

422-17-3246 . vice  
president: richard  
mentor johnson



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422-17-3246HY 201, section 2 April 4, 2004 Martin Van Buren - His Presidential Years 1837 to 1841 picpic The Eighth President of the United States In the election of 1836, Van Buren won easily with 170 electoral votes against 73 for Harrison, 26 for White, 14 for Webster and 11 for Mangum. In popular votes Van Buren received a total of 764, 176 votes compared to 550, 816 for Harrison, 146, 107 for White and 41, 201 for Webster.

Major Issues of the Election of 1836 Van Buren disagreed with Whig candidate William Henry Harrison's revenue-sharing scheme that would return federal surplus from the proceeds of federal lands directly back to the states. Harrison was willing to revive the Bank of the United States if the economy got out of control, while Van Buren opposed the Bank in all circumstances. While Harrison called for a number of internal improvements, while Van Buren only intended on 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 him the name " little magician " was used to promote Andrew Jackson, but it was of no use to him in furthering his own career as President. The main problem was the economic depression that persisted throughout most of his administration. He was further hampered by his taste for the finer things in life, which caused his critics to portray him as a dandy, indifferent to the country's sufferings. He was dubbed " Martin Van Ruin " for these economic problems, even though they were already on the scene before he took office. <https://assignbuster.com/422-17-3246-vice-president-richard-mentor-johnson/>

Almost at once a financial panic struck the nation. Bankers begged Van Buren for aid, but he pointed out that the crisis was due to ruinous speculation.

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 It was voted in 1840 but repealed in 1841.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

Van Buren also inherited from former president Jackson the Seminole Indian War in Florida. The conflict, during which thousands of lives on both sides were lost, cost the government between 40 and 60 million dollars. Meanwhile Van Buren had to handle the undeclared Aroostook War, a dispute between Maine and New Brunswick, Canada, over Maine's northeast boundary on the Aroostook River. Maine called out troops in 1839, but Van Buren managed to have the quarrel settled by Britain and the United States. Van Buren's calm approach to problems angered people who demanded quick action. Despite heated public opinion he carefully weighed both sides of any question. Today he is regarded as having been a sound statesman in a troubled era. Martin Van Buren was among the first American politicians to understand the role of political parties in a democracy.

Before him, parties were viewed disdainfully as dangerous factions threatening the unity of society. The party competition of an earlier era, between the Federalists and Democrat Republicans, was barely tolerated, with those in power tending to view the opposing party as traitors and often

subjecting them to persecution. Van Buren saw parties as salutary institutions within a working democracy, and as a New York state politician, he built the first real political party apparatus in the United States. The popular image of Andrew Jackson as the backwoods representative of the people was largely Van Buren's invention, and Jackson's electoral victories owed as much to Van Buren's organizational skills as they did to Jackson's charisma. In turn, Van Buren's election in 1836 owed everything to Jackson. Van Buren was Jackson's hand-picked successor, and he rode that endorsement into office.

But Jackson's reputation could not help Van Buren solve the economic depression that plagued his years in office. In the end, the genteel Van Buren became a victim of the very political techniques he had developed for Jackson. In 1840 he was defeated for reelection by Whig candidate William Henry Harrison, a backwoods Indian fighter who portrayed himself (falsely) as a Jacksonian log-cabin and hard-cider representative of 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 popular votes were Van Buren 1, 128, 854 to Harrison's 1, 275, and 390. Martin Van Buren was the leading contender for the Democratic nomination in 1844 until he publicly opposed immediate annexation of Texas, and was subsequently beaten by the Southern delegations at the Baltimore convention.

After working behind the scenes among the anti-slavery Democrats, Van Buren joined in the movement that led to the Free-Soil Party and became its candidate for president in 1848. He subsequently returned to the Democratic Party while continuing to object to its pro-southern policy.

Presidential Positions . He opposed slavery. . Opposed annexation of Texas.  
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. 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 Policy Martin Van Buren was faced with his first important crisis only weeks after his inauguration. The nation entered the worst depression it had experienced in its short history. Known as the Panic of 1837, it was the direct result of Jackson's policies, which had been supported and/or initiated by Van Buren. One of the primary causes was the Federal Government's Hard Money Policy. This stated that gold or silver (hard money) must be used to purchase lands in the west. Another major cause of the depression was due to Jackson and Van Buren's opposition to the Bank of the United States. They withdrew all federal funds from the National Bank and transferred them to smaller pet banks.

Many of these banks invested unwisely and in May of 1837 were forced to close. People lost their jobs and homes, as well as confidence in the new president. They demanded he call a special session of Congress to solve the problem. He decided to wait until September to have the meeting. This allowed him to use his acute political strategy skills to develop a plan of his own. An important part of the plan he came up with involves the creation of an independent treasury to hold federal funds. He did not feel that it was his responsibility to help those who had suffered due to the Panic.

The Congress did not approve his plan, and the session ended in name-calling and finger-pointing. The solution accepted by the Congress

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involved increasing overseas trade by allowing importers to pay customs in paper money. Before the end of his term, Van Buren was able to pass the Subtreasury Bill. As a consequence of extensive borrowing fueled by the demise of the Bank of the United States, the failure of the 1836 wheat crop, a 50% drop in the price of cotton, the requested payment of many short-term American loans due to the demise of several European banks, and the order that government lands be paid for in coin, leading to the withdrawal of large amounts of hard currency from circulation, the United States was thrown into a financial panic in 1837. The panic caused a severe increase in unemployment and the demise of many U. S. banks; and the increased cost of flour caused several riots in New York. The Slavery Issue and Amistad New York was still a slave state when Van Buren was growing up, and his family owned slaves.

As a young man Van Buren owned a slave himself, a man 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 in Worcester, Massachusetts, and at that point Van Buren agreed to sell him to another man if he could be captured without violence. Subsequently Van Buren came around to oppose slavery in principle.

But as a matter of public policy, he adhered closely to his sense of the compromises that the Constitution and Congress had set up to preserve both slavery and the union. And as a politician trying to build a national party, he found himself obliged to accommodate growing southern anxieties about northern abolitionism over the 1830s. He was a northerner, a Yankee, of course, and that was enough to make him suspect in southern eyes. So in <https://assignbuster.com/422-17-3246-vice-president-richard-mentor-johnson/>

1835, preparing to run for president, he had to assure southern politicians and editors that he did not oppose slavery in those states where it already existed, that he opposed abolitionism, and specifically that he opposed the campaign to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia. As president from 1836-1840, Van Buren continued this policy of protecting the Democratic Party's southern flank. He tried to steer a middle course, avoiding both the taint of abolitionism on the one hand and utter capitulation to radical southern pro-slavery demands on the other. He faced a stiff race for reelection in 1840.

He therefore needed, or was convinced he needed, to find and make gestures demonstrating that he was prepared to protect the peculiar institution from its radical opponents. He appointed a disproportionate number of southerners to the Supreme Court, and his cabinet featured prominent southern representation. One of the most important of these southerners, from the perspective of the Amistad Africans, was John Forsyth of Georgia, Van Buren's Secretary of State. Van Buren was not in Washington when the affair broke; he was campaigning in upstate New York. His cabinet therefore formulated the administration's initial response: meeting in mid-September, they took Forsyth's lead and arranged for federal authorities to support Spanish demands that the slaves be returned to Cuba to face trial as murderers and pirates. Van Buren soon returned to the capital, but he seems to have paid little attention to the matter, letting Forsyth continue to handle the situation. The president did not replace any judges in the case.

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

Jackson had begun the march against the wishes of most of his colleagues, and, even if it had been generally accepted that the march was a good and necessary thing, which it had not, Van Buren probably could have stopped it. However, by declining to take action, Van Buren advanced the views of Jackson, while foregoing the will of the general public. The other war Van



Buren was involved in was the Indian War in 1835. The Seminoles, who didn't want to move west, revolted with a force of 2,000 Seminoles 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 and a lot of adversity, thus he was not re-elected.

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