” did not, “represent the feelings of the Whigs.”<sup>72</sup> “As a whig,” Littell wrote, “I would say that I cannot imagine any reason why the President’s refusal to sign a *charter* should injure him with that party.” Littell concluded his letter by describing the national bank as, “one of the measures upon which there was not a party union.”<sup>73</sup> The Whigs’ mixed reactions over Tyler’s veto emphasize the fact that the Whigs lacked institution-wide agreement over what policies to support.

Such disunity within the Whig Party is actually quantifiable as seen in the study conducted by Poole, et.al on party unity. Below are the calculated party unity scores amongst Congressional Whigs from 1837-1845:

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<sup>70</sup> J. Johnson, “Letter to President Tyler, Executive Mansion, Washington City, August 23, 1841,” *The Papers of John Tyler, 1790-1862*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>71</sup> Francis Preston Blair, “The Confessions of Caleb Cushing,” *Extra Globe*, Vol.7, No.22, October 13, 1841.

<sup>72</sup> Eliakim Littell, “Letter to Secretary of State Webster, September 14, 1841,” *The Letters and Times of Tylers, Volume III*, Lyon G. Tyler, ed., (Richmond, VA, Whittet and Shepperson, 1884), 97.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, 97.



**Table Two: Whig Party Unity Scores for the House and Senate  
[26<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> Congresses] <sup>74</sup>**

Session of Congress (Date)	House Whig Unity Score *	Senate Whig Party Unity Score*
26 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1839-1841)	0.85	0.87
27 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1841-1843)	0.79	0.89
28 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1843-1845)	0.89	0.87

*\*Party unity is defined as the proportion of Whigs Congressmen voting with the majority of their party.*

Although party unity scores are still relatively high, it is important to note that Whig unity within the House declined during the first two years of the Tyler Administration. Based on the available data, the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress represented the lowest point of cohesion during the existence of the Whig Party. Figure 1 contains the policy-preferences of all the Whig members of the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress. Based on the plot, one can clearly see that the ideologies of Congressional Whigs vastly fluctuated along the conservative-liberal divide.

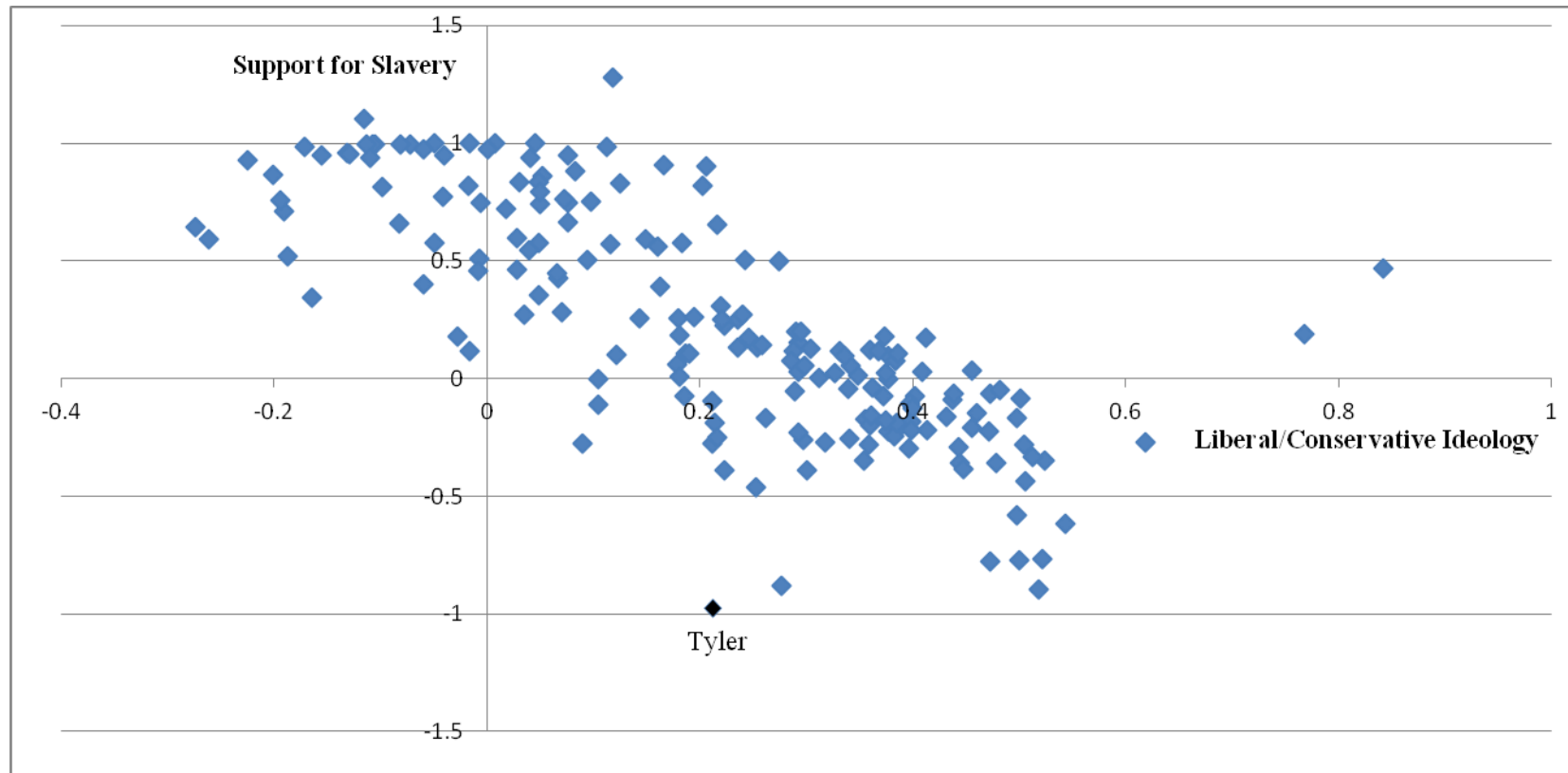
Essentially, the party unity score as well as the disparate ideological preferences of the 27<sup>th</sup> Congress suggest that there was no unanimous consensus on what constituted a true Whig. The scatterplot on the following page, Figure 1, underscores the fact that the Whigs shared multiple policy preferences that existed along a fairly wide political spectrum. President Tyler was not without a party yet.

As indicated, certain elements of the Whigs backed Tyler's decision to veto the bank. Later during his presidency, Tyler appealed to this amalgamation of conservative Whigs and Southern Democrats in order to stymie other Whig Party initiatives including: a land distribution plan and an increase in tariffs.

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<sup>74</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, "DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses," *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).

**Figure 1: Ideal Policy Preferences of Congressional Whigs and Tyler (27<sup>th</sup> Congress: 1841-1843)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, “Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm>. The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Slavery) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1).

Often this coalition blocked Clay Whigs' attempts to override Tyler's vetoes. Tyler employed his patronage power to appoint conservative Whigs and state-righters to federal government positions. Most importantly, Tyler relied on this coalition to pass through a joint resolution that approved the annexation of Texas in 1845, something that the 1844 Whig Presidential nominee Henry Clay and the presumed Democratic nominee, Martin Van Buren, both adamantly opposed.<sup>75</sup>

Overall, Tyler's rogue behavior towards the bank and other Whig issues was due in part to the Whigs' ill-fated strategy to gloss over their ideological differences during the campaign of 1840. As Michael Holt empirically shows, the dearth of harmony within the Whig Party during the fall of 1841 contributed to the party's crushing defeat in the House elections of 1842.<sup>76</sup> Although the Whigs endured their intra-party dispute over the national bank, the political organization ultimately failed to achieve many of the items on their congressional agenda.

### *Nomination Mechanism*

Although a relatively new phenomenon within America's two-party system, the nominating convention had successfully supplanted the earlier era of "King Caucus" in which congressional leaders from the parties would select their presidential and vice-presidential nominees. Holding their second national

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<sup>75</sup> Abbott, 32-34. Many Democrats assumed that Van Buren would be the party's standard bearer in 1844; however, delegate intransigence during the Baltimore Convention as well as Southern Democrats fears over Van Buren's antipathy towards Texas annexation led to the nomination of dark horse candidate James Polk. Polk, like Tyler, supported Texas annexation.

<sup>76</sup> Holt, 151.

convention in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 1839, 250 Whig delegates unanimously nominated John Tyler as Harrison's vice-presidential running mate after more prominent Whigs, including Daniel Webster declined. As discussed previously, the Whigs gave little consideration to Tyler's ideology. Tyler's selection was largely viewed as an attempt to geographically balance the ticket and to placate Henry Clay who had lost the presidential nomination to Harrison. In keeping with the time-period, party leaders did not confer with Harrison over whom his running-mate would be, but the Ohioan agreed that the vice-presidential candidate should come from the South.<sup>77</sup> While Tyler's nomination was due to the party rather than Harrison's blessing, he would quickly display his lack of loyalty to both Harrison and a significant faction of the Whigs.

### *Institutional Status of the Vice Presidency*

The Tyler presidency emphasized the weakness and isolation of the Office of the Vice President. This isolation and impotence was largely reflective of what Jody Baumgartner refers to as the "traditional era" of the vice presidency. As Baumgartner writes, vice presidents of the "traditional" era, "could not even be assured of meeting with the president with any great frequency...they did not attend Cabinet meetings nor were they given any important tasks...[they] had very little reason to be loyal to the president."<sup>78</sup> This was certainly the case for John Tyler, whose, "advice on selections for the cabinet was neither sought nor

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<sup>77</sup> *National Party Conventions, 1831-1976*, (Washington D.C., Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1979), 23.

<sup>78</sup> Baumgartner, 22.

given;” Rather the selection process was dominated by Webster and Clay.<sup>79</sup>

Other than briefly meeting with President-Elect Harrison in Richmond, there is no other indication that Tyler interacted with Harrison in the months leading up to March 4, 1841.<sup>80</sup> Tyler had left Washington D.C. for Williamsburg shortly after the inauguration and was notified of President Harrison’s death while still at home.<sup>81</sup> Arguably, even if Tyler had remained in Washington, it would have been unlikely that the Vice President would have had an audience with Harrison.

During the 1800s, the Presidential Cabinet functioned as an institutional roadblock for those who desired the president’s ear, including the vice president.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, the personal relationship between the president and vice president may have overcome such institutional constraints.

Of course, due to Harrison’s early demise while in office, it is difficult to frame the relationship between the two men. As early as the 1832 presidential, Tyler had praised the Hero of the Thames as a far superior candidate to Jackson and Clay. Tyler even predicted that “[Harrison] may quietly walk into the presidency [in 1832].”<sup>83</sup> Both Harrison and Tyler had similar upbringings as well as political backgrounds (both had served as senators). Potentially, had Harrison lived longer, this may have dissuaded John Tyler from embarking on his course to challenge the Congressional Whigs and veto the national bank bills. Nevertheless,

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<sup>79</sup> Peterson, 34.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>81</sup> Crapol, 8.

<sup>82</sup> David Galvin and Colleen Shogan, “Presidential Politicization and Centralization across the Modern-Traditional Divide,” *Polity*, Vol.36, No.3, (April 2004), 477-78

<sup>83</sup> John Tyler, “Letter to Dr. Henry Curtis, April 13 1832,” *The Papers of John Tyler, 1790-1862*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

due to the institutional weakness of the vice presidency, Tyler would still have had to confront Webster and the Cabinet in order to gain access to the President.

### *Conclusion*

Vice President Tyler's sudden emergence on the presidential stage not only impacted the vice presidency but also ensured that the presidency itself had become what Marcus Cunliffe refers to as, "independent of death."<sup>84</sup> Tyler's actions, such as his decision to take the oath of office, to deliver an inaugural address, to veto the bank bills, and to insist that he was now President rather than Acting President enabled him to avoid being relegated as a caretaker of the late President Harrison's policies. The rejection of the National Bank allowed Tyler to break free from the policy preferences of his predecessor and established his own direction as president. Seizing upon the various factions within the Whig Party, Tyler struck down the bank bills in order to challenge Clay's leadership and to forge his own coalition of conservative Whigs. Tyler's ascension to the presidency, according to Irving Williams, ultimately undermined the Whig Party's plans for a Clay-dominated Congress and a Webster-dominated Cabinet. In Williams' summation, while the selection of Vice President Tyler, "whose views differed radically from those of [Harrison]," assisted the Whig Party in obtaining votes, Tyler, "was bound to bring chaos to the Executive Branch and

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<sup>84</sup> Marcus Cunliffe, et.al., *The American Heritage History of the Presidency*, (New York, American Heritage Publishing Co., 1968), 132-33.

disunity to the Government should [Harrison] die.”<sup>85</sup> Despite this so-called chaos, Tyler’s rogue strategy proved historically significant. Future accidental presidents of the nineteenth century would emulate Tyler’s tactics. As he reflected on his term in office, Tyler correctly hoped that he had set a precedent for future accidental presidents to follow.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>86</sup> John Tyler, “Letter to Robert Tyler, March 12, 1848, *The Letters and Times of the Tylers*, Vol. 2, Lyon G. Tyler, ed. (Richmond, VA, Whittet and Shepperson, 1884), 107.

## Part II: Millard Fillmore

### *Overview*

By 1848 the Whigs were in dire political straits. Henry Clay, the party's standard-bearer in the 1844 election, had failed to obtain the White House for the third time. Moreover, the United States' recent victory in its controversial war with Mexico had reopened the national debate regarding the expansion of slavery into the American West. Congressmen on both sides of the Mason Dixon Line wondered how the newly acquired territories of California and New Mexico would affect the tenuous power balance between free states and slave states. The space for compromise between the North and South appeared to be shrinking. The abolitionist movement in the North had gained momentum during the 1840s, as seen with the rise of the Liberty Party, which obtained 2.3% (roughly 62,000 votes) of the national vote in 1844.<sup>87</sup> Southerners, particularly Democrats, increasingly vocalized their fears of the national government interfering with their peculiar institution in both the territories and the states. Rallying behind Lewis Cass' theory of popular sovereignty, the Democrats unanimously approved an 1848 platform plank that rejected the power of the national government to interfere with slavery.<sup>88</sup> For the Whigs however, a consensus over the fate of slavery, like the question regarding the national bank in 1840, had consistently eluded them.

In an attempt to dodge the issue of slavery, Whig leaders planned to win the election of 1848 by copying the strategy from their 1840 victory. Whig leaders

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<sup>87</sup> *National Party Conventions, 1831-1976*, (Washington D.C., Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1979), 25.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.



selected “Old Rough and Ready” Zachary Taylor, the acclaimed hero of the Mexican-American War, to be their party’s presidential candidate. Longtime Whig politician Millard Fillmore of Buffalo, New York, received the vice-presidential nomination. In contrast to Fillmore, Taylor lacked a political background. In a letter to Jefferson Davis, Taylor confessed, “I am neither a Whig nor a Democrat...I had never meddled in or been mixed up with political matters...not so much as having even voted for one of our chief magistrates.”<sup>89</sup> In another letter to his friend Dr. Delony, Taylor further expressed his disdain for partisan politics. “[I will go] into the office untrammelled and be the Chief Magistrate of the nation and not of a party.”<sup>90</sup> Hopeful that they could capitalize on Taylor’s nationalist approach, the Whig Party rallied around the General. Initially, the General remained vague on all of the major issues, including slavery. When slavery was mentioned, Taylor maintained that he, “would... respect the opinions and feelings of the non-slave holding states on that subject...[and be] equally careful that no encroachments were made on the rights of the citizens of the slave-holding states.”<sup>91</sup>

Upon entering the presidency however, Taylor’s ambivalence towards the question of slavery shifted. As debates within the House and Senate over how to handle the Mexican territory erupted, Taylor became increasingly influenced by the anti-compromise stance of many Northern Whigs including William Seward

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<sup>89</sup> Zachary Taylor, “Letter to J. Davis, August 16, 1847,” *The Papers of Zachary Taylor, 1784-1850*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>90</sup> Zachary Taylor, “Letter to Dr. Delony, June 9<sup>th</sup> 1847,” *The Papers of Zachary Taylor, 1784-1850*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>91</sup> Zachary Taylor, “Letter to J. Davis, August 16, 1847,” *The Papers of Zachary Taylor, 1784-1850*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

and Thurlow Weed. Taylor eventually packed his Cabinet with Seward's men, and by the end of 1849, the President adamantly opposed any deal brokered with the Southern Whigs and Democrats.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Taylor took an anti-slavery stance on every item concerning the Mexican Territory. On the issue of statehood for California, Taylor shocked slaveholders by suggesting that California and New Mexico bypass their status as territories and immediately enter the Union as free states.<sup>93</sup> Taylor even threatened to veto the compromise bill being forged between Henry Clay and Southern Democrats. He also refused to intervene in the developing border war between Texas and the territory of New Mexico.<sup>94</sup> By the summer of 1850, many Democrats and conservative Whigs feared that the President's policies threatened the unity of the country.

Taylor's anti-compromise stance however came to an end on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1850, when the President died from stomach complications. Although somewhat uncertain over how the newly sworn-in President Fillmore would respond, Northern Whigs assumed that the anti-slavery Fillmore would adopt the same position as his predecessor. However, by the end of the summer of 1850, the nation's second accidental president had followed in John Tyler's footsteps. Rejecting the belligerent tactics of his predecessor, Fillmore indicated his willingness to compromise. As early as July 10<sup>th</sup>, Fillmore signified his break with Taylor. In contrast to Tyler, who had requested that his predecessor's

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<sup>92</sup> Abbott, 54.

<sup>93</sup> Zachary Taylor, "Annual Address to Congress, December 4, 1849," *The Papers of Zachary Taylor, 1784-1850*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>94</sup> Zachary Taylor, "Message to the Senate, June 17, 1850," *The Papers of Zachary Taylor, 1784-1850*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

Cabinet stay, Fillmore pushed for the resignation of all of Taylor's appointees.<sup>95</sup> By the end of July, the New Yorker surrounded himself with Whigs who were known for favoring a compromise with the Southern Whigs and Democrats.

Following the Cabinet shuffle, Fillmore continued to paint himself as a rogue. Unlike Taylor, Fillmore desired to postpone the hotly contested issue of California's statehood. The new president focused on New Mexico instead. One of Fillmore's first actions was to rescind Taylor's previous proclamation that banned federal involvement in the border dispute between Texas and New Mexico. In a joint address before Congress, Fillmore defended his decision to deploy federal troops to Santa Fe in order to quell the violence.<sup>96</sup> Concerned that a compromise would never be obtained if the Congress had to vote on all of the territorial issues at once, Fillmore relied upon his conservative Congressional ally, James Pearce, to essentially kill Clay's Omnibus Bill Package.<sup>97</sup> After the collapse of the Omnibus Bill, Fillmore threw his support behind Democrat Stephen Douglas' plan to delay the California question and focus first on New Mexico. By rejecting Taylor's hard-line tactics, Fillmore, aided by Douglas in the Senate and Whig Congressman Alexander Stephens, succeeded in passing separate pieces of legislation that collectively came to be known as the Compromise of 1850. Similarly to Tyler, Fillmore successfully broke away from his predecessor's policies by crafting a new coalition within the Congress. Although he obtained the respect of conservative Whigs, a large faction of the

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<sup>95</sup> Fillmore remains the only accidental president to remove all his predecessor's Cabinet

<sup>96</sup> Millard Fillmore, "Joint Message to Congress, August 16, 1850," *The Papers of Millard Fillmore, 1800-1874*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>97</sup> Abbott, 45.

Whig Party denounced Fillmore as a doughface (a Northerner who sympathized with the South) for his decision to pass the contentious Fugitive Slave Act. “God save us from Whig Vice Presidents!” became the rallying cry for Northern and Western Whigs who denounced Fillmore as a traitor to his party.<sup>98</sup>

### *Party Unity*

In a vein similar to Tyler’s bank vetoes, Fillmore’s decision to reject Taylor’s anti-compromise stance and work with Stephen Douglas and other Democrats only served to exacerbate the already growing tensions within the Whig Party. Even prior to the Compromise of 1850 and the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act, the Whigs were confronting intra-party disunity. On the eve of the Election of 1848, members within the ranks of the Whigs (the anti-slavery “Conscience Whigs”), the Democrats, and the failed Liberty Party convened under the banner of the Free Soil Party in Buffalo, New York.<sup>99</sup> Calling for the immediate cessation of slavery within the federal territories, the Free Soilers not only threatened the Whigs’ chances at electoral victory but also underscored the party’s inability to reach a consensus over the slave question. With Martin Van Buren as their presidential nominee, the Free Soilers obtained 10% of the national vote during the election of 1848 and even obtained some Whig seats in the House of Representatives.<sup>100</sup> The successes of the Free Soilers foreshadowed the Whigs’

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<sup>98</sup> Holt, 596.

<sup>99</sup> Robert Scarry, *Millard Fillmore*, (Jefferson, NC, McFarland & Company Inc., 2001), 133.

<sup>100</sup> The electoral showing of the Free Soiler Party represented the greatest success of any third party movement thus far in American history.

inability to defend themselves from the third party movements of the 1850s (i.e. the Know-Nothings and the Republicans). The Free Soilers and later third party movements would not only deprive the Whigs of its adherents but also hasten the party's eventual collapse.

In addition to the threat from the Free-Soilers, Whig party unity further plunged following the passage of the Compromise of 1850. While some Whigs hailed the reconciliation between the North and South as a nationalist triumph, a large contingency of Whigs derided the Compromise. Concerned that the South had conceded too much ground, Whigs in South Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi joined with Democrats to deride Fillmore; there were even conventions to discuss secession strategies.<sup>101</sup> Whig dissatisfaction sprouted not only in the South but also in the Northeast as many Northern Whigs condemned the Fugitive Slave Act as kowtowing to the demands of radical, inflexible slaveholders. With the 1850 midterm elections fast approaching, it became apparent that the Whigs were divided over Fillmore's actions. Previously, Whig opposition to the Mexican-American War and the expansion of slavery into the West had functioned as the key distinction between the Whigs and the Democrats. Due to Fillmore's endorsement of the Compromise of 1850 and collaboration with Democrats, Northern and Western Whigs openly accused the President of dismantling all ideological differences between the two parties.<sup>102</sup>

Confronted with an identity crisis, Whig Party organization and stability fractured, especially at the state level. Wide swaths of Whigs in Ohio, Indiana,

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<sup>101</sup> Abott, 48.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 48.

Connecticut, and Massachusetts, who had backed Taylor in 1848, either abstained or defected to the Democratic Party during the 1850 elections.<sup>103</sup> The New York Whig Party served as a microcosm of the general disarray of the national party. During the 1851 state elections, the New York Whig Party devolved into two camps: the anti-Compromisers who supported Thurlow and Weed and the “Silver Greys,” a faction of New York merchants who stood by Fillmore. The conservative “Silver Greys” threatened to break entirely from the Whigs and forge their own “Union Party.” Determined to prevent the Thurlow/Weed faction from obtaining victory in New York, the “Silver Greys” went so far as to advocate for uniting with Democratic candidates.<sup>104</sup> As a result, Whig party leaders haplessly watched as conservative Whigs in New York and other northern states defected to the Democrats from 1850-1852. By the end of the 1850 midterm elections, several Whig leaders had declared the party dead. Once again, it is important to note that intra-party squabbling over slavery had existed prior to Fillmore’s 1850 Compromise. Nevertheless, Fillmore was able to seize upon his party’s indecisiveness over slavery to forge a path that differed substantially from his predecessor. Following the passage of the Compromise of 1850, Fillmore continued to take advantage of the internal divides within the Whigs, disregarding the more traditional policies favored by Taylor and the Whig Party faithful such as protective tariffs and a national bank.

So fractious was the Whig Party during this time period (1848-1856) that there is actually no available data from DW Nominat or from the Poole, et.al

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<sup>103</sup> William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1987), 27.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 65.

study on party unity scores. However, the scatterplot (Figure 2) provides a better depiction of how ideologically fragmented the Whig Party was by the time Fillmore assumed the presidency. The divide over slavery coupled with a lack of a party platform had essentially enabled Fillmore to break from the viewpoint of his predecessor and Northern Whigs in order to successfully achieve a compromise.

### ***Nomination Mechanism***

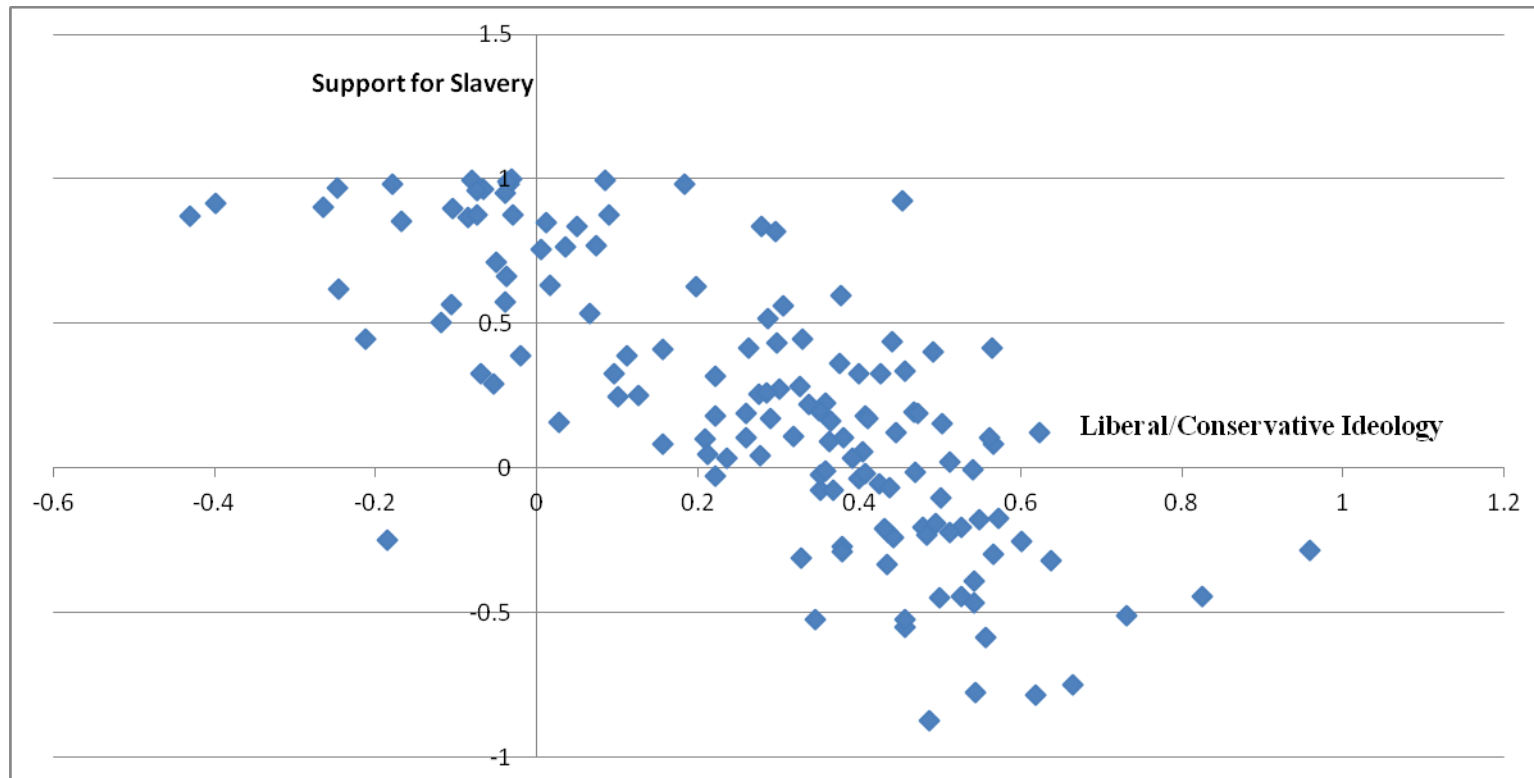
Like Tyler, Millard Fillmore's ascension to the vice presidency was largely determined by powerful party leaders. Fillmore functioned as the appeasement candidate for the various Whigs who were not enthralled with the nomination of Taylor. "The election of Gen. Taylor," Lemuel Holcomb wrote to Fillmore in early 1848, "will be nothing more than a second edition of Gen. Jackson's mad reign."<sup>105</sup> Holcomb and other Whigs' uneasiness towards Taylor stemmed from the General's lack of political experience as well as the ambiguity surrounding his political views. Taylor raised many Whig eyebrows when, in an episode revealing his political naivety, the General accepted the presidential nomination from a delegation of South Carolina Democrats.<sup>106</sup> This episode prompted several Whig factions to howl for Taylor's removal from the ticket. Fillmore's nomination arguably brought a sense of comfort to Clay and his adherents who felt confident in Fillmore's loyalty and commitment to general

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<sup>105</sup> Lemuel C. Holcomb, "Letter to Millard Fillmore, January 10, 1848," *The Papers of Millard Fillmore, 1800-1874*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>106</sup> Scarry, 134.

**Figure 2: Ideal Policy Preferences of Congressional Whigs (31<sup>st</sup> Congress: 1849-1851)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, “Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm> . The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Bi-Metallism/Civil Rights) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1. *Note:* Data unavailable for President Millard Fillmore.



Whig principles.<sup>107</sup> Moreover, anti-slavery Whigs, concerned over anointing a Louisiana slave-holder as their standard-bearer, advocated for a Northerner to bring geographical balance (and hopefully ideological) balance to the national ticket. Many anti-slavery Whigs pointed to Fillmore's staunch defense of the anti-slavery movement in his 1838 letter to the Anti-Slavery Society of the County of Erie. Within the letter, when asked whether he opposed the expansion of slavery and supported the abolition of the slave trade in Washington D.C., Fillmore, "answer[ed] all your [the Society's] interrogation in the AFFIRMATIVE."<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, both Taylor and Fillmore held more complicated views concerning the institution of slavery. At the moment, however, Southern Whigs hoped that the presence of a slaveholder at the top of the Whig ticket would encourage the South to support Taylor while Northern Whigs touted Fillmore's antislavery credentials. Despite this balancing act, the Whigs nevertheless acknowledged that they could not afford to engage with the issue of slavery during the election. To avoid intra-party fighting, the Whigs again failed to draft a party platform.<sup>109</sup>

### ***Institutional Status of the Vice Presidency***

As an institution, the Office of the Vice President had not expanded significantly since the Harrison Administration. Nevertheless, during his tenure as Vice President, Fillmore received bi-partisan praise for his neutral and

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<sup>107</sup> Henry Clay, "Letter to James Brooks, September 8, 1848," *The Papers of Henry Clay: Candidate, Compromiser, Elder Statesman, January 1, 1844 – June 29, 1852*, Vol. X, Melba Porter Hay, ed. (Lexington, KY, University Press of KY, 1991), 533

<sup>108</sup> Millard Fillmore, "Letter to the Anti-Slavery Society of the County of Erie, Buffalo, NY, October 17, 1838," *The Congressional Globe*, Vol.27, Part I, (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1859), 305.

<sup>109</sup> *National Party Conventions, 1831-1976*, (Washington D.C., Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1979), 30

professional overseeing of the Senate during some of the chamber's most heated debates.<sup>110</sup> Fillmore even obtained greater power for the vice-presidency when he successfully revoked the procedural rule that forbade the Vice President from calling unruly Senators to order.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, the relationship fostered between Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore during the election of 1848 seemingly promised that the institutional loneliness surrounding the vice presidency would diminish. Throughout the campaign, Taylor and Fillmore maintained a steady correspondence whereby they commented on their electoral prospects and chances for victories in certain states. Taylor praised Fillmore as, "a gentleman...a tower of strength."<sup>112</sup> Fillmore reciprocated, defending Taylor from the Northern Whigs who continuously questioned the General's Whig credentials. So strong was the developing bond between Taylor and Fillmore that Taylor initiated a new precedent in presidential-vice presidential relations: he actively sought Fillmore's advice regarding appointments. Determined to expunge the Democrats from the federal bureaucracy, Taylor initially relied on Fillmore's extensive Whig background for advice on sound appointees.<sup>113</sup>

Unfortunately for Fillmore, his closeness with Taylor would diminish as the Taylor Administration progressed. Throughout late 1849, Taylor's Cabinet and Northern Whig leaders, William Seward and Thurlow Weed, steadily pushed the Vice President out of the Executive Branch's inner circle. Seizing upon the

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<sup>110</sup> Irving Williams, *The Rise of the Vice Presidency*, (Washington D.C., Public Affairs Press, 1956), 54-55.

<sup>111</sup> Frank H. Severance, ed., *Millard Fillmore Papers, Vol. II*, (Buffalo, New York, The Buffalo Historical Society, 1907), 474.

<sup>112</sup> Zachary Taylor, "Letter to Millard Fillmore, July 17, 1848," *The Papers of Zachary Taylor, 1784-1850*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>113</sup> Scarry, 161.

north-south divide within the Whig Party and wary of Fillmore as a potential threat to their control of New York Whigs, Seward and Weed, along with their allies in Taylor's cabinet, sought to isolate Fillmore from Taylor. By forging friendships with Taylor's relatives and by appealing to the President's strong nationalist stance and professed opposition to the expansion of slavery, Seward was able to bring Taylor into his camp.<sup>114</sup> By early 1850, Seward and Weed, according to Fillmore's former law partner, Nathan K. Hall, "[had] rode [Fillmore] over rough shod."<sup>115</sup> Hall feared that Seward and Weed, "succeeded in poisoning the mind of the president against you [Fillmore]."<sup>116</sup> During the remainder of Taylor's Administration, Hall's prediction held true. Seward and Weed succeeded in blocking Fillmore's nominations.<sup>117</sup> Surrounded by Weed's cronies, President Taylor travelled through Buffalo and upstate New York (Fillmore's old stomping grounds) without even informing the Vice President.<sup>118</sup> Taylor also chose to disregard Fillmore's experience as a Congressman, ignoring the vice president during the vitriolic debates in Congress over California and New Mexico.<sup>119</sup> Now removed from Taylor's confidence, Fillmore remained silent and uncertain over how the President would handle the sectional conflict.<sup>120</sup>

Days before President Taylor's death, an exasperated Fillmore attempted to obtain the President's advice over how he should vote in the event that the

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<sup>114</sup> Williams, 54. Seward's influence was so great that the New York senator was even attended Taylor's Cabinet meetings.

<sup>115</sup> Nathan K. Hall, "Letter to Millard Fillmore, January 2, 1850," The Millard Fillmore Papers, State University of New York (SUNY) Oswego, Oswego, NY.

<sup>116</sup> Scarry, 146.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 162.

<sup>118</sup> Williams, 54.

<sup>119</sup> Scarry, 147.

<sup>120</sup> Abbott, 41-42.

Senate reached a deadlock over Clay's Omnibus Bill. Clearly the fact that Fillmore had to formally solicit the President's advice on an issue that had captivated the nation's attention for sixteen months emphasizes the amount of institutional distance between the President and Vice President. After obtaining Taylor's advice, the Vice President intimated that he would break with Taylor and the Cabinet, declaring, "[my vote will not be] out of any hostility to you [Taylor]...but the vote would be given, because I deemed it for the interests of the country."<sup>121</sup> Essentially, the rise and subsequent collapse of Fillmore's influence with the President, coupled with the institutional isolation of the vice presidency and the fractured state of the Whig Party, all functioned as factors that enabled Fillmore to go rogue and forge his own path as president.

### *Conclusion*

Fillmore's experience as the nation's second accidental president in many ways paralleled that of John Tyler's experience. Both inadvertent chief executives ultimately engaged in policies that directly opposed the viewpoints of either their predecessor or a significant faction of their party. It is also important to note that both men failed to receive the Whig party's presidential nomination in their own right. Although Fillmore's decision to move away from Taylor's preferences arguably prevented civil war, his ability to shift from anti-slavery to a pro-compromise position was enabled by the disunity within the Whig Party. The

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<sup>121</sup> Millard Fillmore, "Letter to President Zachary Taylor, July 1850," *The Papers of Zachary Taylor, 1784-1850*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Room, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

increasing degree of party in-fighting throughout the remainder of Fillmore's term accentuated the fact that the Whigs had failed to learn from the election of 1840 and the Tyler episode. Just as they did with the bank question during the 1840 election, the Whigs attempted to bypass the contentious issue of slavery. Later in 1852, the Whigs would once again nominate a war hero (Winfield Scott), who, like Taylor, remained as vague as possible on political topics. By 1852, however, the question of slavery proved too toxic for the Whig Party. Still unable to achieve an ideological consensus over the fate of slavery, the Whigs self-collapsed. By 1856, Henry Clay's Whig Party was dead.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ormsby, 354-355.

### Part III: Andrew Johnson

#### *Overview*

More so than any of his predecessors, Andrew Johnson, the nation's third accidental president, assumed the office at a truly tumultuous time in United States' history. Still traumatized from a horrendous civil war, the nation experienced the first-ever assassination of its chief executive. In the wake of Abraham Lincoln's death by the hands of a Confederate sympathizer, the North looked to President Johnson to extract vengeance upon the South not only for igniting the flames of war but also for the demise of Father Abraham. Aside from the calls to punish the South, numerous questions were raised over the fate of the four million African Americans who had finally escaped bondage. Although he had limited time to articulate his post-war plans for the Confederacy and the freedmen, President Lincoln had outlined a policy that stressed reconciliation between the North and South. In addition, Lincoln had planned for government programs designed to improve the condition of Southern blacks. During his final weeks in office, Lincoln tactfully maneuvered the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment through Congress and also signed into law the Freedmen's Bureau Bill. The President had even advocated for the enfranchisement of African Americans, particularly to black Union soldiers.<sup>123</sup> Although certain wings of the Republican Party criticized Lincoln for moving too cautiously on the issue of civil rights for blacks or being too lenient on the South, the Republican majorities in both chambers generally supported Lincoln's programs.

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<sup>123</sup> Abraham Lincoln, "Public Address, April 11, 1865," *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, Roy P. Blaser, ed., (Cleveland, World Publishing Co., 1946), 799.

At the onset of his administration, it appeared as though President Johnson would remain loyal to Lincoln and the Republican Party's Reconstruction vision. As the only Southerner who did not resign his seat when war erupted, Andrew Johnson, Democratic Senator from Tennessee, had aligned with the Republican Congress on a number of policy issues. He supported the Republican-endorsed Homestead Act, which provided large tracts of land to encourage farming in the West. Moreover, Johnson utilized his captivating oratory to denounce secession and delivered a number of pro-Union speeches within the Border States.<sup>124</sup> As Johnson biographer Hans Trefousse suggests, Johnson, "fixed the blame for disunion squarely on the shoulders of 'southern States.'"<sup>125</sup> The Tennessean's staunch Unionist views and anti-secessionist rhetoric had garnered the admiration of both Lincoln and the Radical Republicans, eventually earning him the position of Military Governor of Tennessee and ultimately the nomination as Lincoln's running mate in 1864. In his speech to the Chairman of the Republican National Convention, in which he accepted the vice presidential nomination, Johnson reasserted his commitment to Lincoln's views and repudiated any allegiance to the Democratic Party. He also affirmed the notion that slavery had initiated the War Between the States, proclaiming, "It is in vain to reconstruct the Union with the distracting element of slavery in it."<sup>126</sup> In fact, Johnson's statements on slavery and the future of African Americans further convinced Republicans that

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<sup>124</sup> Andrew Johnson, "The constitutionality and rightfulness of secession, December 18-19<sup>th</sup> 1860," *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Digital Archives, Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, IN.

<sup>125</sup> Hans Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 144.

<sup>126</sup> Andrew Johnson, "Speech to the Hon. William Dennison, July 2, 1864," *The Life and Public Services of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States*, John Savage, ed., (New York, Derby & Miller Publishers, 1866), 299.

he would uphold Lincoln's banner after inheriting the presidency in 1865. During one speech before African Americans in Tennessee, Johnson declared himself, "[the] Moses of the colored people [I shall] lead [them] through the Red Sea of war and bondage to a fairer future of liberty and peace."<sup>127</sup> Johnson's overtures and gestures towards African Americans not only echoed but also potentially surpassed Lincoln's stances. In the weeks following Lincoln's death, all indications hinted that Johnson would carry forth the spirit of the Great Emancipator. Shortly after Johnson entered the White House, Radical Republican Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts wrote, "In the question of colored suffrage, the President is with us."<sup>128</sup>

By the summer of 1865, Congressional Republicans quickly discovered that President Johnson had little intention of continuing the policies of his predecessor or upholding the views of his newly adopted party. While Congress was out of session, Johnson issued an executive order that recognized Virginia as a readmitted state of the Union. The order contained a broad amnesty program and remained silent on the civil rights of African Americans. Johnson issued a similar order that restored North Carolina to the Union. Although Johnson's tactics obtained praise from the South, his pardons infuriated many Republicans, particularly when the President failed to ensure that the rights of blacks would be upheld within the former Confederate states.<sup>129</sup> Johnson's leniency towards the

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<sup>127</sup> Andrew Johnson, "The Moses of the Colored Man, October 25, 1864," *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, Vol. VII, Leroy Graff, ed., (Knoxville, TN, University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 251-253.

<sup>128</sup> Charles Sumner, "Letter to Francis Lieber, April 26, 1865," *The Selected Letters of Charles Sumner*, Vol. II, Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed. (Boston, Northeastern University Press, 1990), 299-300.

<sup>129</sup> Annette Gordon-Reed, *Andrew Johnson*, The American Presidencies Series, Arthur Schlesinger Jr., and Sean Wilentz, eds., (New York, Times book, 2011), 100.



South frustrated the Republican Party. Moreover, although Johnson remained convinced of the evils of slavery, he was still very much a man of his time. The self-made politician ultimately empathized more with the plight of poor Southern whites rather than African Americans. As historian Annette Gordon-Reed notes, Johnson's decision to turn his back on Congressional Republicans outraged not only the Radical Republicans but also, "the far more numerous number of moderates who actually wanted to work with him."<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, it was the President's reversal of Lincoln's policies toward Southern blacks that invoked the fury of the Radical Republicans, who were steadily increasing their Congressional number. In addition to refusing to collaborate with Republicans, Johnson began to stray from the path set by his predecessor. Unlike Lincoln, Johnson disagreed about the necessity of securing the vote for African Americans, even for black soldiers.<sup>131</sup> Johnson additionally took measures to undo the Freedmen's Bureau, an organization that Lincoln had personally championed. Not only did Johnson rescind the Bureau's program to provide arable land to Southern freedmen but he also vetoed extending the Bureau all together. While Lincoln had stressed preserving the rights of African American, Johnson vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and spoke out against the ratification of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. As the famous abolitionist Frederick Douglass expressed, "Whatever Andrew Johnson may be he is no friend to our race."<sup>132</sup> While the President's outlook on racial equality and how to handle the defeated South differed widely from Lincoln and the

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 112.

<sup>131</sup> Howard Means, *The Avenger Takes His Place*, (New York, Hartcourt Inc., 2006), 210-211.

<sup>132</sup> Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass from 1817-1882 As Written by Himself*, (London, Christian Age Office, 1882), 319.

Republicans respectively, Johnson's ability to enact a rogue strategy was due in part to the Republican Party's own inability to achieve a consensus over Reconstruction policies.

### *Party Unity*

Despite Lincoln's best efforts, Republican Party unity began to fray during the summer of 1864. Intra-party strife steadily emerged as Republicans in Congress and throughout the Northern states feuded over how to handle the soon-to-be-defeated Southern states. Disagreements also brewed over the status of African Americans. The debates over these issues proved so contentious that on May 31, 1864, only days before the Republican National Convention, Radical Republicans bolted from the party. These disillusioned Republicans formed the Radical Democracy Party in Cleveland, Ohio, and nominated John C. Fremont as their leader to challenge Lincoln.<sup>133</sup> Although the pro-Lincoln wing of the party suppressed the Fremont uprising, the Radical Democracy's Cleveland Convention foreshadowed the increasing difficulty Lincoln would have in maintaining party cohesion. In fact, Republicans were so concerned over the need to ensure unity that they actually ran Lincoln as the Union Party candidate in attempt to muffle the growing discontent amongst Republicans. Lincoln ultimately prevailed in keeping his party together. Following his death, however, Republican unity within the Congress dipped. Three distinct Republican factions quickly emerged within the House and Senate chambers: the conservatives, the moderates, and the

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<sup>133</sup> Means, 79.

Radicals. Conservative Republicans generally sided with Democrats, who favored a laissez-faire policy towards the readmitted South, especially with respect to African American civil rights. Moderates, who typically aligned with Lincoln's position, supported federal intervention within the South, particularly when the rights of blacks were threatened. Lastly, the Radicals clamored for the formation of military governments within the South and the passage of legislation that would guarantee civil rights to Southern blacks. Due to a clear lack of ideological focus, and because the various wings of the Republican Party, "disliked [each other] almost as much as [Johnson] did," Johnson was generally free to break away from his predecessor's views without facing too much resistance from Congress, at least during his first two years in office.<sup>134</sup> So divided were the Republicans during this time that President Johnson successfully convinced conservative and moderate Republicans to campaign against the Radicals during the 1866 midterm elections (i.e. Johnson's so-called "swing around the circle" tour).

To obtain a better sense of Republican divisiveness, below are the DW Nominat scores for Republican Party unity during Johnson's term:

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<sup>134</sup> Gordon-Reed, 112.

**Table Three: Republican Party Unity Scores for the House and Senate  
[39<sup>th</sup> – 41<sup>st</sup> Congresses] <sup>135</sup>**

Session of Congress (Date)	House Republican Unity Score*	Senate Republican Unity Score*
39 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1865-1867)	0.81	0.75
40 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1867-1869)	0.81	0.71

*\*Party unity is defined as the proportion of Republican Congressmen voting with the majority of their party.*

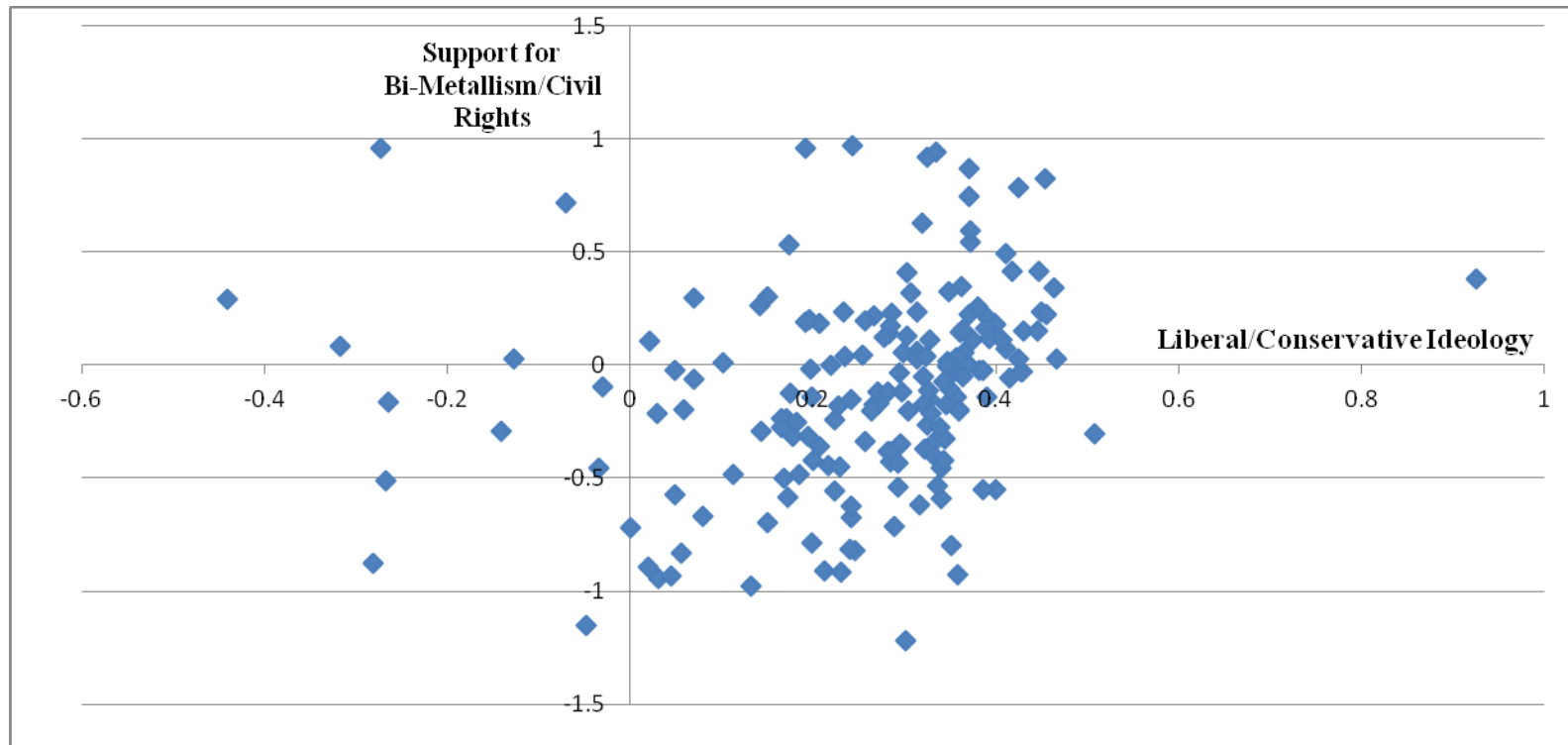
Again, while the Republican Party's unity score in both the House and the Senate appear to be relatively high, it is important to note that the above scores represented the lowest point of Republican Party unity since the formation of the party in 1856. Although there is no DW Nominate Score for Andrew Johnson's policy preferences, the accompanying scatterplot (Figure 3) signifies the strong ideological divides that had emerged amongst conservative, moderate, and radical Republicans. One should note the broad political spectrum occupied by the Republicans.

In a fashion similar to previous accidental presidents, Andrew Johnson seized upon this ideological discord amongst the party in order to advance his own trail that consequentially overturned many of his predecessor's Reconstruction policies. In fact, for the remainder of the nineteenth century, the rifts within the Republican Party would steadily expand as the Party debated the issue of civil service reform and, later, the relationship between government and business. These intra-party strains would peak during the accidental Republican presidencies of Chester Arthur and Theodore Roosevelt.

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<sup>135</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, "DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses," *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).

**Figure 3: Ideal Policy Preferences of Congressional Republicans (39<sup>th</sup> Congress: 1865-1867)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, "Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th," *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm> . The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Bi-Metallism/Civil Rights) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1). *Note:* Data unavailable for President Andrew Johnson.

Nevertheless, as the historical record shows, Johnson's rogue strategy would soon prove to be his undoing. The "swing around the circle" tour was disastrous to Johnson's prestige as the president engaged in slandering various Republican Congressmen. By 1867, the Radical Republicans had obtained firm control in both chambers. While politically unwise, Johnson continued blocking and obstructing not only the Radicals' agenda but also programs favored by the more moderate and conservative wings of the Republican Party (i.e. the Lincoln Republicans). Johnson arguably carried the rogue strategy to such an extent that, in retaliation, Congress passed articles of impeachment against the 17<sup>th</sup> President.

### *Nomination Mechanism*

Like Tyler and Fillmore before him, Andrew Johnson's ascension to the vice presidency was dictated more by party leaders rather than the presidential candidate. Interestingly enough however, Abraham Lincoln, perhaps more so than any other nineteenth century president, played a fairly active role in securing the nomination for Johnson, or at the very least a War Democrat. Convinced that the incumbent vice president, Hannibal Hamlin, offered very little electoral benefits, Lincoln sent operatives to vet Johnson for the vice presidency.<sup>136</sup> Although Lincoln had vied for Johnson's selection, Union/Republican Party leaders would ultimately determine the nomination. During the 1864 convention, journalist John Savage noted, "[I]n regard to the candidate for Vice President there was no...unity. That subject had been canvassed, and the convention assembled in

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<sup>136</sup> Means, 83.

entire ignorance of the candidates that would be named.”<sup>137</sup> Ultimately, the Union Party would prioritize geographical balance over ideological harmony within the ticket. After 25 ballots, Johnson finally obtained the nomination, largely based on his pro-Union views and Southern background. However, as Savage’s comments suggest, the selection of a vice presidential candidate was once again relegated to one of minor importance. Although many Republicans believed that Johnson would bolster Lincoln’s popularity within the Border States and amongst Democrats, little attention was paid to his views surrounding the status of the freedmen or the fate of the South following the War. Once again, the rush to clinch political victory (Lincoln’s chances for reelection during the summer of 1864 were hardly promising), and the failure to explore the vice president’s beliefs, proved disastrous to the party that controlled the White House.

### *Institutional Status of the Vice President*

Although the reach of the Executive Branch augmented during the Civil War era, this expansion of power did not extend to the vice presidency. The position was still firmly grounded within the legislative branch and had not yet transitioned towards the presidency. Nevertheless, the initial relationship between Andrew Johnson and Abraham Lincoln suggested that Johnson would wield considerable influence as vice president. Arguably, no president and vice president of the nineteenth century shared more in common in terms of

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<sup>137</sup> John Savage, ed., *The Life and Public Services of Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth President of the United States*, (New York, Derby & Miller Publishers, 1866), 285-292.

background. Aside from their staunch Unionist views, both Lincoln and Johnson hailed from humble backgrounds and established themselves as self-made politicians. Throughout the war, Lincoln maintained a steady correspondence with Johnson during his tenure as military governor of Tennessee. During the 1864 race, Lincoln relied heavily on Johnson's oratory. Continuing the tradition of the vice president functioning as the ticket's main campaigner, Johnson toured the Border States defending the Lincoln Administration and denouncing George McClellan, the Democrats' nominee.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, Lincoln went so far as to declare, "It is unsafe for you [Johnson] not to be here on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March [the inauguration]. Be sure to reach here by that time."<sup>139</sup> Lincoln's insistence that Johnson attend the inauguration, despite rumors that the vice president had contracted typhoid fever, underscored the significance that Lincoln attributed to his running mate. In fact, given Johnson's Southern roots, many Washington politicians speculated that Lincoln would rely on his vice president to help craft his Reconstruction policy for the Confederate States.

Similarly to Fillmore, Johnson seemed poised to transcend his office's institutional isolation from the presidency. However, like Fillmore, Johnson would quickly fall from the president's favor. After an inebriated performance at the inauguration ceremony, Johnson's influence within the Lincoln Administration quickly diminished. Lincoln's Cabinet, defensive of their access to the President, and highly embarrassed by Johnson's drunken display at the swearing-in ceremony, quickly moved to block Vice President Johnson from

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<sup>138</sup> Means, 85-86.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 88.



Lincoln. For all intents and purposes, Lincoln sided with his Cabinet, maintaining his distance from the allegedly alcoholic Johnson. Although removed from the President's inner circle, Vice President Johnson initiated the practice of the vice president acting as the administration's aegis and attack dog, a practice that did not become common until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Delivering a speech just six days before Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Johnson again defended Lincoln's conduct of the war, criticizing both the secessionists and Northerners who advocated for a truce.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, despite setting this precedent, Vice President Johnson, like his predecessors, enjoyed little access to the President. During the six weeks of Lincoln's second term, Johnson did not attend a single Cabinet meeting, nor was he able to secure an audience with Lincoln until the day of the President's assassination.<sup>141</sup> Given his relative isolation from the presidency, it was highly improbable that Johnson, as President, would be able to emulate Lincoln's Reconstruction policies. The distance between the two offices, coupled with Lincoln's brief second term, made it all the more likely that Johnson would become the third accidental president to become rogue.

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<sup>140</sup> Andrew Johnson, "Speech at Washington, April 3, 1865." *The Speeches of Andrew Johnson* (Boston, Little, Brown, and Company, 1866), xlii-xlvii.

<sup>141</sup> Gordon-Reed, 87.

### *Conclusion*

While it would be extraordinarily challenging for any politician of the mid-nineteenth century to follow in the footsteps of Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson's ascension to the presidency arguably occurred at one of the most inopportune times in American history. The Tennessean proved to be radically different not only in personality but also in ideology. Like other accidental presidents, Johnson assumed power at a time when his party's unity had become exceedingly frayed. By courting Democrats and conservative Republicans, Johnson not only temporarily blocked the Radical Republicans' efforts to advance the civil rights of the freedmen but also revoked many of Lincoln's initial policies. Nevertheless the reversal of Lincoln's early Reconstruction policies and legislation could also be attributed to Johnson's lack of interaction with President Lincoln. Most importantly, Andrew Johnson's subsequent decision to embark on a rogue strategy tremendously impacted the fate of four million freedmen and played a significant part in the eventual demise of Reconstruction's promises. Sadly, both Republicans and Democrats failed to learn from Johnson's accidental presidency and the importance of selecting a vice president who would remain true to the vision and ideals of the party that nominated him.

## Part IV: Chester A. Arthur

### *Overview*

“The people are in grief...not so much because he [Garfield] is dying as because *you* are his successor. What President ever entered office under circumstances so sad?”<sup>142</sup> With these words from New York reformist, Julia S. Sand, “Gentleman Boss” Chester Alan Arthur became the fourth vice president to ascend to the presidency due to the death of his predecessor. Arthur’s succession to the White House could not have been more inauspicious. Not only did the Vice President have a poor relationship with the late President Garfield but also his wing of the Republican Party, the Stalwarts, was seemingly linked to Garfield’s assassination at the hands of the deranged office seeker Charles Guiteau.<sup>143</sup> Based on the amount of intra-party fighting, the rumor that the Stalwarts conspired to murder the President was not implausible. Indeed Republican in-fighting had reached a feverous pitch during the 1880s. Party members debated over the tariff, how to make political gains in the Reconstructed South, and most importantly, civil service reform. More so than any other topic, the question of reforming federal employment practices had proven so divisive that multiple factions within the Republican Party had formed. As a representative of the Stalwarts, led by New York Senator Roscoe Conkling, Chester Arthur supported the current spoils system that had been in effect since the days of Andrew Jackson. Arthur’s backing of the status quo conflicted with James Garfield’s view. Hailing from the reformist-orientated Half-Breeds, Garfield supported James Blaine’s vision of

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<sup>142</sup> Julia S. Sand, “Letter to Chester A. Arthur, August 27, 1881,” *The Papers of Chester Alan Arthur, 1829-1886*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>143</sup> Upon shooting Garfield, Guiteau famously declared, “I am a Stalwart, and Arthur will be President!”

installing a meritocratic system to determine federal employment.<sup>144</sup> The combination, therefore, of Garfield and Arthur on the Republican Party's presidential ticket in 1880 could not have made for a stranger pair. Yet perhaps even more bizarre was the route that Chester Arthur adopted upon becoming an inadvertent Chief Executive.

Although it remains unclear as to how much Garfield supported abolishing the spoils system, Garfield's death ultimately made him a martyr for civil service reform. While Arthur significantly diverged from Garfield on a number of issues, one area where there was some continuity between the accidental president and his predecessor was in confronting the extensive corruption created by party patronage. The fact that Arthur, who had benefitted from patronage during the 1870s, decided to take up the cause for civil service reform, made the push for change all the more effective. Seizing upon the image of the fallen Garfield, Arthur reversed his position and threw his full support behind civil service reform in his First Annual Message to Congress. The newly instated President advocated for examinations that would determine job appointments as well as a panel that would investigate potential abuses and assess an applicant's "fitness for a certain position."<sup>145</sup> By the end of 1883, Arthur had successfully honored the memory of President Garfield when he signed the Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act into law. Arthur's actions alienated many Congressional Republicans and the Stalwarts. Nevertheless, by pursuing civil service reform, the President won allies

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<sup>144</sup> Kenneth D. Ackerman, *Dark Horse*, (New York, Carroll & Graff Publishers, 2003), 16-19.

<sup>145</sup> Chester A. Arthur, "First Annual Message to Congress, December 6, 1881," *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Vol. VIII, James Richardson, ed., (Washington D.C., US Congress Joint Committee on Printing, 1897), 60-63.

amongst the Democratic Party and reform-minded Republicans. In some respects, Arthur welcomed the advice that Julia Sand wrote to him in the summer of 1881: “As President of the United States, made such by no election, but by a national calamity, you have no old associations, no personal friends, no political ties; you have only your duty to the people at large.”<sup>146</sup> Upon assuming the presidency, Arthur engaged in policies that distanced himself both from his Stalwart comrades and from his predecessor. As Sand counseled, Arthur adopted his own course of action.

While Arthur emulated Garfield’s position on civil service reform, the accidental president radically departed from his predecessor’s viewpoints on almost every other issue. Like the accidental presidents before him, Arthur removed many of his predecessor’s Cabinet members. Following this Cabinet shuffle, Arthur crafted an agenda that deviated significantly from Garfield’s. Interestingly, Arthur and Garfield differed tremendously over civil rights policy. Whereas Garfield favored limited government involvement in alleviating the plight of African Americans and other minorities, Arthur advocated for government intervention. Drawing from his abolitionist background (as an attorney he won a case that led to the desegregation of New York City’s streetcars), Arthur insisted upon reinvigorating the Republican Party’s presence within the South and assisting the freedmen.<sup>147</sup> He urged his party to support a group of moderate Republicans known as the Readjusters, a Virginia coalition

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<sup>146</sup> Julia S. Sand, “Letter to Chester A. Arthur, August 27, 1881,” *The Papers of Chester Alan Arthur, 1829-1886*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Building, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas C. Reeves, *Gentleman Boss: The Life of Chester Alan Arthur*, (New York, Knopf, 1975), 16.

comprised of whites and blacks that stressed protecting African Americans' civil rights.<sup>148</sup> While Garfield viewed Native Americans as a dying race, Arthur called for the greater allocation of resources to reservations and for, "a liberal appropriation for the support of Indian schools."<sup>149</sup> While Garfield joined the chorus of Western Congressmen in denouncing Chinese laborers, Arthur proved to be Chinese immigrants' greatest defender when he vetoed an early version of the Chinese Exclusion Act, decrying the bill as, "undemocratic and hostile to the spirit of our institutions."<sup>150</sup>

Not only did Arthur depart from Garfield's views on civil rights but also the President implemented a very different set of economic policies. President Arthur infuriated the majority of Congressional Republicans when he vetoed the Rivers and Harbors Act, an internal improvement bill that had won Garfield's support. Declaring the bill as wasteful, Arthur dismissed Conkling and the Stalwarts while obtaining the admiration of independent Republicans and the Democrats, who consistently opposed federal internal improvements.<sup>151</sup> Later in his term, Arthur continued to break away from Garfield's legacy and exasperate Republicans when he agreed to support the Tariff of 1883. Ridiculed as the "Mongrel Tariff", the bill faced Republican criticism because it was deemed not strong enough to protect American products from foreign competitors.

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<sup>148</sup> Justus D. Doenecke, *The Presidencies of James A. Garfield and Chester A. Arthur*, American Presidency Series, Donald R. McCoy, Clifford S. Griffin, Homer E. Scolofsky, eds., (Lawrence, KS, Regents Press of Kansas, 1981), 49-51.

<sup>149</sup> Chester A. Arthur, "First Annual Message to Congress, December 6<sup>th</sup> 1881," *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908*, Vol. VIII, James Richardson, ed., (Washington D.C., Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908), 56.

<sup>150</sup> Chester Arthur, "Veto Message of the Chinese Exclusion Act, April 4, 1882," *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1908*, Vol. VIII, James Richardson, ed., (Washington D.C., Bureau of National Literature and Art, 1908), 112-118.

<sup>151</sup> Doenecke, 81.

Congressmen also lambasted the bill for it enabled the President to set the tariff rates without having to consult Congress.<sup>152</sup> Although Arthur contended that the tariff's passage was necessary to aid the economy, the President had done very little to acquire much political capital during his three years in office. Half-Breed Republicans failed to regard him as Garfield's heir, and Stalwarts disowned him for promoting civil service reform. By the time Republicans gathered for their 1884 national convention, Chester Arthur, like John Tyler, Millard Fillmore, and Andrew Johnson before him, had become a politician without a party. Rejected by both Republican factions, Arthur was denied the presidential nomination in his own right and sank into obscurity.

### *Party Unity*

The Republican wars over the question of civil service reform had been waging long before Chester Arthur inherited the presidency. The origins of the Half-Breeds and Stalwarts began in the chambers of Congress during the 1860s as Republican members gravitated towards the personalities of James Blaine of Maine and Roscoe Conkling of New York. Since the Grant Administration, Half-Breeds and Stalwarts grappled with each other not only on civil service reform but also on the tariff issue and, later, regarding the propriety of President Grant seeking a third term. Stalwart newspapers and Half-Breed campaign songs quickly became the norm. Moreover, various Gilded Age historians attribute Republican in-fighting as one of the reasons why Democrats were able to make

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 169-171.

gains in Congress, leaving the Republicans with a razor-thin majority in the Senate and House following the 1880 elections. Indeed, the Republican Party of Garfield, Conkling, Arthur, and Blaine appeared far more fragmented and divided than the Republican Party of Lincoln, Johnson, and Seward. However, despite these factions, the Republican Party of the 1880s had become far more organized and powerful at the national level compared to its Civil War counterpart. As Daniel Klinghard notes, the 1880s functioned as a transition period for the national parties as local and state parties surrendered more of their authority to the national committees. Indeed, the parties at the national level witnessed the rise of sub-national leaders, party organizers who had significant influence over where resources (particularly money) were allocated.<sup>153</sup> This greater autonomy over monetary allocations aided Republican Party leaders, such as Conkling and Blaine, to ensure discipline within their own factions as opposed to the general party. Nevertheless, as the table below indicates, Republican Party unity had entered a decline by the time Chester Arthur assumed the presidency.

***Table Four: Republican Party Unity Scores for the House and Senate [47<sup>th</sup> – 48<sup>th</sup> Congresses]***<sup>154</sup>

Session of Congress (Date)	House Republican Unity Score*	Senate Republican Unity Score*
47 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1881-83)	0.92	0.88
48 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1883-85)	0.86	0.85

*\*Party unity is defined as the proportion of Republican Congressmen voting with the majority of their party.*

<sup>153</sup> Klinghard, 8-9.

<sup>154</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, "DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses," *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).



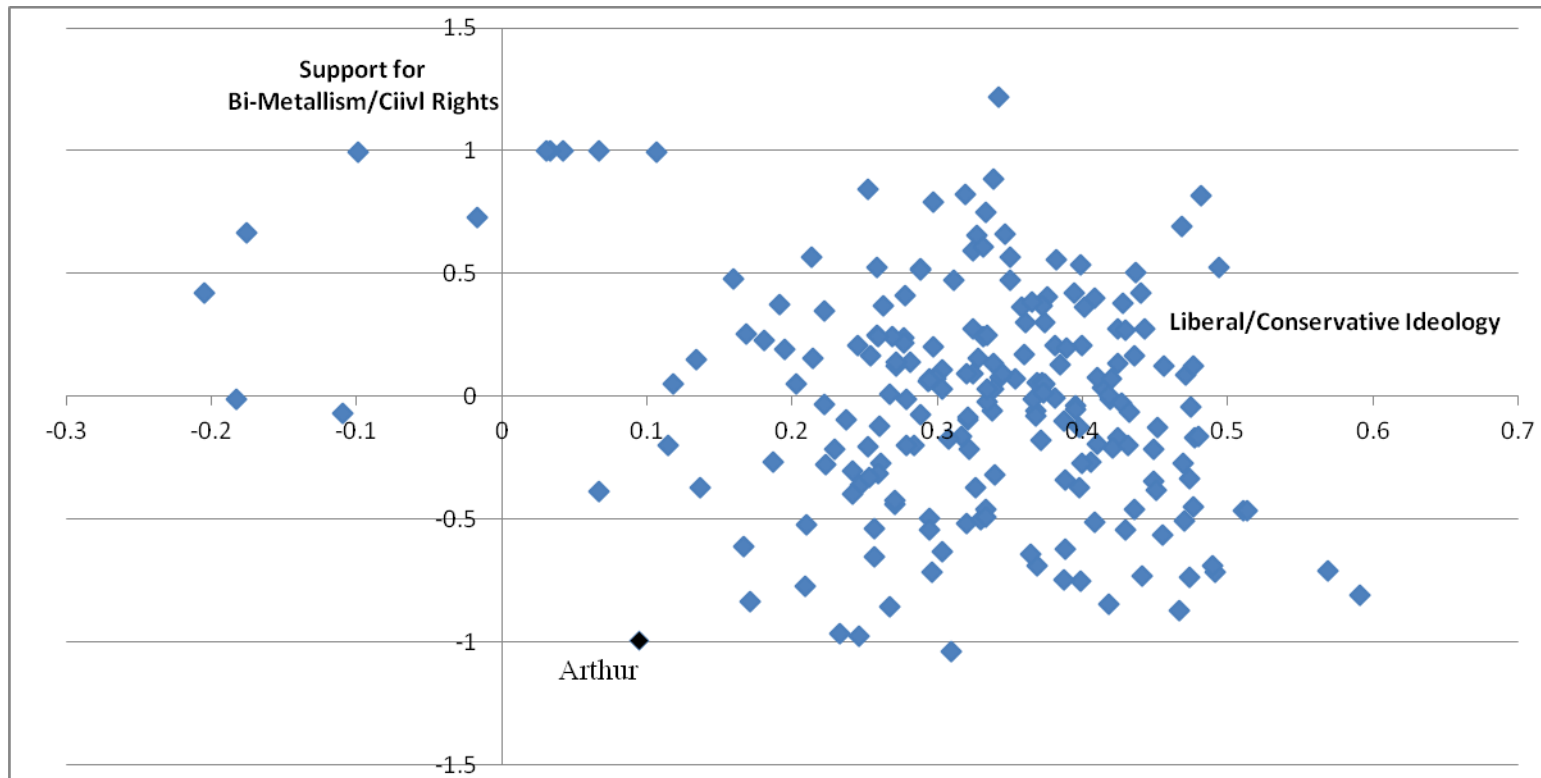
Although Republican Party unity was quite strong during the first two years of the Garfield-Arthur administration, following the mid-term elections, the amount of cohesion amongst Congressional Republicans had declined considerably. In terms of party unity, the 48<sup>th</sup> Congress was the least united session for Republicans since the end of Ulysses S. Grant's Administration. It was amongst this lack of unity that Arthur was able to not only implement the Pendleton Act but also to enact a number of his policy changes on African Americans and Native Americans. Once again, seizing upon the lack of party cohesion enabled Arthur to craft programs and policies that differed substantially from the late Garfield. In order to better visualize the fragmented state of Congressional Republicans, the adjacent scatter-plot (Figure 4) depicts the various policy preferences of Republican members of the 48<sup>th</sup> Congress.

Moreover, Republican Party unity would continue to sink as Arthur's Administration progressed. Republicans had become so fractious over civil service reform, the tariff, and other issues, that a significant number of Northeastern and New England Republicans (the so-called Mugwumps) defected from the party during the 1884 presidential election and threw their support to the Democratic candidate, Grover Cleveland. The Mugwumps' betrayal not only further divided the GOP but also catapulted the first Democrat to the White House in twenty-four years.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Doenecke, 125.

**Figure 4: Ideal Policy Preferences of Congressional Republicans and Arthur (47<sup>th</sup> Congress: 1881-1883)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, “Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm>. The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Bi-Metallism/Civil Rights) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1).

### *Nomination Mechanism*

The inner-turmoil within the Republican Party climaxed during the chaotic Republican National Convention of 1880. Held in Chicago, the convention resulted in the most contested presidential nomination process in the history of the Republican Party. Unable to rally behind one of their three front runners (Ulysses S. Grant, James Blaine, and John Sherman), Republicans finally settled on dark horse candidate James Garfield after a record 36 ballots. In an attempt to present a united front, Republican leaders, for the first time in the party's history, enacted a loyalty pledge.<sup>156</sup> While Republican moderates and the Half-Breeds celebrated the Union general's nomination, Republican Party leaders understood that, going into the general election, they would have to pacify Conkling and the Stalwarts in order to achieve party unity.

After finagling with Conkling and the Stalwarts, Republican Party leaders, without consulting Garfield, anointed Chester Arthur as the vice presidential nominee. Again one can see the tremendous power wielded by party bosses over the nomination process. The viewpoint of the presidential candidate was disregarded. The Republican Party leaders of 1880 followed the same pattern as the Whig Party leaders of 1840 and 1848. As historian Kenneth Ackerman notes, "No one had time to ask Garfield himself his opinion on the matter...James Garfield hardly knew Chester Arthur personally."<sup>157</sup> Other sources commented that while Garfield publicly endorsed Arthur, in private, he deeply distrusted the Stalwart and regretted that Levi P. Morton had declined the offer of the vice

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<sup>156</sup> *National Party Conventions, 1831-1976*, (Washington D.C., Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1979), 15.

<sup>157</sup> Ackerman, 130.

presidency.<sup>158</sup> Garfield's misgivings over Arthur's nomination foreshadowed the rocky relationship that would emerge between the two of them.

Indeed, Arthur's nomination gave pause not only to Garfield but also to other Republicans, including A.O. Campbell. Campbell, knowledgeable of Arthur's dubious management of the New York Customhouse during the Grant and Hayes Administrations, viewed Arthur's selection as unwise and an affront to the platform plank on civil service reform.<sup>159</sup> Despite Campbell's hesitation, the selection of Arthur for the vice-presidency was not given much thought, as was often the case when party leaders determined the second name on the national ticket. As Ohio politician and editor Whitelaw Reid observed, "[Chester Arthur's nomination] had caused many a staunch Republican to wince. Nevertheless with a President like Garfield to elect, the question of the second office seemed then a [light] matter."<sup>160</sup> Despite some Republicans' qualms over Arthur, the vice presidential nominee had not instigated much concern within the party. Given Garfield's vitality and young age (he was only 48 when he received the nomination), the thought of Arthur ascending to the presidency had not been seriously considered. As E.L. Godkin, editor of the reformist paper, *The Nation*, proclaimed, "There is no place [for Arthur] in which the powers of mischief are so small as in the vice presidency. [Garfield's death is] too unlikely a contingency to be worth making extraordinary provision for."<sup>161</sup> Besides their prophetic nature, Godkin's words emphasized the nineteenth century trend of disregarding

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<sup>158</sup> Doenecke, 21.

<sup>159</sup> Ackerman, 130-31.

<sup>160</sup> Royall Cortissoz, *The Life of Whitelaw Reid*, Vol. II Politics-Diplomacy, (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921), 31.

<sup>161</sup> E.L. Godkin, *The Nation*, Vol. 30 (July 1880), 445.

and discounting the vice presidential pick. Once more, party leaders, in their haste to create a united front, had failed to ensure that ideological harmony existed between their running mates. Indeed, as the DW Nominate scores suggest, Garfield's ideology score of 0.303 differed greatly from Arthur's score of 0.095.<sup>162</sup> Due to this ideological disparity, and the fact that Garfield had no say over who would appear below his name on the Republican ballot, it is not surprising that Arthur adopted a rogue strategy upon inheriting the presidency.

### *Institutional Status of the Vice President*

Aside from the fact that they hailed from different sects of the Republican Party, another factor that compelled Arthur to pursue the rogue strategy was his isolation from President Garfield. Although Arthur campaigned heavily for Garfield in New York and Indiana, the relationship between the two men declined considerably once Garfield's presidency began. This again was due in part to Vice President Arthur's closeness to Conkling and the New York Stalwarts. During his tenure as vice president, Arthur personally coordinated Conkling's campaign to be re-nominated to the Senate. Nevertheless, Arthur's isolation from the President was particularly unfortunate. As Vice President, Arthur presided over an evenly divided Senate, meaning that he would cast the deciding vote on a number of legislative initiatives.<sup>163</sup> Had Garfield been more trusting, the President may have directed Arthur to help coordinate the passage of the much-discussed civil service

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<sup>162</sup> Keith Poole, et.al. "DW Nominate Scores," *VoteView*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21\\_PRES.DAT](ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21_PRES.DAT)

<sup>163</sup> Doenecke, 54.

reform bill. Unfortunately, due to Garfield's mistrust, and his unexpected assassination, the President failed to fully exploit the advantage wielded by his Vice President. Similarly, Arthur had failed to obtain much influence as Vice President. Like Millard Fillmore, Arthur intended to utilize his position to have a voice in patronage and federal appointments. However, Garfield rarely attempted to seek Arthur's counsel, deferring instead to his Cabinet, particularly Garfield's Secretary of State James Blaine. Blaine's appointment to the Cabinet instigated fears from Arthur and Conkling that they had lost influence over Garfield.<sup>164</sup>

Arthur further isolated himself from Garfield when he aggressively pushed to have his say with Garfield's other appointments. When Garfield considered nominating Half-Breed William Robertson to the New York Customhouse (a position formerly held by Chester Arthur), the President received a firestorm of criticism from Conkling and the Stalwarts. Robertson's supporters appealed to Garfield, insisting, "If [the President] surrenders now, Conkling [and Arthur] is President for the rest of the term and Garfield becomes a laughing stock. On the other hand he [Garfield] has only to stand firm to succeed."<sup>165</sup> Emboldened by the support, Garfield pressed forward with the nomination, declaring, "Robertson may be carried out of the Senate head first or feet first...I shall never withdraw him."<sup>166</sup> In a desperate attempt to block the nomination, Vice President Arthur even included his name on a letter addressed to Garfield protesting Robertson's appointment. On April 14, 1881, Arthur finally secured an audience with Garfield

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>165</sup> Cortissoz, 60.

<sup>166</sup> James Garfield, "Letter to John Hay, April 1881," *The Life and Letters of James Abram Garfield*, Vol. 2 (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 1925), 1109.

in order to personally convince the President to select a different nominee for the customhouse position.<sup>167</sup> When Garfield still refused to be ruled by the Stalwarts, Vice President Arthur went so far as to publicly criticize the President in an editorial for the *New York Herald*. “Garfield,” the editorial read, “has not been square, nor honorable, nor truthful with Conkling. It’s a hard thing to say of a President of the United States, but it’s only the truth.”<sup>168</sup> While Vice President Arthur’s explicit condemnation of the President would be unthinkable in modern politics, Arthur’s editorial highlighted the Office of the Vice President’s lack of influence. Moreover, Arthur’s criticism symbolized the amount of tension that existed between the two men and foreshadowed Arthur’s ultimate determination to go rogue. Indeed, after Arthur’s very open attack, the Vice President was officially banned from the White House.<sup>169</sup> Following Arthur’s ban, the Vice President interacted very little with President Garfield. The restriction ultimately triggered Arthur to engage in different policies when he assumed the presidency in September 1881.

### ***Conclusion***

Although Garfield and Arthur had found some common ground with respect to civil service reform, Arthur ultimately followed the precedents set by Tyler, Fillmore, and Johnson and became another rogue accidental president.

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<sup>167</sup> Cortissoz, 61

<sup>168</sup> T.B. Connery, “The Secret History of the Garfield-Conkling Tragedy, *Cosmopolitan*, Vol. 23, (June 1897), 146. (145-162)

<sup>169</sup> After considerable research, I can say with some confidence that Chester Arthur remains the only vice president to have been banned from the White House.

Arguably though, compared to earlier accidental presidents, Arthur did not entirely diverge from the path set by his predecessor and party. This is due in part to the level of organization and professionalization that the Republican Party had obtained by the 1880s. The Party had left its formative years during the 1860s behind and now had instituted a clear hierarchical structure with party bosses and a national committee that was steadily gaining in power. In fact, this modernization of the Republican Party coincides with the argument crafted by Daniel Klinghard's work. While Arthur did stray from the policies of Garfield and infuriated the Stalwarts, his rogue strategy did not prove to be nearly as harmful to the Republican Party as Fillmore's rogue behavior was to the Whigs. Admittedly of the five accidental presidents, Arthur is perhaps the least radical and least rogue-like. This, however, can be attributed to the growing strength of the national parties.

Nevertheless, the parallels amongst these four accidental presidents are quite striking. Arthur presided over a Republican Party that had failed to reach a consensus over civil service reform. In many ways, this echoes Millard Fillmore's attempts to serve as the head of a Whig Party torn apart over the question of slavery. Furthermore, because of the multiple factions within the Republican Party, Arthur was able to not only secure the nomination for vice president but he was also able to enact his own policies rather than function as the custodian of the Garfield Administration. Although he failed to win his party's nomination for the 1884 presidential race, Arthur was not nearly as disastrous a president as his enemies predicted. Moreover, compared to Tyler, Fillmore, and Johnson, Arthur



enjoyed considerable success as an accidental president. He not only pushed through civil service reform but also set an important model for executive power through the Tariff of 1883. Although serving as president during a time of executive impotence, Arthur proved to be a capable administrator. Nonetheless, the successes Arthur enjoyed as an accidental president would soon pale in comparison to the smashing victory enjoyed by the last accidental president who employed a rogue strategy: Theodore Roosevelt.

## Part V: Theodore Roosevelt

### *Overview*

“I wish to state that it shall be my aim to continue absolutely unbroken the policy of President McKinley,” so stated the energetic Vice President Theodore Roosevelt upon taking the presidential oath of office on September 14, 1901.<sup>170</sup> Days earlier, an anarchist gunned down President William McKinley at an expedition in Buffalo, thus making Theodore Roosevelt, at the age of 42, the youngest man to ever assume the presidency.<sup>171</sup> Yet despite Roosevelt’s oaths of loyalty, the nation’s fifth accidental president adopted his own independent route. McKinley’s death symbolized not only the death of a president but also the end of traditional Republican practices. Indeed, as journalist Joseph B. Bishop declared, “There was general recognition...that Roosevelt’s ascension to the Presidency meant the opening of a new epoch in national history.”<sup>172</sup> During the last quarter century of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, American society underwent dramatic changes. Immigration levels reached new peaks. The West witnessed a rise in labor and populist movements. Reformists groups increased in numbers. Forward thinkers called for new policies and programs within American cities. One such member of this growing progressive movement included New York Governor Theodore Roosevelt. In fact, Governor Roosevelt’s push for reform and public programs marked him as too uncontrollable in the opinion of the New York City bosses. It was the New York City Republican Party machine that originally promoted

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<sup>170</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Inaugural Speech, September 14, 1901,” *Theodore Roosevelt and his time shown in his own letters*, Joseph Bishop, ed., (New York, Scribner’s Sons, 1920), 149.

<sup>171</sup> John F. Kennedy was 43 years old when inaugurated, making him the youngest person *elected* as president.

<sup>172</sup> Joseph Bishop, ed., *Theodore Roosevelt and his time shown in his own letters*, (New York, Scribner’s Sons, 1920), 152.

Roosevelt as McKinley's running mate in 1900. That McKinley and Roosevelt clearly came from opposite ends of the Republican Party spelled trouble for the President and Vice President. Given Roosevelt's own aspirations for the presidency (historians speculate that he accepted the vice presidential nomination to position himself to run as president in 1904), it seemed natural for him to want to break free from McKinley's shadow. In many respects, of the five accidental presidents, Roosevelt's decision to go rogue and detach himself from McKinley's programs and policies was the least surprising.

While McKinley and Roosevelt shared similar visions regarding America's newfound role within the international community, the two running mates rarely agreed on domestic policies. McKinley, according to Bishop symbolized how, "the Republican Party was controlled by the great industrial and commercial interests...[such tactics] had never found more acceptance than was the case under President McKinley's administration."<sup>173</sup> As president, McKinley strongly pushed for pro-business, particularly pro-monopoly policies within his administration. The president did very little to enforce the 1890 Sherman Antitrust Act and actively met with the bigwigs of Wall Street (John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan) to shape economic policy. The President adhered to the pro-tariff stance that he had embraced during his days in the US Senate, ensuring that duties on US imports remained high to protect domestic corporations. As a result of McKinley's tactics, the relative strength of the steel, rubber, copper, and oil trusts had grown. For instance, Rockefeller's Standard Oil controlled 84% of all US

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid, 152.

petroleum products.<sup>174</sup> Overseeing an era of prosperity within the country, McKinley simply employed the policies that Republicans had been implementing since the days of the Lincoln Administration.

Although President Roosevelt insisted that he would commit himself to the views of his fallen predecessor, the accidental president, with little delay, asserted the need to undo, “[the Republican’s] old laws and the old customs...[they] are no longer sufficient.” Within his first message to Congress, President Roosevelt articulated a vision that opposed many of McKinley’s planks. The President called for reducing the amount of influence exerted by “the captains of industry.” He also cautioned against the growing strength of trusts and monopolies, maintaining that the national government had an obligation to assist all levels of American society.<sup>175</sup> Symbolically, Roosevelt declared his independence from Wall Street influence when he informed J.P. Morgan that the US government would investigate Morgan’s business activities and interests should, “we [the government] find out that...they [Morgan] have done something we regard as wrong.”<sup>176</sup> In addition to his rhetoric, Roosevelt increased the number of anti-trust litigations that the federal government pursued, earning him the moniker, “Trust-Buster Teddy.” As President, Roosevelt also directly intervened in the coal miners’ strike and successfully crafted an outcome that

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<sup>174</sup> Richard Lacayo, “Fighting the Fat Cats,” *Time Magazine*, Vol. 167, No. 26, (June 25, 2006), 2013, Web, 15 December 2012, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1207811,00.html#ixzz2H4wgBD44>

<sup>175</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “First Annual Message, December 3, 1901,” *The American Presidency Project*, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Wolley, 2013, Web, 15 December 2012, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29542>.

<sup>176</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: An Autobiography*, (New York, Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929), 468.

favored the workers rather than the mine owners.<sup>177</sup> Perhaps most significantly, Roosevelt embraced the rising spirit of progressivism by calling for greater reform and for more programs designed to help various sectors of the population. In many ways, the rise of progressivism within the American political system had created a growing divide within the Republican Party between the Old Guard and the more liberal-minded members. Just as his predecessors before him, Roosevelt utilized his party's internal disputes to enact his own rogue strategy. He would not be beholden to McKinley's Gilded Age views.

### *Party Unity*

While less intense than the era of Garfield and Arthur, internal fights within the Republican Party over the organization's ideology and commitments still erupted during the turn of the century. As Roosevelt entered office, the Republicans steadily bifurcated into the conservative Old Guard, represented by Senators Thomas Platt and Mark Hanna of New York and Ohio, respectively, and the Progressives, embodied by Wisconsin Governor Robert LaFollette and Theodore Roosevelt himself. Divisions between the Old Guard and the Progressives cut across geographic lines. A large number of Western Republicans typically were at the forefront of the Progressive Movement, while many Northeastern Republicans, such as Platt, generally identified with the more conservative faction within the group. Although Table 5 (below) depicts a Republican Party that appears united, the accompanying scatterplot (Figure 5)

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<sup>177</sup> Abbott, 85.

reveals the wide range of different policy preferences that existed amongst Republican members within the 57<sup>th</sup> Congress:

***Table Five: Republican Party Unity Scores for the House and Senate [57<sup>th</sup> – 59<sup>th</sup> Congresses]***<sup>178</sup>

Session of Congress (Date)	House Republican Unity Score*	Senate Republican Unity Score*
57 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1901-1903)	0.94	0.89
58 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1903-1905)	0.94	0.87
59 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1905-1909)	0.88	0.83

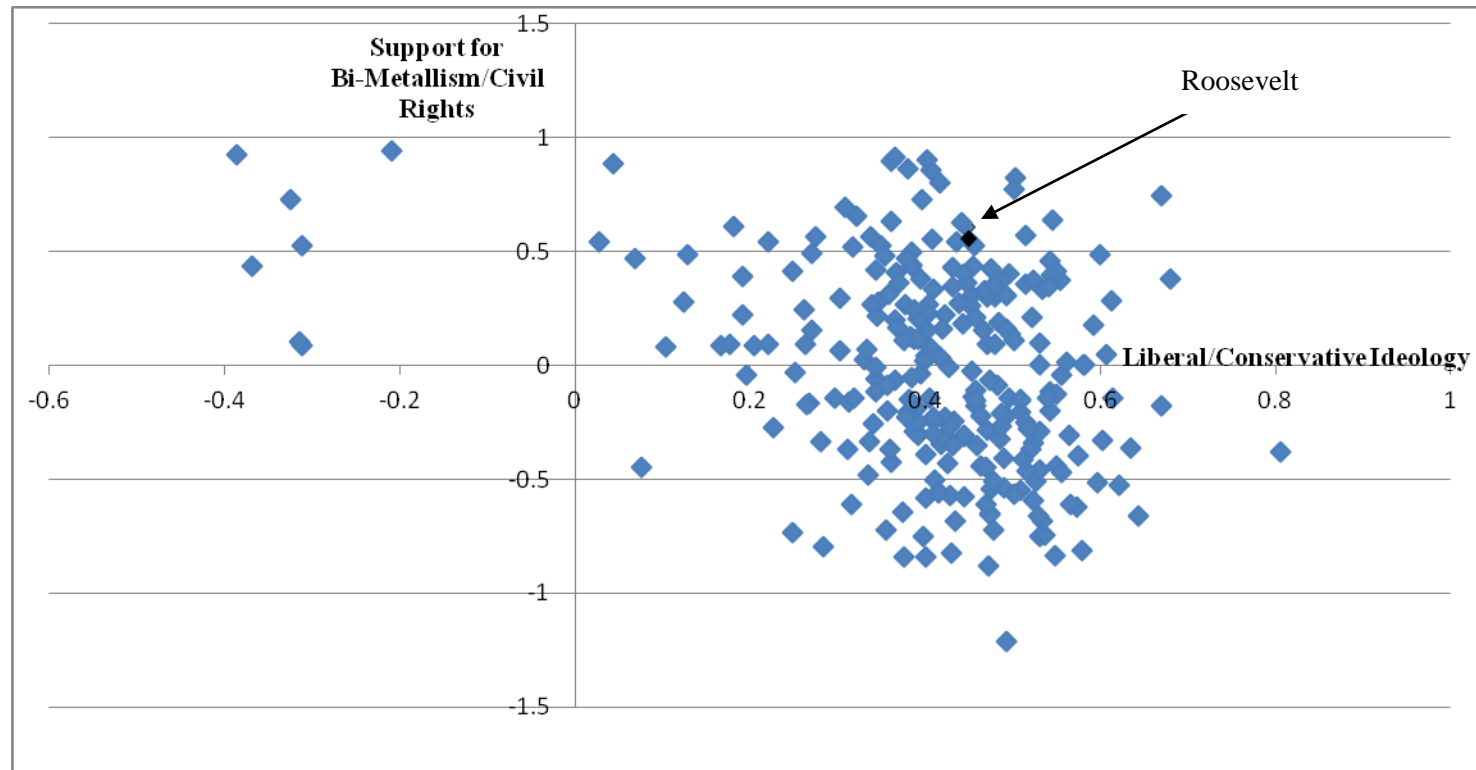
*\*Party unity is defined as the proportion of Republican Congressmen voting with the majority of their party.*

Regardless of the story told by the party unity scores, in-fighting between Old Guards and Progressives made it difficult for Congress to challenge the President's actions. As a result, while the Congressional Republicans squabbled, Roosevelt resorted to executive orders and unilateral action in order to scrap McKinley's policies and establish a new path.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, the accidental President Roosevelt would play different Republican senators off of each other, exploiting their ideological divisions. For example, by appealing to the progressive Senators Edward Wolcott and Philipp B. Stewart of Colorado and Ohio respectively, Roosevelt bolstered his support amongst the Progressives and secured patronage jobs for his men. Although the decline in party cohesion ultimately benefitted Roosevelt in his attempt to break free from McKinley's programs, tensions within the Republican Party would only escalate between the

<sup>178</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, "DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses," *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).

<sup>179</sup> Abott, 85.

**Figure 5: Ideal Policy Preferences of Congressional Republicans and Roosevelt (57<sup>th</sup> Congress: 1901-1903)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, “Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm>. The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Civil Rights) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1).

Progressives and the Old Guards. In fact, intra-party fighting reached a feverous pitch during the presidential election of 1912, when a schism between the Progressive and Old Guard Republicans enabled the Democrats to reclaim the White House after sixteen years of Republican control.

### *Nomination Mechanism*

Theodore Roosevelt was the vice-presidential running mate who no one really wanted. The appointment of the New York governor to the number two spot on the national ticket was, once again, due to backroom dealings of Republican Party bosses, particularly New York Senator Thomas Platt. Eager to rid himself of Roosevelt and gain greater control over New York state politics, Platt started advocating for Roosevelt as the vice presidential nominee following the death of McKinley's first vice president, Garret Hobart.<sup>180</sup> Governor Roosevelt was less than enthusiastic about Platt's campaign. In a letter to his close friend, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Roosevelt professed, "In the Vice-Presidency, I could do nothing....It would not entertain me to preside in the Senate."<sup>181</sup> After Senator Platt informed him that the business interest in New York would not support Roosevelt for a second term as governor, Roosevelt accepted his political fate.<sup>182</sup> On the last day of the 1900 Republican National

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<sup>180</sup> Bishop, 136.

<sup>181</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Letter to Senator Lodge, February 2, 1900," *The Papers of Theodore Roosevelt, 1858-1919*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Room, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>182</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Letter to Senator Lodge, June 9, 1900," *The Papers of Theodore Roosevelt, 1858-1919*, Microfilm, James Madison Memorial Room, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.



Convention in Philadelphia, Roosevelt was nominated as the vice-presidential candidate, 925 to 1.

Similarly to earlier instances, Roosevelt's ascension to the vice presidency due to the influence of party leaders carried with it a variety of ideological and political problems. Senator Mark Hanna of Ohio, who had consistently protested Roosevelt's inclusion on the national ticket, was among the few Republicans to note the clear ideological differences between the Rough Rider and McKinley. Eerily prophetic, Hanna asked during the National Convention, "Don't any of you realize that there's only one life between that madman and the Presidency?...What harm can he do as Governor of New York compared to the damage that he will do as President if McKinley should die?"<sup>183</sup> Indeed, by analyzing the DW Nominate Scores, one can clearly see that the policy preferences of McKinley (0.231) and Roosevelt (0.456) along the liberal/conservative divide differed greatly.<sup>184</sup> Moreover, the party bosses' decision to appoint Roosevelt as vice-president without consulting McKinley led to further complications. As Irving Williams writes, "McKinley had no love for Roosevelt. To him, the Governor was...politically unpredictable and discomfoting....No offer to run with McKinley in 1900 was ever to come from the President."<sup>185</sup> Aware of the rift that already existed between McKinley and Roosevelt, Senator Lodge urged Roosevelt to, "appear...as the President's next friend as [the deceased Vice President]

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<sup>183</sup> Arthur Wallace Dunn, *From Harrison to Harding, Vol. I* (New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1922), 335.

<sup>184</sup> Keith Poole, et.al. "DW Nominate Scores," *VoteView*, 2012,

[ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21\\_PRES.DAT](ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21_PRES.DAT)

<sup>185</sup> Williams, 73.

Hobart was.”<sup>186</sup> Nevertheless, despite Roosevelt’s best efforts, McKinley’s antipathy towards Roosevelt, combined with the weakness of the Office of the Vice President, prevented Roosevelt from acquiring significant influence and power as vice president.

### *Institutional Status of the Vice President*

Theodore Roosevelt’s tenure as Vice President represented the nadir of that institution’s overall power and influence. This was potentially due to the fact that the Executive Branch itself had diminished in prestige during the Gilded Age. As Vice President, Roosevelt presided over the Senate for only one week.<sup>187</sup> In fact, an examination of Vice President Roosevelt’s papers and correspondences include more references to Roosevelt’s desire to study law and take the New York bar exam than any of his official duties or responsibilities. Throughout his six months as vice president, Roosevelt consistently attempted to enter McKinley’s inner circle and function as an advisor. He reiterated his claims made in an 1896 essay in which he advocated for a stronger vice-presidency, arguing that the vice president should be afforded a seat at the Cabinet’s table as well as full voting power within the Senate.<sup>188</sup> As Fillmore and Arthur before him, Roosevelt also attempted to influence the president’s decision regarding federal appointments. Although the practice of vice presidents making recommendations for federal

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>187</sup> Dunn, 147.

<sup>188</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Essay on the Vice President, September 1896,” Reprinted in the *American Monthly Review of Reviews: An International Magazine, Volume 22*, July-December 1900, Albert Shaw, ed. (New York, The Review of Reviews Company, 1900), 10.

appointments had become commonplace by the time Roosevelt assumed the office, there is little evidence to indicate that McKinley honored this precedent. After Roosevelt failed to secure several federal appointments for his supporters, the Vice President complained, “[McKinley] does not intend that I shall have any influence of any kind, sort, or description in the administration from the top to the bottom.”<sup>189</sup> In many respects, Vice President Roosevelt suffered the same fate as Chester A. Arthur. Ideological disparity and McKinley’s lack of trust led to Roosevelt’s isolation. Given Roosevelt’s lack of access to the President and his identification with the growing progressive wing within the party, Roosevelt’s decision to employ a rogue strategy seemed logical when he inherited the presidency on September 15, 1901.

### *Conclusion*

In 1896 Theodore Roosevelt, reflecting on the Tyler, Fillmore, Johnson, and Arthur administrations, acknowledged, “It is an unhealthy thing to have the Vice President and President represented by principles so far apart that the succession of one to the place of the other means a change as radical as any party overturn.” Ironically, Roosevelt ultimately chose to ignore his own advice upon his accidental succession to the presidency. Aware of Progressivism’s growing rise within the Republican Party, Roosevelt was able to chart his own course that repudiated the stagnant politics of his predecessor. Based not only on his reversal of McKinley’s domestic programs but also on the discrepancies between the DW

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<sup>189</sup> Williams, 83.

Nominate scores, Theodore Roosevelt is one of the more roguish accidental presidents. Although the Republican Party had modernized and entered a period of political dominance during the late 1800s and early 1900s, the ongoing identity crisis the party faced between its progressive and conservative wings provided the bombastic Roosevelt the opportunity to seize the Party away from McKinley and towards his own vision. Had McKinley the ability to select his own running mate, it is perhaps more likely that his successor would have continued his policies. Again, Roosevelt's rogue strategy arose not only due to a lack of ideological harmony but also because of his isolated experience as the Vice President. McKinley's refusal to provide the energetic Roosevelt any role as counselor prevented Vice President Roosevelt from fully understanding McKinley's policies and stances. Moreover, Roosevelt's isolation removed any incentive that may have existed for him to rally behind McKinley's vision for the country. Why support the policies and programs of a president who clearly did not value your advice?

Interestingly, of the five accidental presidents who engaged in the rogue strategy, Roosevelt arguably had the most success. Not only did the Trust-Buster obtain a term in his own right, but also many historians rank Roosevelt as a "near-great" or "great" president.<sup>190</sup> Roosevelt's initial success as a rogue accidental president may be attributed to his accurate reading of the political atmosphere. Roosevelt's advocacy for Progressivism and reform rooted him as the undisputed head of that segment of the Republican Party. It is important to note that

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<sup>190</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. "Rating the Presidents: Washington to Clinton," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 112, No.2, (1997), 189.

Theodore Roosevelt would be the last of the accidental presidents who engaged in what I have defined as a rogue strategy. Starting with Calvin Coolidge in 1923, accidental presidents for the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would continue, rather than defy, the policies and programs of their predecessor. As I shall argue in the proceeding chapter, the shift away from the rogue strategy to one of emulation resulted from a variety of factors including: the rise of greater intra-party unity and discipline, changes in nomination practices, and the expansion of the vice-presidency as an institution.

## Chapter Four: The Emulators

*“I would devote every hour of every day during the remainder of John Kennedy’s unfilled term to achieving the goals he had set.” – Lyndon Johnson*

### Part I: Calvin Coolidge

#### Overview

While the national media focused on the sudden death of the beloved president, Warren G. Harding, the Washington D.C. circular, *The Searchlight*, turned its attention to Harding’s laconic Vice President, Calvin Coolidge. Acknowledging that Coolidge was now the sixth man to inadvertently inherit the presidency, *The Searchlight* cautioned the Vice President to not become, “[the next] [Andrew] Johnson” and lead the country down a ruinous path by betraying the policies of his predecessor.<sup>191</sup> Given the historical record and the very recent example of Theodore Roosevelt, the editors of *The Searchlight* were justifiably concerned that President Coolidge would go rogue, setting the nation on a very different course from the one envisioned by Harding. However, almost automatically, Coolidge broke from the tradition set by previous accidental presidents. Rather than undo the policies of his late predecessor, Calvin Coolidge became Warren Harding’s biggest champion. The day after he assumed office, President Coolidge asserted, “It will be my purpose to carry out the policies which he [Harding] has begun.” Coolidge continued his statement by calling upon members of the Harding cabinet to retain their posts.<sup>192</sup> Shortly after his declaration, Coolidge symbolically committed himself to preserving Harding’s

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<sup>191</sup> “Your Government at Washington,” *The Searchlight*, Vol. VIII, No. 2, (August 1923), 4.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

policies by accepting the chairmanship for the Harding Memorial Association.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, by building upon the programs and policies implemented by Harding, the former Massachusetts governor launched the years of “Coolidge prosperity.”

Although he upset the historical norm, Coolidge’s enactment of the emulation strategy as an accidental president was based on a number of factors. Despite the clear personality discrepancies between the two men, Harding and Coolidge had one of the more amiable presidential/vice-presidential relationships in the history of the two offices. Ideologically the two men were incredibly similar. Moreover, both Harding and Coolidge presided over a fully modernized, highly structured Republican Party. By the 1920s, the changes described in Daniel Klinghard’s *The Nationalization of American Political Parties, 1880-1896*, such as better party organization and the emergence of powerful parties at the national level, had clearly taken effect. There were no more discussions of Half-Breeds, Mugwumps, or Stalwarts. The wars between Theodore Roosevelt and William H. Taft or the House Republicans’ retaliation against Speaker Joe Cannon had become stories of the past. Innovations in campaigning, originally designed by Mark Hanna and Harry Daugherty, had jettisoned Republican candidates to the White House. By the end of the Great War, the GOP had largely solidified against the principles of Wilsonianism and the Democratic President’s proposed League of Nations. Republicans’ strong sense of identity and clear commitment to pro-business, anti-interventionist policies would ultimately make it very difficult for Coolidge to run roughshod over Congressional Republicans and the rest of his

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<sup>193</sup> Robert K. Murray, *The Harding Era*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 492.

party. Lastly, new institutional developments to the vice presidency, created during the Wilson Administration, brought Coolidge closer to the executive branch, enabling him to develop a better understanding of his predecessor's policies and programs. While I will discuss these changes in greater detail, one should note that the same factors Coolidge faced during his tenure as Vice President and, later, President would also impact later accidental presidents of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Throughout the last fifteen months of the Harding Administration and even into 1925, Calvin Coolidge functioned as, “caretaker for the Harding program...[he assumed] custodial responsibility.”<sup>194</sup> Emulating Harding's programs proved to be not too challenging for Coolidge. As their DW Nominate Scores suggest, Harding and Coolidge were fairly close to each other along the ideological spectrum with scores of 0.471 and 0.370 respectively.<sup>195</sup> In fact, both the Ohio Senator and the Massachusetts Governor hailed from the same wing of the Republican Party. Since his days as a member of Senator Foraker's Ohio machine, Warren Harding had identified more closely with the Republican Old Guard than with Roosevelt and the Progressives. Stumping for Taft in the 1912 election, Harding denounced Roosevelt as, “utterly without conscience...the greatest faker of all times.”<sup>196</sup> After a highly efficient campaign in 1920, President Harding continued to advance the viewpoints of moderate and conservative Republicans. In terms of domestic policy, Harding advocated for a high tariff,

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<sup>194</sup> Muray, 498.

<sup>195</sup> Keith Poole, et.al. “DW Nominate Scores,” *VoteView*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL0111E21\\_PRES.DAT](ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL0111E21_PRES.DAT)

<sup>196</sup> Harold F. Alderfer, “The Personality and Politics of Warren Harding,” Ph.D. dissertation (Syracuse University, New York, 1928), 162-63.



expressed his own doubts about immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, opposed the soldiers' bonus to World War I veterans, and did not trust labor unions.<sup>197</sup> With respect to foreign relations, Harding had earlier seized upon Republican rhetoric condemning Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations and instead lobbied for the United States' entry into the World Court.<sup>198</sup> Furthermore, as President, he refused to recognize the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, pushed for greater involvement in Latin America, and agreed to the provisions of the Washington Naval Treaty.<sup>199</sup>

The late Harding clearly had marked a path to emulate, which Coolidge actively followed. After his first Cabinet meeting, President Coolidge reiterated his desire to keep all of Harding's appointees and stressed that all of Harding's programs would be continued.<sup>200</sup> Coolidge publicly asserted his decision to follow Harding's path when he delivered his First Annual Message to Congress in December 1923.<sup>201</sup> While other accidental presidents had made similar pledges to respect the memory of their predecessor, Coolidge adhered to his word. Like his predecessor, Coolidge opposed the notion of providing for a soldiers' bonus and even vetoed the World War Adjusted Compensation Act.<sup>202</sup> Domestically, Coolidge continued Harding's work on reducing the national debt and supporting the newly created Budget Bureau. Moreover, Coolidge expanded upon Harding's

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<sup>197</sup> Murray, 10-15.

<sup>198</sup> Warren Harding, "Speech on the Senate Floor, September 11, 1919," *Congressional Record*, 66<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, (Washington D.C., US Government Printing Office, 1919), 5219-5225.

<sup>199</sup> Murray, 502.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 500.

<sup>201</sup> Calvin Coolidge, "First Annual Message to Congress, December 6, 1923," *The American Presidency Project*, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Wolley, 2013, Web, 10 December 2012, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29542>.

<sup>202</sup> "Veto Record for Calvin Coolidge during the 68<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, July 1926," (Washington D.C., US Government Printing Office, 1926), 227.

views surrounding immigration when he signed the Immigration Act of 1924, which established a quota system designed specifically to limit the number of Southern European immigrants. In terms of international affairs, Coolidge enforced the stipulations of the Washington Naval Agreement, also refused to recognize the Soviet Union, increased the rhetoric in favor of the World Court, and expanded US influence into Latin America. In addition to continuing Harding's policies, Coolidge showcased his commitment to Harding's agenda as the presidential election of 1924 approached. Coolidge essentially ran on Harding's 1920 platform in order to obtain his party's nomination in his own right. As Murray observes, by dutifully following Harding's legacy, Coolidge, "automatically garnered the support of all former Harding supporters."<sup>203</sup> The fact that most Republicans had already coalesced around Harding's policies made the emulation strategy even more compelling and appealing for Coolidge to adopt.

### ***Party Unity***

Eight long years of Wilsonianism had served to unite the Republican Party. With the Progressive Era winding down and threats of economic recession looming in the horizon, the Republican Old Guard steadily wrestled power away from more liberal-minded Republicans such as Bob LaFollette and Hiram Johnson. The vicious Republican in-fighting during the election of 1912, coupled with the death of Theodore Roosevelt and his Bull Moose Party in 1919, further suppressed the Progressive-leaning elements of the Republican Party.

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<sup>203</sup> Murray, 508.

Alternatively, Republican discontent focused on Woodrow Wilson, his lack of a post-war plan, and his insistence on having the United States join the League of Nations. Aside from this ideological cohesion (as Table Six indicates below), Republicans were also efficiently organized and well-disciplined, particularly compared to the Democrats who had become severally split along both geographic and liberal/conservative lines.<sup>204</sup> Republican organization and discipline shone through during the Party's 1920 national convention and the subsequent campaign. Despite the convention delegates' rumblings over how Harding was ultimately selected, "the bulk of the Republican party...quickly endorsed the decision of the convention."<sup>205</sup> Republican-orientated papers such as the *Chicago Tribune* sang the praises of Harding and Coolidge. As Coolidge later recalled, "When the election came, it appeared we had held practically the entire Republican vote." Again, Table 6, which contains party cohesion scores from DW Nominate, empirically indicates the strength of party unity amongst the Republicans during the 1920s and helps to explain their ability to dominate the White House for twelve years.

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<sup>204</sup> Robert Murray, "The Politics of Normalcy," (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), 136-37.

<sup>205</sup> Robert K. Murray, *The Harding Era*, (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1969), 42.

**Table Six: Republican Party Unity Scores for the House and Senate  
[68<sup>th</sup>-70<sup>th</sup> Congresses] <sup>206</sup>**

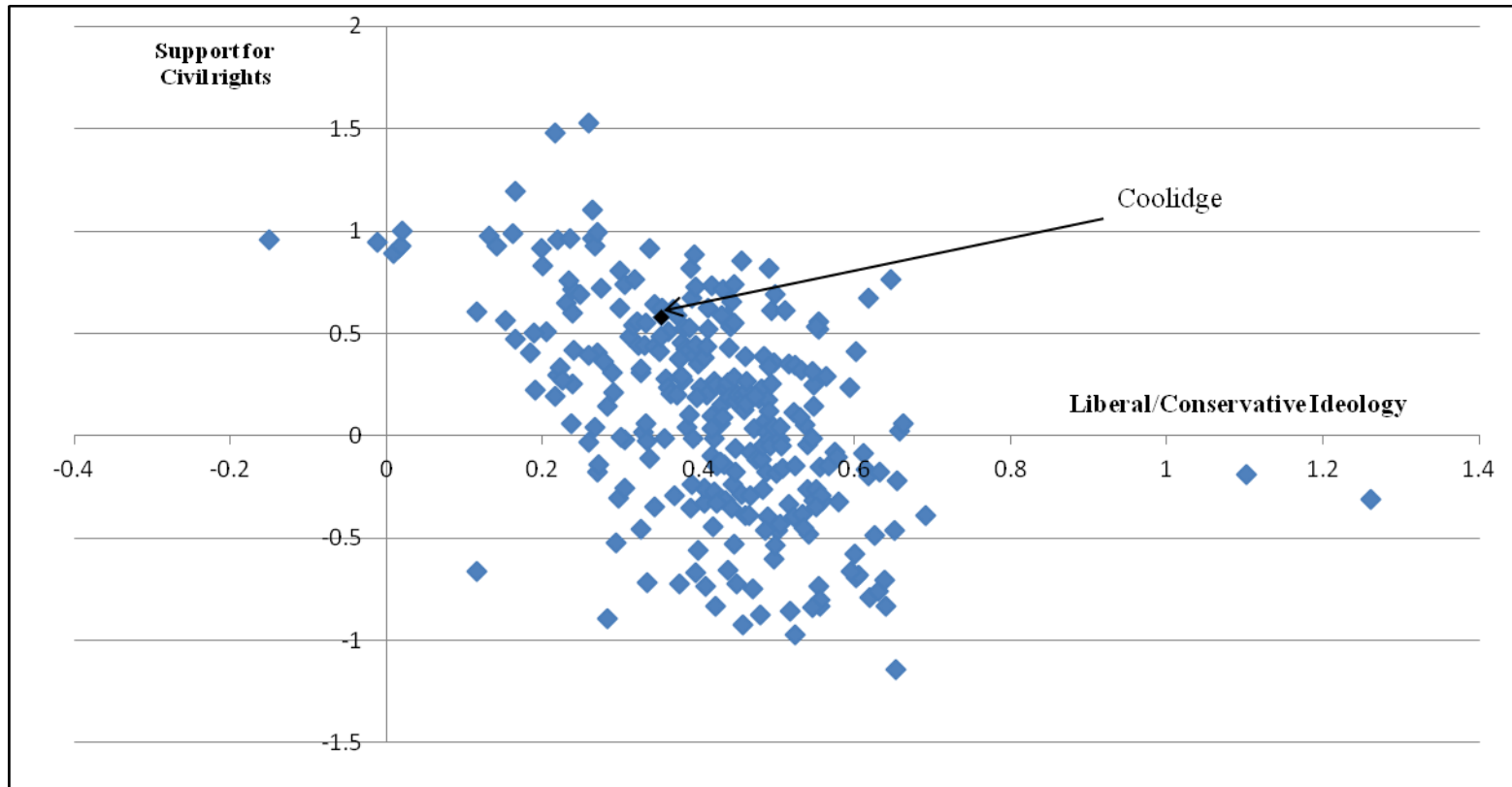
Session of Congress (Date)	House Republican Unity Score	Senate Republican Unity Score
68 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1923-1925)	0.83	0.77
69 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1925-1927)	0.85	0.76
70 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1927-1929)	0.81	0.72

*\*Party unity is defined as the proportion of Republican Congressmen voting with the majority of their party.*

Not only are the scores from the above table high (these scores had not been seen by Republicans since the Taft Administration), but also, based on the adjoining scatterplot (Figure 6) one can clearly see that the policy preferences of Coolidge and Congressional Republicans are in tandem. Additionally, the policy preferences of Republicans fall within a much smaller range. Their policy preferences are clumped together in one section of the graph; this stands in direct contrast to the graphs included in the previous chapter, especially the plots for the Tyler and Fillmore Administrations. Unlike the Whigs of the 1840s and 1850s, the Republicans of the 1920s possessed a far more defined party line and set of ideologies. Roosevelt's Progressive wing had been marginalized or fled to their own third party movements. Therefore, regardless of Coolidge's beliefs, the fact that Congressional Republicans projected such clear views and stances suggests that it would have been difficult for Coolidge to have adopted a different pathway from the one already forged by Harding. Fortunately, however, Coolidge's mindset matched mainstream Republican thinking.

<sup>206</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, "DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses," *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).

**Figure 6: Ideal Policy Preferences of Congressional Republicans and Coolidge (68<sup>th</sup> Congress: 1923-1925)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, “Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm> . The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Civil Rights) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1).

### *Nomination Mechanism*

If Theodore Roosevelt was the vice president no one had wanted, then Calvin Coolidge was the vice president that no one had expected. Similarly to the Republican National Convention of 1880, the 1920 convention lacked a clear front runner. Four candidates, including Ohio Senator Warren G. Harding, vied to place their name at the top of the ticket. Reports of back-room negotiations amongst Republican Senate leaders to determine the nominee sparked retaliation from the media. “The Republicans did not nominate a man,” proclaimed the *New York Evening World*, “they nominated a group, an oligarchy.”<sup>207</sup> Although the Republican Party eventually rallied behind Harding after the tenth ballot, rank and file members resented the party bosses who, “maneuvered [the convention] into...nominating a President in ways that were not satisfactory to a majority of the delegates.”<sup>208</sup> In retaliation, floor delegates refused to nominate the party bosses’ vice presidential nominee, Irvine Lenroot, and instead bolted to Calvin Coolidge after the Oregon delegation started shouting his name loudly. Coolidge happily accepted the nomination. Although party unity remained intact despite the controversy, the uprising from the Republican delegates against the party bosses highlighted the bosses’ decline in power.

While his nomination was spontaneous, the selection of Coolidge as Harding’s running mate proved to be fortuitous. As Murray notes, Coolidge’s victory resulted in, “the selection of a vice presidential candidate no more liberal,

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<sup>207</sup> “How the Press Size Up Harding,” *Literary Digest*, Vol. LXV, No. 13, (June 26, 1920), 13.

<sup>208</sup> Calvin Coolidge, *The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge*, (New York, J.J. Little & Ives Co., 1929), 148.

no more progressive...than Warren Harding.”<sup>209</sup> Indeed, due to their ideological similarities, both candidates trusted and respected each other. “[I was] especially agreeable to be associated with Senator Harding, whom I knew well and liked,” wrote Coolidge upon becoming the Republican’s vice presidential nominee. This rapport established between Harding and Coolidge would ultimately prove crucial in shaping how the two interacted officially as President and Vice President.

### *Institutional Status of the Vice President*

Interestingly, World War I had an indirect impact on the potency of the vice presidency. With peace talks taking place at Versailles, President Woodrow Wilson had traveled to Europe to negotiate the fate of the Central Powers. While abroad, Wilson had designated Vice President Thomas Marshall to lead Cabinet meetings and discussions. Wilson’s actions were unprecedented; vice presidents rarely attended, let alone presided, over Cabinet meetings.

The example set by Wilson was not lost on Harding. In fact, upon winning the presidency, Harding declared, “I think that the Vice President should be more than a mere substitute in waiting...the vice president can and ought to play a big part...The country needs the counsel....of such men as Governor Coolidge.”<sup>210</sup> Harding actively met with Coolidge and consulted him on a variety of issues including the composition of his Cabinet. As Coolidge recalled in his *Autobiography*, “We discussed at length the plans for his administration...the

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<sup>209</sup> Murray, 40.

<sup>210</sup> Williams, 121.

members of the Cabinet were considered.”<sup>211</sup> Harding also deployed Coolidge as his official liaison to a variety of events and functions within Washington D.C. and in the surrounding states.<sup>212</sup> Yet perhaps most pivotal was Harding’s decision to invite Coolidge to attend all Cabinet meetings. Indeed, it had been over 130 years since a vice president was regularly invited to attend Cabinet meetings. From Coolidge’s perspective, Harding’s decision to have him attend Cabinet meetings recognized the fact that, “[The vice president] should be in the Cabinet because he might become President and ought to be informed on the policies of the administration.”<sup>213</sup> Coolidge’s ability to sit in on Cabinet meetings and become informed about Harding’s policies not only pushed him further down the pathway of emulation but also contributed to his administrative and executive skills. As Coolidge confessed in his memoirs, “My experience in the Cabinet was of supreme value to me when I became President.”<sup>214</sup> The open recognition that vice presidents were next in line and should be kept informed about the presidents’ policies marked a considerable step forward to greater vice presidential power and reducing the office’s distance from the White House.

### *Conclusion*

While historians typically overlook or dismiss him, Calvin Coolidge’s experiences tremendously impacted both the presidency and vice presidency.

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<sup>211</sup> Coolidge, 154-55.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 164.



Coolidge's emulation strategy established an alternative precedent for future accidental presidents to follow. Perhaps more noteworthy, Coolidge had exhibited the effectiveness of emulation. Whereas rogue accidental presidents typically encountered electoral defeat or were abandoned by their party, Coolidge promoted the benefits of following in his predecessor's footsteps. By rallying around the image of the fallen Harding and remaining committed to his policies, Coolidge was ultimately able to achieve the presidency in his own right. Significantly, the three remaining accidental presidents (Truman, LBJ, and Ford) are also classified as emulators, and each one of them received their respective parties' nominations after adopting that strategy.

Moreover, Coolidge's tenure as vice president is also fairly influential. The revolution that took place in the Chicago Coliseum during the 1920 Republican National Convention symbolized the waning power of the party bosses. Gradually, power would shift more towards the presidential candidate, who would eventually have a monopoly over deciding whom his running mate would be. Additionally, Coolidge emphasized the significance that the position of vice president could play. While Harding did not exploit his Vice President's ties to the legislative branch, he was willing to utilize Coolidge as a councilor and ended the vice presidency's institutional isolation by enabling Coolidge to attend Cabinet meetings. The precedents set by Harding had ramifications for the future as presidents became increasingly reliant on the individual whose name followed theirs on the campaign buttons. Indeed, the Coolidge vice presidency falls under Jody Baumgartner's age of the transitional vice presidency, an era where the

Office of the Vice President started to break away from its 19<sup>th</sup> century mold.

Within the next section, I will discuss in greater detail how the expansion in vice presidential duties correlates with the overall growth of the presidency. The crises of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the personalities of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson led to a shift in the balance of power within the national government that favored the Chief Executive. As presidents assumed a greater role in governing, they quickly learned that they would require greater assistance.

## Part II: Harry S. Truman

### *Overview*

Despite winning an unprecedented fourth term, Franklin D. Roosevelt and those within his inner circle recognized that the President would not survive the next four years in office due to his declining health. FDR understood that he was selecting his successor with his 1944 vice-presidential pick. Although lacking Roosevelt's urbanity and privileged upbringing, Missouri Senator Harry S. Truman proved to be a loyal Vice President. A faithful New Dealer, Truman, in many ways, surpassed Roosevelt's commitment to American liberalism and big government. Senator Truman consistently voted the party line, supporting a number of FDR's legislation including the Social Security Act, the Wealth Tax Act, and many relief programs (the CCC, the WPA, etc.).<sup>215</sup> Although involved with Tom Pendergast's political machine, Truman obtained a reputation for his honesty and willingness to uproot corruption during his tenure as chairman of the Committee of Military Affairs. In fact, it was Truman's voting record on New Deal policies and his successful efforts in preventing wasteful government spending on military contracts that earned him Roosevelt's attention during the summer of 1944.

Upon first glance, Roosevelt's perception of Truman as a dutiful subordinate echoes Lincoln's interpretation of Andrew Johnson. Both Johnson and Truman displayed their support for the Lincoln and FDR Administrations respectively either by their actions as Senators or by their wartime efforts.

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<sup>215</sup> Abbott, 113.

However, while President Johnson ultimately proved to be quite different from that of his predecessor, President Truman never strayed too far from FDR's policy preferences. The DW Nominate Score system empirically proves the close ideological alignment between FDR and Truman. In terms of overall political ideology, FDR has an average DW Nominate Score of -0.260 (calculated over the course of 12 years) while Truman's average DW Nominate Score is -0.276.<sup>216</sup> From these scores, one can clearly see that FDR and Truman shared many of the same policy viewpoints. Moreover, due to the closeness in their scores, one can determine that Truman adhered very strongly to the emulator model.

Aside from empirical evidence, one can additionally analyze Truman's record as President. As mentioned previously, Truman had established himself as a committed New Dealer. While he would at times criticize the management of World War II, an examination of Senator Truman's speeches and addresses reveals that he never publicly condemned Roosevelt or his Administration. Indeed, early into his accidental presidency, it became apparent that Truman would employ the emulation strategy within the realms of both foreign and domestic policy. President Truman often invoked the memory of the beloved Roosevelt rally his base and mobilize the public. In his, "First Speech to Congress," President Truman reaffirmed his fealty to FDR's world vision. Insistent that the United States would pursue the War against Hitler's Germany and Japan to its victorious conclusion, Truman asserted, "This is what he [Roosevelt] would want us to do... With great humility I call upon all Americans

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<sup>216</sup> Keith Poole, et.al. "DW Nominate Scores," *VoteView*, 3 Feb. 2011, [ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21\\_PRES.DAT](ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21_PRES.DAT)

to help me keep our nation united in defense of those ideals which have been so eloquently proclaimed by Franklin Roosevelt.”<sup>217</sup> Within his speech, Truman both established his decision to continue FDR’s war policies and his willingness to rely upon the image of FDR as a source of inspiration and strength. In fact, Truman concluded his speech by invoking, “the memory of our fallen President,” in order to solidify his commitment to the Allied war effort.<sup>218</sup> Shortly after his first address to Congress, Truman extended both the Lend-Lease Act, a program FDR had initiated back in 1941, and retained FDR’s cabinet members. Truman further assumed the mantle of achieving Roosevelt’s goals for peace and internationalism. Like FDR, Truman advocated for the United Nations. He did not alter the delegation that FDR had appointed to the San Francisco Conference where the UN Charter was ratified. Furthermore, Truman’s articulation of the Marshall Plan and later the Truman Doctrine coalesced with the principles that FDR outlined in his famous “Four Freedoms Speech.” With respect to the international economy, Truman confirmed his support for the Bretton Woods plan, a plan that FDR originally endorsed. “I am for it [the Bretton Woods plan],” Truman stated in one of his first news conferences, “And I would have supported that proposition had I stayed in the Senate, and I would have done everything I possibly could as Vice President to help the President get it through the Senate.”<sup>219</sup> Truman’s comments on the Bretton Woods system are very

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<sup>217</sup> Harry Truman, “First Speech to Congress, April 12, 1945,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, April to December 1945*, Office of the Federal Register, National Archives, ed., (US Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1961), 1-4.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>219</sup> Harry Truman, “The President’s News Conferences of April 17<sup>th</sup> 1945,” *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, April to December 1945*, Office of the Federal Register, National Archives, ed., (US Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1961), 9.

compelling for they not only reveal Truman's adherence to FDR's vision but also signify the relationship that had previously existed between Truman and FDR. Prior to his death, FDR had apparently utilized Vice President Truman's role as President of the Senate to help muscle through legislation that FDR supported. Truman's loyalty to FDR is uncommon given the historical relationship that existed between the president and his vice president. Nevertheless, based on the amount of assistance that Vice President Truman was willing to provide FDR, it is unsurprising that the former machine politician from Missouri was amenable to follow in the footsteps of the sophisticated Hyde Park Democrat.

Not only did Truman emulate FDR's world view but also the accidental president mimicked many of the domestic policies crafted by "Dr. New Deal." By the end of the summer of 1945, Truman had drafted a twenty-one point agenda that consisted of economic programs that largely reflected the economic initiatives Roosevelt intended to pursue. Such programs included, "increased social payments and additional projects modeled on the Tennessee Valley Authority."<sup>220</sup> In September 1945, Truman, in an address before Congress, described his economic goals as, "[the] long-range plans...summarized by the late President Franklin D. Roosevelt over a year and a half ago in the form of an economic bill of rights."<sup>221</sup> By the time he delivered his first State of the Union Address, Truman pushed for an extension of many of FDR's New Deal programs. In addition to preserving FDR's welfare programs, Truman highlighted some of

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<sup>220</sup> William Edward Leuchtenburg, *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Barack Obama*, (Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2009), 8.

<sup>221</sup> Harry Truman, Message before Congress, September 6, 1945," *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, April to December 1945*, Office of the Federal Register, National Archives, ed., (US Government Printing Office, Washington D.C., 1961), 263-309.

his own initiatives, such as a government regulated healthcare system. Truman's continuation of FDR's programs and the advancement of new social projects (the so-called Fair Deal) were referred to as Truman's Fair Deal, a series of legislative initiatives that paralleled the New Deal.<sup>222</sup> President Truman embraced the labor policy tactics employed by his predecessor as well. Invoking FDR's pro-union rhetoric, Truman denounced the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act as, "bad for labor, bad for management, and bad for the country...we need legislation to correct abuses in the field of labor relations."<sup>223</sup> Truman's largest criticism of the Taft-Hartley Act was that it threatened the provisions that existed under the Wagner Labor Act, a bill that both he and FDR had supported during the Great Depression.<sup>224</sup> In addition to labor, Truman pushed the civil rights policies that FDR had established. Truman extended the Federal Employment Practices Commission, which sought to establish non-discriminatory policies in federal government hiring practices. During the Democratic National Convention of 1948, he insisted that the civil rights plank included in the 1944 Democratic platform be reinstated. Truman ultimately superseded FDR as a defender of civil rights. Through his executive authority, Truman created the Civil Rights Commission and desegregated the military. Nevertheless, a significant overlap existed in the policies of FDR and Truman. As late as 1947, Truman professed, "My only effort has been to carry out what I thought were the wishes of the late President."<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Harry Truman, "State of the Union Address, January 21, 1946," *State of the Union Addresses by Harry Truman*, Jim Manis, ed., (State College, PA, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 26-28.

<sup>223</sup> Harry Truman, "On the Veto of the Taft-Hartley Bill, June 20, 1947," *Miller Center*, 3 February 2013, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3344>

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>225</sup> William Hillman, *Mr. President: The First Publication from the Personal Diaries, Private Letters, Papers, and Revealing Interviews of Harry S. Truman*. (New York, Farrar, Straus, & Young, 1952), 51.

Overall, in a vein similar to Coolidge, Truman became the most vocal spokesman for the policies and programs of his deceased predecessor. Just as Coolidge carried Harding's mantle of "normalcy," Truman advanced FDR's dream of an active federal government at home and a strong US presence abroad. Yet aside from their ideological similarities, Truman was further compelled to adopt the emulator strategy due to the strength of party unity amongst the Democrats, the process by which he was nominated to the vice-presidency, and the amount of institutional closeness to the presidency that the Office of the Vice President had obtained during the FDR years.

### *Party Unity*

Even if Truman had decided to adopt a rogue strategy, his ability to break free from Roosevelt's shadow and pursue his own agenda would have been hampered by the fact that the vast majority of Democrats remained united in their support for FDR's domestic and foreign policies. Throughout FDR's twelve years in office, the Democratic Party had created a powerful coalition consisting of labor unions (represented by John Lewis and Henry Wallace), African Americans (who often had Eleanor Roosevelt as their spokeswoman), and Southern agrarians (who benefitted greatly from the New Deal programs). Furthermore, many Democrats obtaining victory in the 1944 midterm elections had pledged their support to FDR's various New Deal programs as well as pursuing the war against the Axis Powers. Loyalty to FDR was so strong that the deceased president had



obtained a cult-like status. Recalling the throngs of people gathered around Union Station to watch FDR's funeral procession, Truman remarked, "You'd think the world had come to an end."<sup>226</sup> Democrats from both ends of the spectrum praised the memory of Roosevelt. Roosevelt Day dinners were held; Roosevelt University was established in Chicago. Even Republican Mayor of New York, Fiorello La Guardia commented, "How we miss him. Hardly a domestic problem or an international situation today but what we say, 'Oh if FDR were only here.'"<sup>227</sup> Throughout the 1946 midterm elections, Robert Hannegan and the rest of the Democratic National Committee leadership made FDR rather than President Truman the focus of their campaigns. Due to Democrats' idolatry of FDR, Truman understood that if he wanted to obtain reelection in his own right, he had to convince the Roosevelt faithful and party liberals that he was the intermediary between the fallen Roosevelt and the Democratic Party. Although constantly unfavorably compared to the debonair Roosevelt, Truman consistently invoked FDR during his famous 1948 whistle-stop tour.<sup>228</sup> Within his stump speeches, Truman implored voters to recall the many benefits they gained under Roosevelt's New Deal. At one point, Truman referred to FDR as, "a great and true lover of democracy."<sup>229</sup> By marrying himself to the image of FDR, Truman not only ensured the support of the Democratic Party but also managed to defeat the Republicans in the 1948 general election. Here one can see how the Democratic Party, united under the image of Roosevelt, pushed Truman to act accordingly.

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<sup>226</sup> Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Putnam's, 1973), 206.

<sup>227</sup> Fiorello La Guardia, WJZ Radio Script, Jan. 26, 1947, *Fiorello La Guardia Papers*, New York City Municipal Archives and Records Center, New York, NY.

<sup>228</sup> Leuchtenberg, 31-32.

<sup>229</sup> Harry Truman, "Address in the Chicago Stadium, October 25, 1948," *Harry S. Truman Library and Museum*, 2013, <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/publicpapers/index.php?pid=2007>.

Indeed, Table 7 (located below) lists the party unity scores for House and Senate Democrats. Based on the scores, one can determine that the Democrats, even with the loss of their standard bearer, remained relatively united. In fact, the Senate Democrat unity scores were at their highest point during the post-war years than during all of Roosevelt's 12 years in office. Additionally, the scatterplot (Figure 7) indicates that despite some bickering over civil rights legislation, Northern and Southern Democrats had clearly defined ideological preferences. Again this data stands in direct contrast to the fluctuating policy preferences expressed by the political parties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Overall, had Truman deviated too far from FDR's mantle, the former haberdasher may have followed the failed path of Tyler, Fillmore, Johnson, and Arthur.

***Table Seven: Democrat Party Unity Scores for the House and Senate [79<sup>th</sup> - 81<sup>st</sup> Congresses]*** <sup>230</sup>

Session of Congress (Date)	House Democrat Unity Score*	Senate Democrat Unity Score*
79 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1945-1947)	.79	.78
80 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1947-1949)	.83	.79
81 <sup>st</sup> Congress (1949-1951)	.79	.80

*\*Party unity is defined as the proportion of Democratic members voting with the majority of their party.*

Not only were Democrats fairly united during the Truman years but also the party had achieved enough power at the national level to enforce greater party discipline and ensure that rogue members were punished. As the debate over civil rights for minorities obtained national prominence, cracks within the New Deal

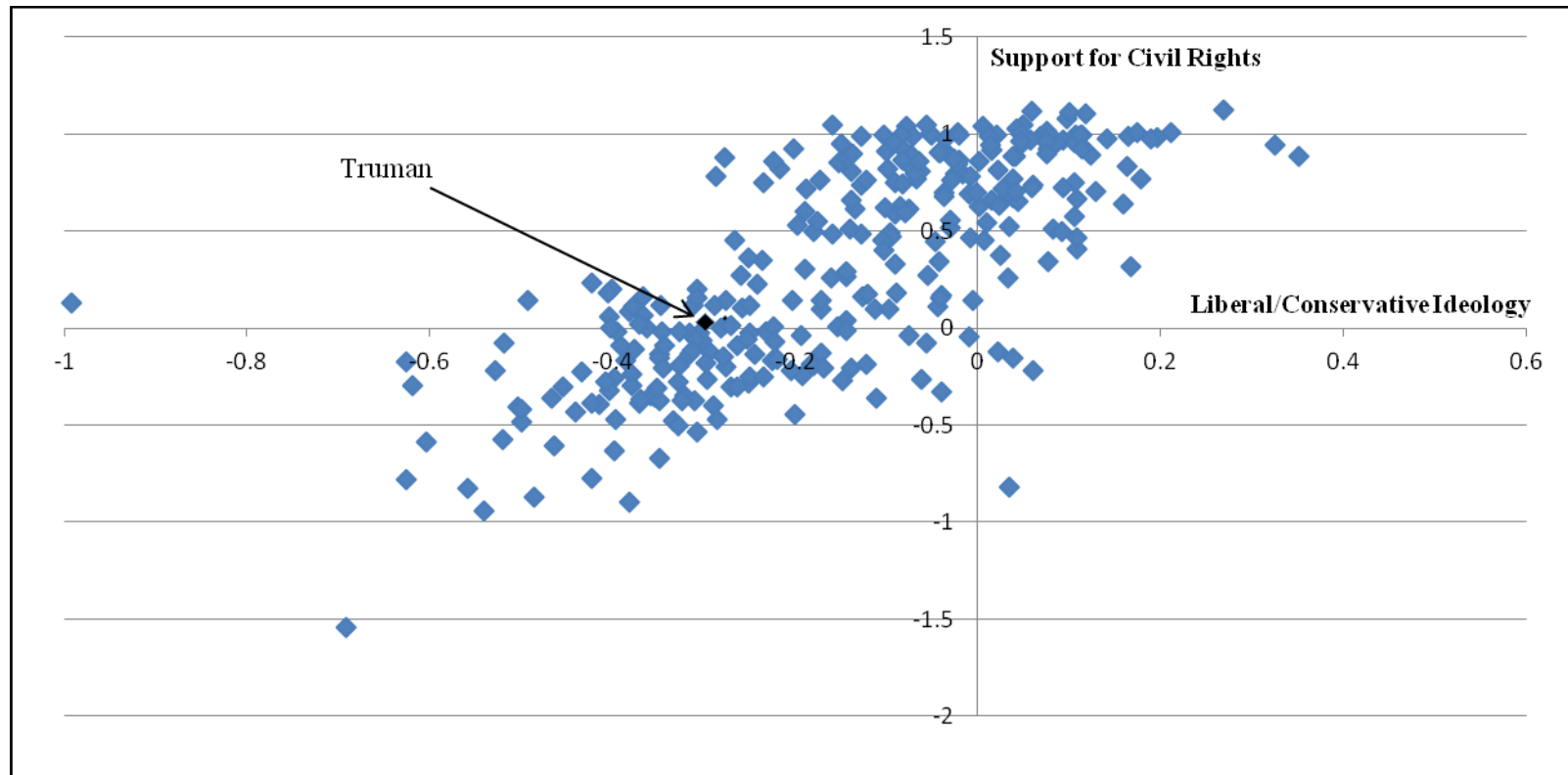
<sup>230</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, "DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses," *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).

coalition began to emerge. In fact, a contingency of Southern Democrats (Dixiecrats) bolted from the Democratic National Convention following Truman's insistence that a civil rights plank be included within the Democratic Party's platform. Although the formation of the states' rights orientated Dixiecrats threatened the integrity of the Democratic Party, their impact on the overall unity of the Party was relatively minor. When the Dixiecrats nominated Strom Thurmond as their presidential candidate at their convention in Birmingham, many prominent Southern Democrats declined to attend the convention out of fear that, "involvement would jeopardize their standing with the national party and their seniority in Congress."<sup>231</sup> Despite their disdain for a civil rights plank, the Southern Democrats were more fearful of facing retaliation from the rest of the party. The example highlighted the newfound ability of the national parties to ensure that its members behaved in a certain fashion. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a splinter group within the Whig, Democrat, or Republican parties could easily form without suffering any repercussions from the greater party membership. Now, however, party rogues would have a harder time exercising their will because the national parties were able to connect loyalty with benefits such as seniority and access to resources. Although the Dixiecrats nominated Thurmond, Truman and the mainstream Democrats still crushed them in the general election.

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<sup>231</sup> *National Party Conventions, 1831-1976*, (Washington D.C., Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1979), 91.

**Figure 7: Ideal Policy Preferences of Congressional Democrats and Truman (77<sup>th</sup> Congress: 1945-1947)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, “Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm>. The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Civil Rights) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1).

### *Nomination Mechanism*

Significantly, Roosevelt, like Abraham Lincoln, played a fairly active role in determining his running mate. The amount of agency afforded to FDR in selecting his vice president again reflects the gradual decline in the power of the party machine and party bosses. Indeed, although still powerful in local circles, party bosses were becoming less prominent at the national level. As Williams observed, “The Truman experience also indicated that party machinery had become more closely knit around the patronage power of the chief executive.”<sup>232</sup> While FDR still had to obtain the approval of the Democrats, and Truman himself would have to be nominated at the 1944 National Convention, FDR’s decision to run with Truman was hardly contested by Democratic leaders. Though FDR raised many eyebrows with his selection, the nomination of Truman was never an accident. Truman’s selection was the culmination of a, “careful search by the Democratic leaders...for the man politically, administratively, and ideologically best qualified to succeed [Roosevelt].”<sup>233</sup> Although Roosevelt did take into account Truman’s Missouri background (which would help the New Yorker broaden his appeal to the Western and Southern states), Roosevelt appeared to tap Truman largely because of their ideological similarities. The Missouri Senator did not harbor extreme leftist views like FDR’s current Vice President Henry Wallace, and he had developed a strong reputation as a loyal New Dealer and a capable administrator. Most importantly, the fact that Roosevelt, with the assistance of his inner circle, selected his running mate indicated that Truman

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<sup>232</sup> Williams 227.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 3.

would remain loyal to him rather than some other faction of the party (as was the case with Arthur). By being able to choose Truman rather than having Truman foisted upon him by the party, FDR obtained the greatest insurance that his Vice President would emulate his policies and programs in the (very likely) event that he would die. FDR's influence over who his running mate would be established an important precedent in presidential campaigns. As presidential races continued throughout the rest of the century, the candidates acquired greater autonomy when it came to nominating their vice presidential running mates.

### *Institutional Status of the Vice President*

In terms of institutional progress, the vice president arguably reached the peak of what Jody Baumgartner has termed the transitional era during the Roosevelt years (1933-1945). The vice presidency's expansion was due in part to the bureaucratic growth of the executive branch, which was famously advocated for by the 1938 Brownlow Committee.<sup>234</sup> Somewhat unsurprisingly, as FDR assumed new responsibilities, he gradually began to devote greater attention to the vice presidency. As a result, vice presidents, particularly in the post World War II era, soon adopted jobs that extended beyond their sole constitutional obligation as presiding officer of the Senate. As Joel Goldstein articulates, "Changes in American politics since the New Deal have drawn Vice Presidents into the

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<sup>234</sup> James Fesler, "The Brownlow Committee Fifty Years Later," *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (1987), 292.

presidential orbit.”<sup>235</sup> Indeed, Roosevelt utilized his vice presidents in novel ways in order to accomplish various aspects of his agenda. As he grappled with the Great Depression throughout his first two terms in office, Roosevelt relied heavily upon Vice President John Nance Garner. Garner, a Texan who served as the former Speaker of the House, employed his knowledge of House politics to cajole Southern and conservative Democrats into supporting Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation.<sup>236</sup> More significantly, Garner’s conservatism and Southern background aided Roosevelt in his efforts to preserve his coalition of Northern industrialists and Southern farmers. Roosevelt’s effective use of Garner as a political strategist established a precedent of presidents using their vice presidents to manipulate legislation through the Congress. Vice presidents, as Garner displayed, could be crucial to the development of a president’s domestic policies.

Similarly, the tenure of Henry Wallace, FDR’s second vice president, showcased the substantial role that a vice president could play in directing foreign affairs. With the threat of European war looming in the background during the presidential election of 1940, FDR turned to Henry Wallace, the internationalist, to serve as his running mate. Highly knowledgeable of foreign affairs, Wallace functioned as Roosevelt’s emissary to key Allied powers during the War including Latin America, China, and Russia. Roosevelt further relied on Wallace’s understanding of international affairs by appointing him the head of the Board of Economic Warfare, which was primarily responsible for processing all

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<sup>235</sup> Goldstein, 134.

<sup>236</sup> Williams, 176.

imports that contributed to the war effort.<sup>237</sup> Although the Board was short-lived, Roosevelt's decision to appoint Wallace as head established yet another precedent for the vice presidency as an institution.

Based on the experiences of his two immediate predecessors, Vice President Truman could have reasonably expected to have a strong relationship with President Roosevelt. While Roosevelt did select Truman primarily for his fealty to the New Deal, the President rarely met with Truman in private, nor did he inform Truman of the ongoing Manhattan Project. Arguably as a result of his ignorance of the atomic bomb, President Truman pressured Congress to include the vice president as a statutory member of the National Security Council in order to ensure that the position remained fully informed about foreign policy decisions. Nevertheless, as Vice President, Truman, like Garner and Wallace, still played a relatively significant role for FDR. As Vice President, Truman attended all Cabinet meetings. Perhaps more importantly, Roosevelt seized upon Truman's long-standing connections within the Senate to secure Henry Wallace's confirmation as Secretary of Commerce.<sup>238</sup> While it is uncertain how Roosevelt would have utilized Vice President Truman following the end of the war, it is clear that FDR understood the benefits of having an active vice president. From Truman's political background and experience in the Senate, one could assume that FDR, had he survived his cerebral hemorrhage, would have employed Truman in a similar fashion to Garner. As discussed earlier, Truman did mention in a press conference that he would have utilized his role as presiding officer of

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<sup>237</sup> Goldstein, 136.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 137.



the Senate in order to push through the Roosevelt-backed Bretton Woods treaty. Truman's attendance at Cabinet meetings enabled him to develop a stronger grasp of FDR's policies and strengthened his ideological commitment to FDR. Overall, the experiences of Garner, Wallace, and Truman established a new model for vice presidents. Not only had their relative powers and visibility increased but also they became institutionally closer to the presidency.

### *Conclusion*

In many ways, the FDR-Truman connection parallels the Harding-Coolidge association. Whereas the ideological closeness between Harding and Coolidge only became apparent after Coolidge's nomination for the vice presidency, it was clearly established that FDR and Truman had very similar policy preferences prior to Truman's selection. Indeed Truman was selected to be Roosevelt's running mate for this very fact. Following FDR's death, Truman would reiterate his commitment to Roosevelt's vision as seen with his first message to Congress and his creation of the Fair Deal. Notably, Truman also presided over a Democratic Party that remained unified in terms of policy preferences and beliefs. Even in the midst of intra-party fighting over Truman's civil rights plank, the majority of the party remained united and backed Truman's decision to advance FDR's civil rights policies. The ability of the Democrats to disregard the threat posed by the Dixiecrats/Boll Weevils during the 1948 election symbolized the extent to which the party had professionalized and was enabled to

enforce discipline. Moreover, by catering to New Deal Democrats and emulating Roosevelt's policies, Truman had secured the loyalty of the bulk of Roosevelt's coalition, aiding him in obtaining the nomination for president in 1948. As seen before with the Coolidge case, one can identify the benefits of adopting the emulation strategy. Instead of pursuing his own agenda, Truman, like Coolidge before him, ran on the vision of his deceased predecessor in order to unite his party behind him. Additionally, Truman's ability to employ the emulator strategy was due to the new level of institutional closeness that the vice presidency had achieved. This closeness, initiated during Calvin Coolidge's vice presidency, would expand as the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed.

### Part III: Lyndon B. Johnson

#### *Overview*

It was perhaps the most anomalous location to hold the presidential oath of office. On November 22, 1963, a mere hour after President John F. Kennedy succumbed to an assassination attack, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the powers of the presidency aboard *Air Force One*. The iconic image of District Judge Sarah Hughes administering the oath to Johnson with Jacqueline Kennedy at his side is probably the most famous picture taken on an airplane. While some questioned the propriety of the former First Lady being there, Johnson's instance that Jacqueline Kennedy attend the ceremony foreshadowed his decision to retain a strong link between himself and JFK.

Similarly to Coolidge and Truman, Lyndon Johnson, upon becoming the nation's eighth accidental president, almost instantaneously adopted the emulator strategy. A day after the tragedy in Dallas, President Johnson held a private meeting with former President Eisenhower. In a confidential memo, Eisenhower wrote, "No revolution in purpose or policy is intended or will occur. Rather it will be your purpose to implement effectively the noble objective so often...stated by your great predecessor."<sup>239</sup> Johnson internalized Eisenhower's advice. Despite his animosity towards Kennedy's staff, (particularly Attorney General Robert Kennedy), Johnson asked that all of Kennedy's Cabinet and advisors stay.<sup>240</sup> On November 27, 1963, the President appeared before Congress and publicly

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<sup>239</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, "Confidential Notes for the President, November 23, 1963," Reprinted in Lyndon Johnson's *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency 1863-1969*, (New York, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), 32.

<sup>240</sup>Abbott, 140

committed himself to defending JFK's legacy. Echoing President Kennedy's inaugural refrain of "Let us begin," Johnson urged, "Let us continue...let us here highly resolve that John Fitzgerald Kennedy did not live – or die – in vain."<sup>241</sup> Aside from his soaring rhetoric, Johnson tactfully peppered his speech with recommendations that Congress enact Kennedy's anti-poverty legislation and tax cut plan.<sup>242</sup> Regardless of his own ambitions, flaws, and eventual feud with the Kennedy family, LBJ proved committed to his word to follow Kennedy's footsteps. A review of Johnson's autobiography and personal correspondences suggest that the Texan political wizard felt a sense of indebtedness towards JFK. "I did what I believe he [Kennedy] would have wanted me to do. I never wavered from that sense of responsibility, even after I was elected in my own right, up to my last day in office," Johnson wrote in opening pages of his memoirs.<sup>243</sup> Yet by some measures, LBJ surpassed the liberal vision articulated by President Kennedy. By 1969, Johnson had pushed the boundaries of Kennedy's New Frontier, dramatically extended US involvement in Vietnam, and ushered in a sweeping range of social programs rivaled only by FDR's New Deal.

As President, LBJ emulated JFK across almost all fronts from escalating the United States' commitment to South Vietnam to pushing forward the civil rights legislation that Kennedy had championed during the summer of 1963. Seizing upon the image of the dead Kennedy, Johnson stressed in his first address as President that, "no memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor

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<sup>241</sup> Lyndon Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, November 27, 1963," *LBJ Presidential Library*, 2013, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/631127.asp>

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> Lyndon Johnson, *The Vantage Point*, (New York, Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1971), 19.

President Kennedy's memory," than for the Congress to pass certain pieces of legislation.<sup>244</sup> Throughout the fall of 1963 and into the spring of 1964, LBJ worked tirelessly to push through the Kennedy tax cuts as well as a litany of other domestic programs. Kennedy's campaign experiences in the destitute coal-mining communities in West Virginia compelled him to make anti-poverty a key focus of his Administration. As his successor, Johnson formalized Kennedy's anti-poverty drive into a fully mobilized, "War against Poverty." LBJ further supported the education bill that JFK endorsed, which provided for increased federal funding for universities and vocational colleges to develop libraries, classrooms, and other facilities.<sup>245</sup> To fulfill Kennedy's, "goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth,"<sup>246</sup> President Johnson defended the budgetary appropriations provided to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).<sup>247</sup> Yet Johnson most closely emulated Kennedy within the realm of civil rights. Reflecting on the demonstrations for racial equality within Birmingham, Alabama, President Kennedy pressured Congress, "to enact legislation giving all [African] Americans the right to be served in facilities which are open to the public."<sup>248</sup> Taking his cue from JFK's June 11, 1963 speech, LBJ campaigned brilliantly within Congress to achieve the passage

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<sup>244</sup> Lyndon Johnson, "Address Before a Joint Session of Congress, November 27, 1963," LBJ Presidential Library, 2013, <http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/631127.asp>

<sup>245</sup> Sean J. Savage, *JFK, LBJ, and the Democratic Party*, (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 2004), 124.

<sup>246</sup> John F. Kennedy, "An Address before a Joint Session of Congress, May 25, 1961," *The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum*, 2013, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/xzwlgaeeTES6khED14P1Iw.aspx>

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid*, 282-283.

<sup>248</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Address on Civil Rights, June 11, 1963," *The Miller Center*, 2013, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3375>

of the Civil Rights Act, the crowning achievement of LBJ's first year as an accidental president.

The bonds connecting the domestic policies of JFK and LBJ are quite clear. However, LBJ's attempt to emulate Kennedy within the realm of foreign policy is more complex, particularly in light of the Vietnam War. Discussing the counterfactual of how President Kennedy would have handled the growing crisis in Vietnam if he had lived is considerably difficult. Nevertheless, one can identify some parallels between Kennedy and Johnson's handling of Vietnam during the early stages of the conflict. In *The Vantage Point*, Johnson maintained that he strongly subscribed to the foreign policy measures of Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy. Johnson, like Kennedy, also presented himself as a proponent of the domino theory (the fear that if one nation in Southeast Asia fell to Communism than neighboring states would quickly follow). "I was convinced that the broad lines of his [Kennedy's] policy in Southeast Asia and elsewhere had been right," Johnson insisted. "Kennedy [had] sent approximately 16,000 American troops to South Vietnam to make good our SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organization] pledge."<sup>249</sup> As part of his justification for broadening US military involvement in Vietnam, Johnson pointed to Kennedy's actions and the August 2, 1964, Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Revealingly however, Johnson confessed to one biographer that another factor that compelled his decision to defend South Vietnam was his fear of criticism from other Democrats. "There would be Robert Kennedy [and others]

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<sup>249</sup> Johnson, 42.

out in front leading the fight against me, telling everyone that I betrayed John Kennedy's commitment to South Vietnam."<sup>250</sup> Johnson's quote hints at the magnitude of Democratic Party unity at this time and also points to a potentially negative aspect of the emulation strategy. Although in hindsight the Vietnam War devolved into a bloody, violent quagmire for the United States, one could claim that Johnson's determination to follow Kennedy's stance on Vietnam may have obscured his judgment. It is of course, Lyndon Johnson's handling of Vietnam that has overshadowed his victorious domestic policy achievements in housing, education, healthcare, and civil rights.

Aside from the uncertainties surrounding his foreign policy, Johnson closely followed the route that JFK had designed. As Coolidge and Truman before him, LBJ obtained the presidency in his own right partly by invoking the symbol of his fallen predecessor. However, like Coolidge and Truman, Johnson did not simply emulate his predecessor's policies due to ideological similarities. Rather, other forces, such as party unity and institutional reform to the vice presidency, compelled LBJ to conform to JFK's programs.

### *Party Unity*

After almost a decade of Republican rule in the White House, the early 1960s witnessed a Democratic resurgence. Following the 1960 elections, Democrats not only recaptured the White House but also obtained sizeable

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<sup>250</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*, (New York, Harper and Row, 1976), 252-53.

majorities in both the House and the Senate. Rank and file Democrats rallied around President Kennedy's inspiring inaugural address, and the term "New Frontiersmen" was quickly coined. Although intra-party fights brewed between Southern Democrats and the rest of the Party over the issue of civil rights, Democrats for the most part united behind the social programs outlined by Kennedy and later Johnson. In his meditations on the presidency, Johnson commented on the general consensus held amongst many Democrats. The Party believed that governmental action was necessary to improve both the welfare state and the education system of the United States.<sup>251</sup> Johnson himself had played a significant role in unifying Congressional Democrats during his days as Senate Majority Leader. Table Eight (below) provides an empirical demonstration of Democratic Party unity. Based on the DW Nominate database, the unity scores listed below represent the highest party unity scores from the Democrats since the early years of the Truman Administration. The scatterplot representing the policy preferences of the Democrats in the 88<sup>th</sup> Congress (Figure 8) further confirms the notion that Democrats stood strong within their ranks in order to make the dreams of Kennedy and Johnson a reality. In fact, due to their numbers and clear vision, Congressional Democrats during the first half of the 1960s led some of the most productive Congresses in American history.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Johnson, 96-97.

<sup>252</sup> Lisa Lerer and Laura Litvan, "No Congress Since '60s Makes as Much Laws as 111<sup>th</sup> Affecting Most Americans," *Bloomberg News*, 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-12-22/no-congress-since-1960s-makes-most-laws-for-americans-as-111th.html>



**Table Eight: Democrat Party Unity Scores for the House and Senate  
[87<sup>th</sup> – 90<sup>th</sup> Congresses] <sup>253</sup>**

Session of Congress (Date)	House Democrat Unity Score*	Senate Democrat Unity Score*
87 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1961-63)	0.81	0.78
88 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1963-65)	0.83	0.76
89 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1965-67)	0.78	0.75
90 <sup>th</sup> Congress (1967-69)	0.75	0.72

\*Party unity is defined as the proportion of Democratic members voting with the majority of their party.

Although President Johnson’s ideology generally coalesced with that of the late President Kennedy, another force that prompted Johnson to pursue emulation was the fact that many Democrats had come to generally aligned themselves with President Kennedy’s agenda. During his years in office, JFK’s general approval rating amongst Democrats averaged at around 85%.<sup>254</sup> Kennedy’s mystique was further perpetuated by the presence of his popular brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Although Democrats, “widely, positively, and authoritatively assumed that [Johnson] would be the... nominee [in 1964],” it was Kennedy’s legacy, not Johnson, that commanded the attention of the Democrats during their 1964 convention.<sup>255</sup> The amount of Democratic support around the Kennedy name provided LBJ with very little space to develop a different course of action. As mentioned previously, LBJ had even feared retaliation from RFK and other Democrats should he alter President Kennedy’s

<sup>253</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, “DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).

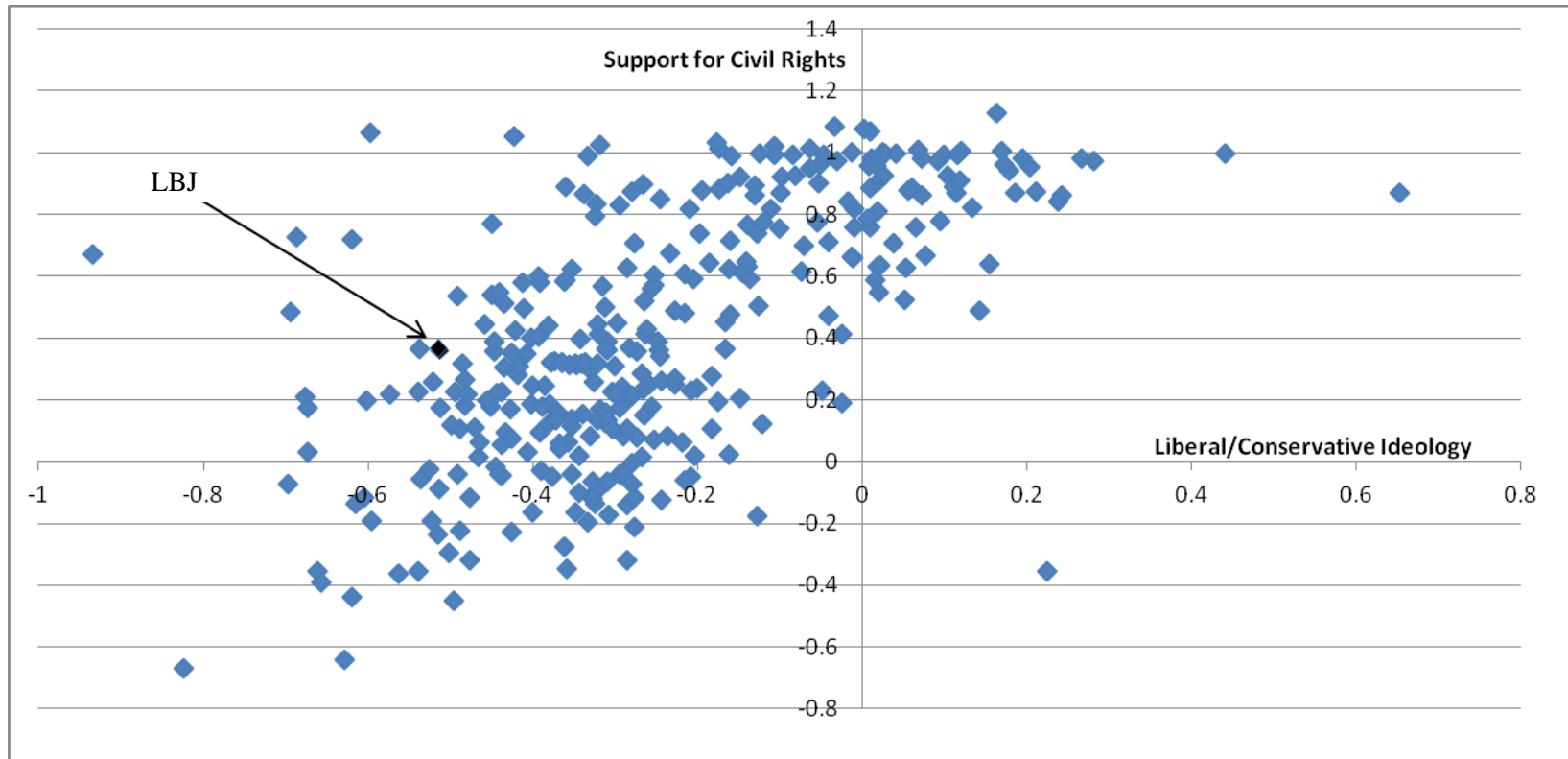
<sup>254</sup> Hazel Gaudet Erskine, “The Polls: Kennedy as President,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol.28, No.2, (Summer 1964), 335.

<sup>255</sup> Johnson, 96-97.

Vietnam policy. Nevertheless, just as Coolidge and Truman did in 1924 and 1948 respectively, Johnson won favor with the vast majority of Democrats by linking his name to the martyred Kennedy. As a result, President Johnson not only smashed Republican Senator Barry Goldwater at the polls but also Democrats avoided a repeat of the 1948 presidential election. Despite the Civil Rights Act of 1964, most Dixiecrats toed the party line and did not bolt from the party in retaliation.

As seen from Table 8, Democratic unity would continue well into the Johnson years. While Johnson eventually turned Democratic support for Kennedy into support for himself, by the beginning of the 90<sup>th</sup> Congress, the tide began to turn against LBJ. Party unity began to decline as US military forces sank even deeper in the Vietnam quagmire, and soon challengers had surfaced for the Democratic presidential nomination. By late 1968, as seen with the tumultuous national convention in Chicago, the party that had chartered the New Frontier and built the Great Society had lost the cohesion that had bounded them for the past decade.

**Figure 8: Ideal Policy Preferences of Congressional Democrats and Lyndon B. Johnson (88<sup>th</sup> Congress: 1963-1965)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, “Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm> . The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Civil Rights) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1).

### *Nomination Mechanism*

Another element that explains LBJ's emulation strategy is the fact that Kennedy had the autonomy to select Johnson as his running mate. Kennedy's victories in the primary system had enabled him to carry substantial support as Democrats convened in Los Angeles for the 1960 convention. After obtaining the presidential nomination after the first ballot, Kennedy surprised many by actively seeking out LBJ as his running mate. Instead of consulting with party bosses or having a candidate forced upon him, Kennedy tapped the powerful Senate Majority Leader, who was approved by a voice vote on the convention floor.<sup>256</sup> From Kennedy's perspective, LBJ was an attractive running mate not only because of his Texan roots (Kennedy recognized the importance of catering to Southern Democrats) but also because of his similar ideological bent. A review of the DW Nominate scores reveals that the ideological disparity between the two was quite minimal. Kennedy's overall liberal score is -0.607 while Johnson scored a slightly more conservative -0.512.<sup>257</sup> Kennedy's emphasis on ideological harmony mirrored the process FDR utilized in 1944 to determine his running mate. This time, however, the decision of the vice presidential candidate rested formally within the hands of the presidential nominee. Naturally, Kennedy's power to choose Johnson ensured that a high level of compatibility would exist between the two of them. Indeed, Johnson and Kennedy had built a strong rapport with each other during their days in the Senate. Although LBJ had envisioned a Johnson-Kennedy ticket in 1960, he nevertheless graciously

<sup>256</sup> *National Party Conventions, 1831-1976*, (Washington D.C., Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1979), 99.

<sup>257</sup> Keith Poole, et.al. "DW Nominate Scores," *VoteView*, 3 Feb. 2011, [ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21\\_PRES.DAT](ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21_PRES.DAT)

accepted Kennedy's offer and vigorously stumped for Kennedy in the South.

Kennedy, too, had recognized the value of having LBJ on the ticket, insisting that he "needed [Johnson] to run with him if the ticket was to be successful."<sup>258</sup>

Although Johnson intended to utilize the vice presidency as a springboard to the White House in 1968, as Kennedy's Vice President he proved to be quite effective.

### *Institutional Status of the Vice President*

By the time LBJ ascended to the vice presidency, the office, according to Jody Baumgartner, had entered its modern period.<sup>259</sup> Finally, the vice presidency obtained a degree of potency as well as consistent access to the president. Typically, political scientists interpret the construction of a vice presidential office within the Old Executive Office Building as the beginning of the modern vice presidency. President Kennedy's commission to have the office assured LBJ that he would be able to consult the President. More symbolically, the new office signified the vice presidency's shift away from the Congress and into the executive branch.<sup>260</sup> No longer was the Office of the Vice President interpreted as a creature of the legislature. Rather, the example left by LBJ's predecessor, Republican Vice President Nixon, revealed the integral role the vice presidency now played in the daily operations of the executive branch. During his tenure, Vice President Nixon regularly attended (and at times led) National Security

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<sup>258</sup> Johnson, 2.

<sup>259</sup> Baumgartner, 36-37.

<sup>260</sup> Relyea and Arja, 42.

Council Meetings. President Eisenhower also continued the FDR tradition of employing the vice president as a foreign emissary and sent Nixon to over 50 countries.<sup>261</sup> Like FDR, Eisenhower also augmented the role of the vice presidency through his powers as Chief Executive. In 1954, under Executive Order No. 10479, Eisenhower appointed Nixon to chair the President's Committee on Government Contracts, a body designed to enforce non-discriminatory practices between agents of the federal government and contractors.<sup>262</sup> During his tenure, President Kennedy also implemented executive orders and commission in order to receive administrative assistance from Johnson.

As Vice President, LBJ would build upon Nixon's model. Reflecting on his days as Vice President, Johnson confessed, "John Kennedy was always courteous, thoughtful and solicitous of me...he did everything he could to give [the vice presidency] substance....I do not think that any President ever made a greater effort to make sure that his Vice President was briefed and kept fully informed."<sup>263</sup> Special Advisor to President Kennedy, Theodore Sorenson, validates LBJ's statement when he acknowledged, "[Johnson's] advice was particularly sought by the President on legislative and political problems."<sup>264</sup> Understandably, Kennedy took full advantage of Johnson's thirty plus years of experience on the Hill. Shortly after the 1960 election, Kennedy and Johnson met frequently to discuss the composition of the administration and larger foreign and

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<sup>261</sup> Goldstein, 159.

<sup>262</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, "Executive Order No. 10479," *Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), US Department of Labor*, 2013, [http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/about/History\\_EO11246.htm](http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/about/History_EO11246.htm)

<sup>263</sup> Johnson, 4.

<sup>264</sup> Goldstein, 168.

domestic policy goals.<sup>265</sup> It was during these meetings that Johnson was able to secure having final say over all federal appointments made in Texas.<sup>266</sup>

Not only did Johnson obtain influence over patronage but also he played a significant role in developing President Kennedy's domestic and foreign policy agendas. Overburdened by other responsibilities, Kennedy requested that Congress appoint Johnson as head of the National Aeronautics and Space Council, a policy area that fascinated Johnson. Kennedy also consulted frequently with Johnson on civil rights policy. On March 6, 1961, through Executive Order 10925, Kennedy appointed Johnson as head of the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. As Chairman, Johnson oversaw the enforcement of non-discriminatory hiring practices within the federal government, unions, and contractors.<sup>267</sup> Through these experiences as chairs of various executive commissions, Johnson enhanced both his administrative skills, developed a deeper understanding of Kennedy's policies, and permitted him to have a direct impact on policy.

In addition to affecting domestic policy, Johnson quickly became a far-travelling ambassador on behalf of the Kennedy Administration. Due to the president's quasi-monopoly over foreign policy, Kennedy took various steps to ensure that Johnson remained, "well-informed of international events."<sup>268</sup> Following the erection of the Berlin Wall, Kennedy deployed Johnson to Germany to discuss the future of US-Soviet relations and to quell the fears of

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<sup>265</sup> Johnson, 52.

<sup>266</sup> Johnson, 7. Johnson specifically remarks that this created tension between him and Texan Senator Ralph Yarborogouh.

<sup>267</sup> Goldstein, 153-54.

<sup>268</sup> Johnson, 22.

West Germany. The Vice President received notable praise from Kennedy, Senate Democrats, and the press for his effective speech before a crowd of 250,000.<sup>269</sup> Johnson also developed first-hand knowledge of how US policy impacted Australia and East Asia through his vice presidential visits. This bolstered the United States' image within the region and enabled Johnson to better determine the military needs of these US allies. Overall, through these various appointments, commissions, and diplomatic missions, Johnson was provided with a substantial glimpse into the major threads of Kennedy's domestic and foreign policy agendas. While the practice of assigning vice presidents as heads of certain commissions or boards began in the 1930s, by 1965, the number of boards and commissions had skyrocketed. President Kennedy's Executive Order 10925 acknowledged that the President was overwhelmed with his duties and forced to delegate tasks to others, including his Vice President. As President, Johnson developed a similar approach, assigning certain duties and practices to his vice president, Hubert Humphrey. This institutional design has existed to the present day as seen with President Obama's decision to place Vice President Biden as the head of American Recover and Reinvestment Act Taskforce.<sup>270</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Although his administration was marred with tragedy, the Johnson presidency was a watershed moment for political parties as well as the Offices of

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<sup>269</sup> Goldstein, 163.

<sup>270</sup> "Vice President Joe Biden," *The White House*, 2013, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-biden>



the Vice President and President. For the Democratic (and eventually Republican) Party, the rise of the new primary system represented the end of the Party's domination of the nominating conventions. During elections, the focus had completely shifted away from the political parties and to individual candidates. Kennedy's successes in the primaries had provided him with enough clout to pick Johnson as his running mate. Thus, the presidential candidate's ability to select his vice president became a firm precedent that candidates have since followed.

LBJ's tenure as vice president revolutionized the office. The ability to now head executive commissions and conduct diplomatic visits had finally provided the vice presidency with both power and a window into the daily operations of the White House. Johnson's impact on civil rights and space policy as Kennedy's vice president showcased the benefits of establishing an active Office of the Vice President. Following LBJ's experience, vice presidents for the remainder of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would only see their duties and power increase. In terms of the presidency, the proliferation of new executive commissions and panels to oversee the New Frontier and Great Society programs led to both an overall expansion of the federal government, but more notably, the further concentration of power within the executive branch. The explosion of presidential duties and responsibilities in the post-World War II era made the president even more reliant upon his staff and advisors. Given the extensive bureaucracy and institutional growth of the executive branch, an accidental president, such as Lyndon Johnson (and later Gerald Ford) would be hard-pressed to enter the White House and start demanding radical policy reversals. For the accidental president, emulation, at

least until the completion of his predecessor's term, had become the only alternative available to those who unexpectedly fell into the presidency.

## Part IV: Gerald Ford

### *Overview*

Even for an accidental president, Gerald Ford's journey to the White House could not have been more unusual. "I am acutely aware that you have not elected me as your President," Ford confessed shortly after taking the oath of office.<sup>271</sup> The President's concession would have been more accurate if he also acknowledged that, unlike other accidental presidents, he was not elected as the nation's Vice President. Fourteen months earlier, Congressman Ford had been tapped by President Nixon to serve as his Vice President following the resignation of Vice President Agnew. Under the provisions of the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment, passed in 1967, Ford's admission to the Office of the Vice President had to first be approved by both chambers of Congress. Although Vice President Ford easily obtained confirmation from the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Nixon Administration quickly faced larger problems than Agnew's bribery. During the tortuous Watergate controversy, political pundits speculated as to whether Vice President Ford would replace the increasingly cagey and isolated President Nixon. In his memoir, *A Time to Heal*, Ford himself admitted, "The odds were fifty-fifty that Nixon would have to step down eventually."<sup>272</sup> When President Nixon relinquished his position on August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1974, Vice President Ford once again made the history books by becoming the first Vice President to succeed a President in the wake of a resignation. Despite the intrigue and

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<sup>271</sup> Gerald Ford, "Swearing in Ceremony, August 9<sup>th</sup> 1974," *The Gerald Ford Presidential Library*, 2013, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0122/1252055.pdf>.

<sup>272</sup> Gerald Ford, *A Time to Heal*, (New York, Harper & Row, 1979), 120.

cynicism surrounding Nixon and the Watergate incident, the presidential succession mechanism had ensured a peaceful transition

Given the extraordinary circumstances by which he obtained the presidency and his insistence that the nation focus on restoring its faith in the national government, it would have been entirely plausible for Ford to have fashioned a new version of the rogue strategy. The Ford Administration dismantled Nixon's imperious tone and significantly altered the management style of the Executive Branch. Ford drew heavily on his years of experience in the House of Representatives to drastically improve relations between Congress and the White House. Yet aside from making the Chief Executive more accessible and extending the olive branch to Congress and the press, the Ford Administration largely emulated the policy stances and positions adopted by President Nixon. Even prior to his vice presidential tenure, Ford obtained a reputation for his commitment to Nixon's programs. Abbott notes, "Nixon and [Chief of Staff] Haldeman saw Ford as a reliable vice president...Not only had Ford loyally supported all of the President's policies in Congress, he also attacked Justice Douglas on orders from the White House."<sup>273</sup> It was Ford's fealty to Nixon and his ideological similarity to the President that ultimately guided Nixon to select him as his second Vice President. During his brief stint as Vice President, Ford toed a precarious line between defending the Nixon Administration while also not impeding upon the Congress' investigation. By the summer of 1974, Nixon's

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<sup>273</sup> Abbott, 175.

resignation appeared inevitable; for Ford the question was no longer would he become President but when.

As President, Ford proclaimed his determination to follow both the domestic and foreign policies devised by Nixon. To achieve this goal, Ford, like other emulators, decided to retain the vast majority of Nixon's Cabinet and staff, including Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and Nixon's Chief of Staff Alexander Haig. One policy area that Ford closely emulated was Nixon's economic programs. "Let me assure you," Ford recollected asserting at one point, "that I expect to continue to support the [Nixon] Administration's...fight against inflation."<sup>274</sup> Perhaps more grave and serious than the Watergate scandal was the state of the nation's economy. Ford followed Nixon's advice to revoke the wage and price controls of 1971 in order to push inflation down.<sup>275</sup> He also endorsed the so-called inflation summit between Congress and the White House that Nixon had advocated.<sup>276</sup> In terms of spending cuts to help balance the budget and curtail inflation, Ford stated, "The economic proposals I submitted to Congress in the early weeks of my Administration were fairly similar to the ones that Nixon had proposed."<sup>277</sup> Yet, just as LBJ did for some of Kennedy's policies, Ford surpassed some elements of Nixon's economic plans. In a concerted effort to stifle inflation, Ford developed the Whip Inflation Now (WIN) initiative, a grassroots campaign designed to encourage frugality and wiser spending habits. Overall, Ford seemed strongly aligned with Nixon when it came to domestic policy.

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<sup>274</sup> Ford, 21.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid, 29

<sup>276</sup> Gerald Ford, "Presidential Address to Congressional Joint Session, August 12, 1974," *The Gerald Ford Presidential Library*, 2013, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0122/1252056.pdf>

<sup>277</sup> Ford, 156.

The bond connecting Ford's foreign policy to the foreign policy crafted by Nixon and Kissinger was also quite robust, especially since Ford retained Kissinger as a member of his administration. Early in his presidency, Ford firmly asserted, "I have fully supported the outstanding foreign policy of President Nixon. This policy I intend to continue."<sup>278</sup> Like Nixon before him, Ford would expand upon the policy of détente with the Soviet Union, which culminated in the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Accords. Abiding Nixon's wishes, Ford met with Soviet Chairman Leonid Brezhnev in order to obtain agreement on arms limitations (which ultimately failed).<sup>279</sup> Ford also committed himself to strengthening US ties with NATO as well as ensuring the successful withdrawal of US combat troops in South Vietnam and Cambodia.<sup>280</sup> Although he did not play nearly as active a role as Nixon did in formulating new policy responses to various international actors, Ford's continuation of détente revealed his commitment to Nixon and Kissinger's global vision. In some respects détente as a policy was so compelling that Ford's Democratic successor, Jimmy Carter also embraced the strategy.

Overall, Gerald Ford's case is an anomaly. Although he stressed that "no illegal tappings (tapings), eavesdropping, buggings, or break-ins,"<sup>281</sup> would be tolerated under a Ford Administration (even though they most certainly occurred during Nixon's presidency), Ford's decision to pardon the former President and

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<sup>278</sup> Gerald Ford, "Presidential Address to Congressional Joint Session, August 12, 1974," *The Gerald Ford Presidential Library*, 2013, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0122/1252056.pdf>

<sup>279</sup> Ford, 33.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>281</sup> Gerald Ford, "Presidential Address to Congressional Joint Session, August 12, 1974," *The Gerald Ford Presidential Library*, 2013, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0122/1252056.pdf>

keep a large portion of his staff engendered skepticism over Ford's honesty and competence. While his character and personality differed tremendously from that of his predecessor, Ford still implemented many of the programs and policies conceived by Nixon. Ford's choice to emulate may have originated from his ideological closeness to Nixon. Emulation may have also appealed to Ford by bolstering his own sense of legitimacy, a difficult sense to obtain since Ford had not even been elected Vice President. As will be discussed, other variables, such as party unity amongst Congressional Republicans or Ford's own experience as Vice President, may have compelled the last of the accidental presidents to become an emulator.

### *Party Unity*

The summer and fall of 1974 were perhaps the worst times to be a Republican in Congress. Although the nation had lost a President, Republicans were unable to muster much sympathy from the public since Richard Nixon was politically but not physically dead. Nixon's Watergate debacle, coupled with Ford's decision to pardon him, had created tremendous hostility towards the Republican Party. Yet surprisingly, in the midst of all the political upheaval, the Party retained their sense of cohesion. Although a large contingency of them had planned to push for impeachment, Congressional Republicans, for the most part, had supported most of Nixon's domestic and foreign policy initiatives. Republicans heralded Nixon's détente strategy as "a golden age of American

diplomacy.” They praised Nixon’s push for a reduction in property taxes and stood behind his stance on the Vietnamization of the conflict in South Vietnam.<sup>282</sup> The path that Ford could take as President was in some ways predetermined due to Republicans’ clear policy stances. Breaking away from Nixon’s policies would have not only invoked anger from the Republicans but also would have weakened Ford’s presidency. Congressional Democrats were only a few votes shy of overriding Ford’s veto. Upsetting Congressional Republicans could have provoked retaliation, thus tipping the balance in favor of the Democrats. Ford needed to maintain his Republican base in the Congress in order to ensure that his veto powers retained their potency.

As Table Nine indicates, Republican unity still remained fairly high throughout the 92<sup>nd</sup> and 93<sup>rd</sup> Congresses. The scatterplot (Figure 9) depicts how most Congressional Republicans shared the same ideological and policy preference space. The decline in Republican unity during the early 1970s may have been due to the growing rise of Ronald Reagan and the conservative Republicans, who would later challenge the centrist Ford for the 1976 presidential nomination.

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<sup>282</sup> *National Party Conventions, 1831-1976*, (Washington D.C., Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1979), 117



**Table Nine: Republican Party Unity Scores for the House and Senate  
[92<sup>nd</sup> – 93<sup>rd</sup> Congresses] <sup>283</sup>**

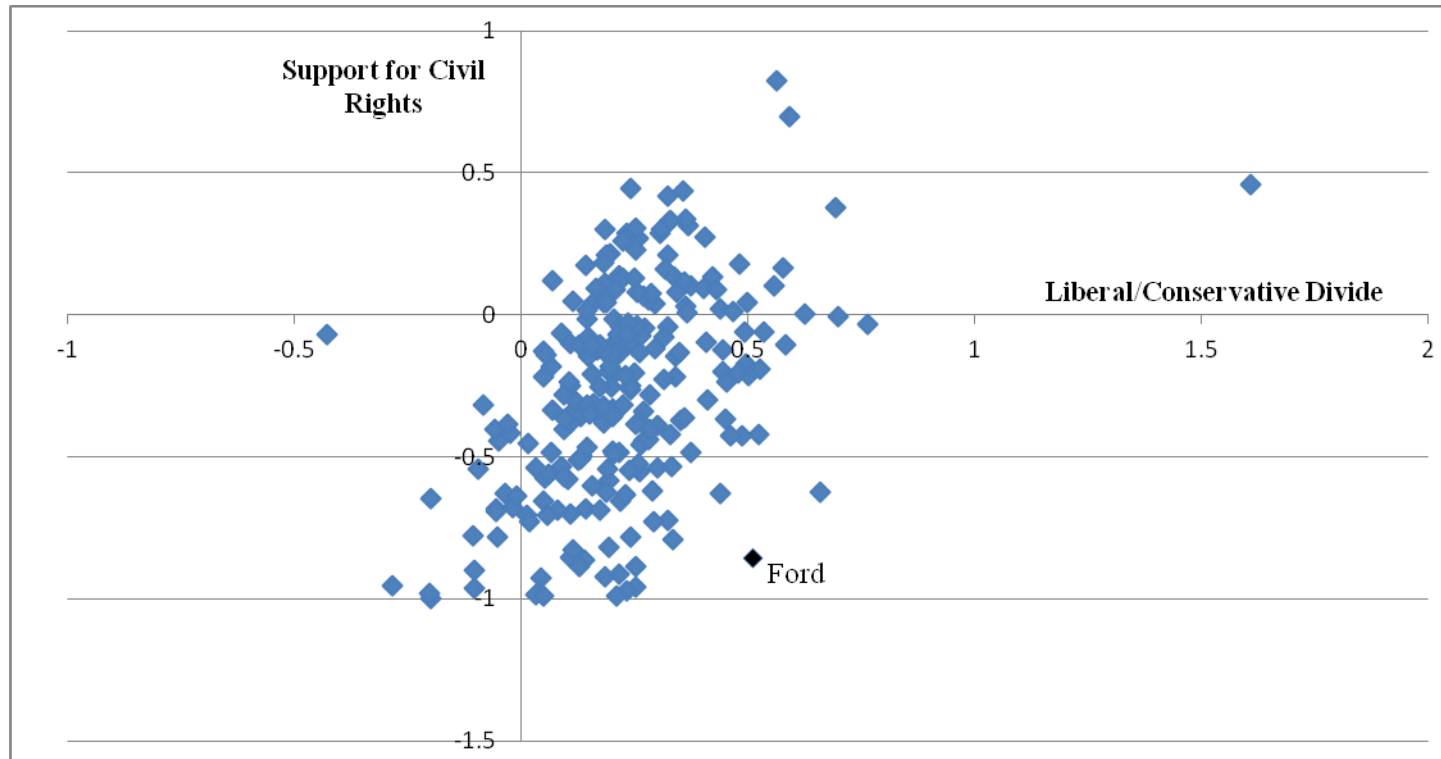
Session of Congress (Date)	House Republican Unity Score*	Senate Republican Unity Score*
92 <sup>nd</sup> Congress (1971-73)	0.76	0.74
93 <sup>rd</sup> Congress (1973-75)	0.72	0.70

*\*Party unity is defined as the proportion of Republican members voting with the majority of their party.*

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<sup>283</sup> Keith Poole, et.al, "DW Nominate: Party Unity Scores for 1<sup>st</sup>-112<sup>th</sup> Congresses," *Voteview.com*, 2012, [ftp://voteview.com/partyunity\\_house\\_senate\\_1-112.dat](ftp://voteview.com/partyunity_house_senate_1-112.dat).

**Figure 9: Policy Preferences of Congressional Republicans and Ford (93<sup>rd</sup> Congress: 1973-1975)**



*Source:* Royce Carroll, et.al, “Common Space Data: Congresses 1-112th,” *Voteview.com*, 2012, <http://voteview.com/readmeb.htm> The horizontal axis (Liberal/Conservative Ideology) is measured from on a scale from -1 to 1, with -1 representing the most liberal viewpoint and 1 representing the most conservative stance. The vertical axis (Support for Civil Rights) is measured on a wider scale but with the same implications as the scale used for the horizontal axis (i.e. the more conservative stance is towards 1 while the more liberal position is towards -1).

### *Nomination Mechanism*

While historically and politically debatable, it is possible that Nixon, very much like FDR in 1944, realized that he was selecting his successor following the resignation of Spiro Agnew in 1973. While the nomination mechanism described in the 25<sup>th</sup> Amendment was a novel process, Nixon had to still take into consideration many of the factors that guide a presidential candidate when he determines his running mate. While Nixon had full autonomy to name his new vice president, any nominee required the approval of Congress. Nixon nominated Gerald Ford not only because of his general approval amongst House Democrats and Republicans but also because of his similarities to the President. Both men had achieved considerable success given their modest background and had collaborated with each other when Nixon was a Congressman. Nixon was also aware of Ford's ideological loyalty to his Administration. According to the DW Nominate database, Nixon's ideological score ranked as a 0.490 while the more centrist Ford obtained 0.513.<sup>284</sup> The clear ideological linkages between Nixon and Ford suggested that the working relationship between the two would be functional.

Fascinatingly, although this was the first time in American history in which a Vice President had to be confirmed by the Congress, the questions asked of Ford dwelled little on policy and ideology and more about his character and fitness. Even though various Senators and Congressmen openly acknowledged that they did not agree with Ford on a number of issues, Ford encountered

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<sup>284</sup> Keith Poole, et.al. "DW Nominate Scores," *VoteView*, 3 Feb. 2011, [ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21\\_PRES.DAT](ftp://voteview.com/junkord/HL01111E21_PRES.DAT)

relatively little resistance to his nomination. For a final vote tally, the House voted to confirm vote 387-35 while in the Senate, 92 members approved of Nixon's nominee while 3, far-left Democrats disagreed.<sup>285</sup> Considering that all of the negative votes were from Democrats, the Republican Party, despite the Watergate crisis and their dim electoral prospects for 1973, were still united enough to mobilize behind their President's candidate for the vice presidency. Despite the fact that Ford's pathway to the vice presidency was unconventional, the fact that Nixon still had a direct say over who the candidate would be engendered a greater sense of loyalty to him.

### *Institutional Status of the Vice President*

Although President Nixon had developed a reputation for his insularity, this did not prevent him from assigning multiple duties to Vice President Ford. The institutional status of the vice president had shifted from one of insignificance to actual training and preparation for taking over as Chief Executive. Always present at Cabinet and National Security Council meetings, Ford immediately developed a strong understanding of Nixon's foreign policy, often receiving intelligence briefs from the CIA. "At least once a week at Nixon's request," Ford wrote, "Henry Kissinger or his deputy...would brief me on foreign policy."<sup>286</sup> Here one sees the executive branch's recognition that the Vice President should be fully versed in international relations should he have to step in as President.

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<sup>285</sup> Goldstein, 242-244.

<sup>286</sup> Ford, 121.

Vice President Ford played a critical role in developing and implementing domestic policy as well. Similarly to his three most recent predecessors (Agnew, Humphrey, and Johnson), Ford headed a number of executive commissions including the Domestic Council, the Committee on the Right of Privacy, and the Energy Action Group. During his chairmanship, Ford oversaw the creation of new energy proposals and also actively pursued measures to go against invasions of privacy.<sup>287</sup> In his first speech as President, Ford further remarked, “As Vice President, I studied various proposals for better health care financing...I saw them coming together and urged my friends in the Congress and in the Administration to sit down and...compromise.”<sup>288</sup> Ford’s comments not only underscored his ability to shape the debate on health care but also revealed that he was essentially acting as a liaison between the White House and the Congress. In some respects, one could say that Ford captured the intended spirit of the Office of the Vice President. Rather than exist in limbo between the presidency and the Congress, Vice President Ford served as a link between the two branches. Lastly, Vice President Ford emphasized the vice president’s potentiality in affecting electoral outcomes. Throughout the summer of 1974, Ford threw his weight as the Republican Party’s chief spokesman in order to campaign for many congressional and gubernatorial campaigns. As a national figure, Ford was able to attract votes as well as funding for many Republicans running for office.<sup>289</sup> Through all of these experiences, Ford was not only forging his own brand name but also was

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<sup>287</sup> “Vice Presidential Papers – Introduction,” *The Gerald Ford Presidential Library*, 2013, [http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/Ford\\_VP\\_Papers.asp](http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/Ford_VP_Papers.asp)

<sup>288</sup> Gerald Ford, “Presidential Address to Congressional Joint Session, August 12, 1974,” *The Gerald Ford Presidential Library*, 2013, <http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0122/1252056.pdf>

<sup>289</sup> Vice Presidential Papers – Introduction,” *The Gerald Ford Presidential Library*, 2013, [http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/Ford\\_VP\\_Papers.asp](http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/Ford_VP_Papers.asp)

acquiring the skills to effectively govern. Moreover, the amount of information that Ford obtained through his commissions and foreign policy briefings provided him with a clear sense of Richard Nixon's policies.

### *Conclusion*

While no other individual has reached the presidency the way that Gerald Ford did, his vice presidency and presidency truly established the primacy of the emulator strategy. Ford was arguably in the best position to revive the rogue strategy. Yet, the fact that he followed in the footsteps of his predecessor highlights how influential party unity, institutional design, and compatibility between the president and vice president can be. Vice President Ford displayed how a vice president could contribute to the electoral fortunes of a party. He also continued the precedent of vice presidents staying informed about the president's major domestic and foreign policy programs. Perhaps most importantly, Vice President Ford's confirmation hearings symbolized the gravitas that the Office of the Vice President wielded. After a presidential death, an assassination, and a resignation all occurring within less than thirty years of each other, attention was at long last being paid to the vice presidency. Nevada Senator Howard Cannon expressed it best when, during the Ford confirmation hearings, he urged the Senate Committee on Rules and Administration to, "view its obligations as no

less important than the selection of a potential President of the United States.”<sup>290</sup>

This ideally is how the vice president should be viewed, as the next-best individual for the position of Chief Executive. Equally significant was Ford’s ability to remove some of the stigma surrounding accidental presidents. By stressing his honesty and willingness to forgive, President Ford successfully guided the nation through some of its darkest days. His ability to help the nation transcend the wounds left by Watergate asserted that accidental presidents could function just as effectively as presidents who obtained power through the normal channels.

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<sup>290</sup> Senator H. Cannon, “Hearings on Nomination of Gerald Ford to be the Vice President of the United States,” Senate Committee on Rules and Administration, 93<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1973), 4.

## Chapter Five: A Heartbeat Away – Concluding Remarks and Thoughts

*“I am Vice President. In this I am nothing, but I may be everything.” –  
John Adams*

On the eve of the 1896 presidential election, a reflective Theodore Roosevelt drafted an essay dedicated not to the Chief Executive but to the far more obscure Office of the Vice President. “The Vice President,” Roosevelt began, “should represent the same views and principles which have secured the nomination and election of the President...[and be] able to take up the work of the latter where it was left.”<sup>291</sup> Although Roosevelt chose not to follow his own wisdom when he became an accidental president, his comments touched upon a truth that had been largely disregarded for most of American political history. Thankfully, twentieth century innovations to the executive branch and to the structure and unity of political parties have enabled Roosevelt’s vision for the vice presidents to finally come to fruition. Over the past twenty years, the Office of the Vice President has been dominated by powerful, effective individuals who made substantial impacts on their presidents’ administrations. Vice President Gore functioned as President Clinton’s chief advisor on environmental policy and led the commission to reform government. President George W. Bush relied upon Vice President Cheney’s experience as Secretary of Defense to help craft America’s post-9/11 security policy. President Obama has extensively utilized

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<sup>291</sup>Theodore Roosevelt, “Essay on the Vice Presidency, September 1896,” Reprinted in the *American Monthly Review of Reviews: An International Magazine*, Vol. 22, (July-December 1900), (New York, The Review of Reviews Company, 1900), 10.



Vice President Biden's background in the Senate to help muscle through healthcare reform, negotiate during the fiscal-cliff talks, and advocate for gun control. Given the amount of institutional interconnectedness between the presidency and vice presidency as well as the modernization of the Republican and Democratic parties, it is inconceivable that a 21st century accidental president would undo the agenda of his predecessor.

Overall, as Theodore Roosevelt first recognized 117 years ago, attention must be paid to the vice presidency. The conventional wisdom to view the vice presidency as an after-thought is wrong-headed and perverse. As my case studies indicate, the famous adage, "even the best laid plans of mice and men go awry," is a compelling reason why the importance of the vice presidency must be stressed. The president is not immune to the forces of fate and change. However, one concern that the presidency can provide for, in the event of death or removal from office, is a successful succession process. Throughout the 19th century, as my earlier chapter clearly depicts, transitions from a deceased president to his successor were hardly smooth. Indifference to the Office of the Vice President, coupled with malleable political parties and ideologies, cultivated the tendency of accidental presidents to become rogues. The threat of an uncontrollable vice president trampling upon the legacy of his deceased predecessor only became mitigated once twentieth century presidents embraced Roosevelt's 1896 essay. This is not to say that presidential interaction with the vice president was the only factor that prompted the end of the rogue strategy. Nor was the decision to become an emulator or rogue necessarily related to the individual personality of

the accidental president. (One would be hard pressed to classify the ambitious Lyndon B. Johnson as overly conciliatory or acquiescent to the views of others). Instead, the factors influencing an accidental president's decision to become a rogue or emulator often took place outside the White House and within the halls of Congress as seen with the DW Nominate measures of party unity and cohesion. The empirical data clearly depicted a trend in which accidental presidents functioned outside of the mainstream opinion of their political parties. Conversely, emulator accidental presidents typically matched their policy preferences with the majority of their fellow party members. The scatterplots further display how party unity became stronger as time progressed. The ideological range of political parties shrank as one transitioned from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Nevertheless, although the days of accidental presidents going rogue now belong to a bygone era, as my thesis suggests, it is paramount that the institutional and personal relationship between presidents and vice presidents remain strong. The emulation strategy can only be guaranteed as long as a vice president is active, engaged, and connected to the White House. Presidential candidates should absolutely retain their right to nominate their own running-mate. The vice presidents' attendance in Cabinet and National Security Council meetings should be mandated. Vice Presidents should be permitted to work on various commissions or head different presidential initiatives in order to hone their leadership and administrative skills. As my preceding chapter depicts, these provisions should be kept in place for they assure the sitting president that his vice

president will uphold his policies. The emulation strategy should naturally appeal to an accidental president for, when utilized effectively, it may strongly increase his chances at election in his own right. With the exception of Ford (who had still lost to Carter by only 8,000 votes), every accidental president who assumed the emulation strategy obtained victory in the next general election.<sup>292</sup> More importantly, the emulation strategy should be pressed upon accidental presidents since it preserves the principle of democratic transition. By far, the most problematic aspect of the rogue strategy is the fact that an individual can alter the ideas and programs that the public had initially elected him and his predecessor to pursue. While the rogue strategy has proven to be generally unsuccessful in enabling accidental presidents to win the presidency in their own right, the strategy has the potential to be ruinous to the rest of the country. In order to respect the will of the people and the democratic process by which the president and vice president obtained office, it is important that the emulation strategy remain the only option available to accidental presidents in the future.

Lastly, by ensuring that a strong bond is forged between the president and vice president, one is also providing for greater stability. The death, assassination, or resignation of a president is a traumatic event for any nation. Fortunately, the United States has persevered through nine incidents of losing its head of state; this is due in part to the succession process that has been gradually put into place. While the succession process clearly works, it can be even more effective by ensuring that the vice president is fully informed of his predecessor's policies and programs; this guarantees better governance and, more essentially, stability. In

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<sup>292</sup> Ford, 434.

sum, vice presidents must always be on call in case the unthinkable should happen. They must be ready should they be inadvertently propelled to the center of the political stage as the next President of the United States. They must be prepared should the moon and stars fall on them.

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