

# [422-17-3246 . vice president: richard mentor johnson](https://assignbuster.com/422-17-3246-vice-president-richard-mentor-johnson/)

422-17-3246HY 201, section 2 April 4, 2004Martin Van Buren – His Presidential Years1837 to 1841 picpicThe Eighth President of the United StatesIn the election of 1836, Van Buren won easily with 170 electoral votesagainst 73 for Harrison, 26 for White, 14 for Webster and 11 for Mangum. Inpopular votes Van Buren received a total of 764, 176 votes compared to550, 816 for Harrison, 146, 107 for White and 41, 201 for Webster.

Major Issues of the Election of 1836Van Buren disagreed with Whig candidate William Henry Harrison’srevenue-sharing scheme that would return federal surplus from the proceedsof federal lands directly back to the states. Harrison was willing torevive the Bank of the United States if the economy got out of control, while Van Buren opposed the Bank in all circumstances. While Harrisoncalled for a number of internal improvements, while Van Buren only intendedon federally funding projects that were truly national in scope. Van Buren’s major political opponents were: . William Henry Harrison (Whig) . Hugh Lawson White (Whig) .

Daniel Webster (Whig) . Vice President: Richard Mentor Johnson (1780-1850) Martin Van Buren’s expertise as a political strategist which earned himthe name “ little magician” was used to promote Andrew Jackson, but it wasof no use to him in furthering his own career as President. The mainproblem was the economic depression that persisted throughout most of hisadministration. He was further hampered by his taste for the finer thingsin life, which caused his critics to portray him as a dandy, indifferent tothe country’s sufferings. He was dubbed “ Martin Van Ruin “ for theseeconomic problems, even though they were already on the scene before hetook office. Almost at once a financial panic struck the nation. Bankers begged VanBuren for aid, but he pointed out that the crisis was due to ruinousspeculation.

He insisted that government manipulation would only furtherweaken the economic structure. As a step to guard the nation’s own money, he repeatedly pressed Congress to set up an independent treasury. It wasvoted in 1840 but repealed in 1841. Van Buren attributed the Panic of 1837to the overexpansion of the credit and favored the independent treasury. In1840, he established a 10 hour day on public works.

Van Buren also inherited from former president Jackson the SeminoleIndian War in Florida. The conflict, during which thousands of lives onboth sides were lost, cost the government between 40 and 60 milliondollars. Meanwhile Van Buren had to handle the undeclared Aroostook War, adispute between Maine and New Brunswick, Canada, over Maine’s northeastboundary on the Aroostook River. Maine called out troops in 1839, but VanBuren managed to have the quarrel settled by Britain and the United States. Van Buren’s calm approach to problems angered people who demanded quickaction. Despite heated public opinion he carefully weighed both sides ofany question. Today he is regarded as having been a sound statesman in atroubled era. Martin Van Buren was among the first American politicians tounderstand the role of political parties in a democracy.

Before him, parties were viewed disdainfully as dangerous factions threatening theunity of society. The party competition of an earlier era, between theFederalists and Democrat Republicans, was barely tolerated, with those inpower tending to view the opposing party as traitors and often subjectingthem to persecution. Van Buren saw parties as salutary institutions withina working democracy, and as a New York state politician, he built the firstreal political party apparatus in the United States. The popular image of Andrew Jackson as the backwoods representative ofthe people was largely Van Buren’s invention, and Jackson’s electoralvictories owed as much to Van Buren’s organizational skills as they did toJackson’s charisma. In turn, Van Buren’s election in 1836 owed everythingto Jackson. Van Buren was Jackson’s hand-picked successor, and he rode thatendorsement into office.

But Jackson’s reputation could not help Van Burensolve the economic depression that plagued his years in office. In the end, the genteel Van Buren became a victim of the very political techniques hehad developed for Jackson. In 1840 he was defeated for reelection by Whigcandidate William Henry Harrison, a backwoods Indian fighter who portrayedhimself (falsely) as a Jacksonian log-cabin and hard-cider representativeof the people. Memories of the financial crisis did not help him either. Van Buren lost the election by an electoral count of 234 to 60; the popularvotes were Van Buren 1, 128, 854 to Harrison’s 1, 275, and 390. Martin VanBuren was the leading contender for the Democratic nomination in 1844 untilhe publicly opposed immediate annexation of Texas, and was subsequentlybeaten by the Southern delegations at the Baltimore convention.

Afterworking behind the scenes among the anti-slavery Democrats, Van Burenjoined in the movement that led to the Free-Soil Party and became itscandidate for president in 1848. He subsequently returned to the DemocraticParty while continuing to object to its pro-southern policy. Presidential Positions . He opposed slavery. . Opposed annexation of Texas.

. Fought an unpopular war with the Seminole Indians in Florida. Cabinet Members . Secretary of State John Forsyth . Secretary of the Treasury Levi Woodbury . Secretary of War Joel R. Poinsett .

Attorney General Benjamin F. Butler ( 1837-1838)Domestic PolicyMartin Van Buren was faced with his first important crisis only weeksafter his inauguration. The nation entered the worst depression it hadexperienced in its short history. Known as the Panic of 1837, it was thedirect result of Jackson’s policies, which had been supported and/orinitiated by Van Buren. One of the primary causes was the FederalGovernment’s Hard Money Policy. This stated that gold or silver (hardmoney) must be used to purchase lands in the west. Another major cause ofthe depression was due to Jackson and Van Buren’s opposition to the Bank ofthe United States. They withdrew all federal funds from the National Bankand transferred them to smaller pet banks.

Many of these banks investedunwisely and in May of 1837 were forced to close. People lost their jobsand homes, as well as confidence in the new president. They demanded hecall a special session of Congress to solve the problem. He decided to waituntil September to have the meeting. This allowed him to use his acutepolitical strategy skills to develop a plan of his own. An important partof the plan he came up with involves the creation of an independenttreasury to hold federal funds. He did not feel that it was hisresponsibility to help those who had suffered due to the Panic.

TheCongress did not approve his plan, and the session ended in name-callingand finger-pointing. The solution accepted by the Congress involvedincreasing overseas trade by allowing importers to pay customs in papermoney. Before the end of his term, Van Buren was able to pass theSubtreasury Bill. As a consequence of extensive borrowing fueled by the demise of theBank of the United States, the failure of the 1836 wheat crop, a 50% dropin the price of cotton, the requested payment of many short-term Americanloans due to the demise of several European banks, and the order thatgovernment lands be paid for in coin, leading to the withdrawal of largeamounts of hard currency from circulation, the United States was throwninto a financial panic in 1837. The panic caused a severe increase inunemployment and the demise of many U. S. banks; and the increased cost offlour caused several riots in New York. The Slavery Issue and AmistadNew York was still a slave state when Van Buren was growing up, andhis family owned slaves.

As a young man Van Buren owned a slave himself, aman named Tom. When Tom ran away, Van Buren made no effort to recover him. But ten years later, in 1824, the escapee was discovered living inWorcester, Massachusetts, and at that point Van Buren agreed to sell him toanother man if he could be captured without violence. Subsequently VanBuren came around to oppose slavery in principle.

But as a matter of publicpolicy, he adhered closely to his sense of the compromises that theConstitution and Congress had set up to preserve both slavery and theunion. And as a politician trying to build a national party, he foundhimself obliged to accommodate growing southern anxieties about northernabolitionism over the 1830s. He was a northerner, a Yankee, of course, andthat was enough to make him suspect in southern eyes. So in 1835, preparingto run for president, he had to assure southern politicians and editorsthat he did not oppose slavery in those states where it already existed, that he opposed abolitionism, and specifically that he opposed the campaignto abolish slavery in the District of ColumbiaAs president from 1836-1840, Van Buren continued this policy ofprotecting the Democratic Party’s southern flank. He tried to steer amiddle course, avoiding both the taint of abolitionism on the one hand andutter capitulation to radical southern pro-slavery demands on the other. Hefaced a stiff race for reelection in 1840.

He therefore needed, or wasconvinced he needed, to find and make gestures demonstrating that he wasprepared to protect the peculiar institution from its radical opponents. Heappointed a disproportionate number of southerners to the Supreme Court, and his cabinet featured prominent southern representation. One of the mostimportant of these southerners, from the perspective of the AmistadAfricans, was John Forsyth of Georgia, Van Buren’s Secretary of State. Van Buren was not in Washington when the affair broke; he wascampaigning in upstate New York. His cabinet therefore formulated theadministration’s initial response: meeting in mid-September, they tookForsyth’s lead and arranged for federal authorities to support Spanishdemands that the slaves be returned to Cuba to face trial as murderers andpirates. Van Buren soon returned to the capital, but he seems to have paidlittle attention to the matter, letting Forsyth continue to handle thesituation. The president did not replace any judges in the case.

But he didput federal attorneys on the case and he did sign off on an effort to havethe Africans shipped immediately to Cuba if the court found for theadministration, before any appeals could be filed. In sum, Van Buren wantedthis problem to go away, cleanly and quietly. From his point of view, thiswas not only a potential diplomatic crisis with Spain, but morefundamentally a slave revolt — a dangerous provocation to southernersalready unsettled by the rise of northern abolitionism. The “ Trail of Tears” The major conflict of the Van Buren administration was the “ Trail ofTears ” march. The forced removal of some 18, 000 Cherokees, most fromGeorgia, to the Indian Territory west of the Mississippi, was ordered byPresident Jackson, but executed during the term of President Van Buren. Though the removal was widely denounced by humanists and constitutionalexperts, and despite the Supreme Court’s ruling that the Indians had thelegal right to remain at their ancestral homes, President Jackson orderedthe army, under the leadership of General Winfield Scott, to move theIndians out of Georgia; and when Van Buren came into power, he did notinterfere with this policy, despite its frequent criticism. During themarch, many Indians died of starvation, heat-induced diseases, and over-exposure to cold, leading Indians to name the long journey “ The Trail ofTears” Though Van Buren did not do anything about the forced march that hispredecessor had begun, he had the opportunity, the encouragement, and thepower to do so.

Jackson had begun the march against the wishes of most ofhis colleges, and, even if it had been generally accepted that the marchwas a good and necessary thing, which it had not, Van Buren probably couldhave stopped it. However, by declining to take action, Van Buren advancedthe views of Jackson, while foregoing the will of the general public. Theother war Van Buren was involved in was the Indian War in 1835. TheSeminoles, who didn’t want to move west, revolted with a force of 2, 000Seminoles fighting a guerrilla war.

The people did not support the war, because it drained funds that could be used on them. Martin Van Buren’s term as President was one full of many dilemmas anda lot of adversity, thus he was not re-elected. BibliographyMartin Van Buren, The autobiography of Martin Van Buren. (ed John C.

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