University of North Carolina Asheville
Journal of Undergraduate Research
Asheville, North Carolina
May 2020

Perfect Indifference: Kentucky Politics in the Era of Good Feelings

Zach Dorcas
History
The University of North Carolina Asheville
One University Heights
Asheville, North Carolina 28804 USA

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Sarah Judson

Abstract

The election of John Quincy Adams as president in 1824 saw the final stages of the so-called 'Era of Good Feelings.' Following the War of 1812 and the end of the Federalist Party, the United States entered a period characterized by high national pride and a single major political party, the Democratic-Republicans. Much of the scholarship around this period explains its ramifications on a national scale, such as works by historians Robert V. Remini and Daniel Walker Howe, and the consensus is that this period was still full of contentious politics. However, there is little work examining how the 'Era of Good Feelings' affected local politics, specifically during the election of 1824. Kentucky, home of presidential candidate Henry Clay, provides the ideal conditions to study these effects. This state was one of the few that was not politically homogeneous during this period and was more susceptible to the effects of the Era of Good Feelings. By comparing election returns from 1824 to later presidential races, this project explains how a single-party system impacted Kentuckians' voting patterns in national issues. A large portion of the American public was indifferent to presidential elections during this period and the citizens that did vote were not bound to political parties to guide their decision. While national politicians continued to argue over major issues and state politics dominated smaller communities, the connection between ordinary citizens and national politics was severed. This project demonstrates that while historians rightfully claim there were few actual 'good' feelings on the national scale, there was still a significant impact on counties and states during this era.

1. Body of Paper

In late December of 1824, the *Kentucky Reporter* of Fayette county chronicled the progression of the presidential election and the eventual defeat of their hometown hero, Henry Clay. Eventually, Clay's loss became inevitable and Kentuckians began to look towards the other candidates. One editor for the newspaper wrote, "Our opinion however is that there cannot now be a reasonable doubt of the final success of either General Jackson or Mr. Adams. With respect to these two, we feel the most perfect indifference."[1] The sentiment expressed in this article was one shared by many in the state at the time: Henry Clay was the only candidate in which Kentuckians had any substantial interest. While this strong preference for Clay was understandable, the *Reporter* article presents Jackson and Adams as comparable candidates. In any other election, equating candidates as dissimilar as these two would call into question the reliability of the author. However, this particular election marked the culmination of the so-called 'Era of Good Feelings,' a period in American history characterized by high national pride, supposed national unity, and only one major political party. As a result, the lines between platforms and politicians were blurred and the nation could not rely on allegiance to a political party to influence their vote. In Kentucky, the effects of this period were far more extreme than other parts of the nation. By analyzing partisan behavior on the county level, however, we can fully understand the relationship between smaller communities and national politics during this period.

The national political landscape during the Era of Good Feelings was, at the very least, tense and much of what would have resulted as a partisan conflict in a two-party system largely turned to factionalism. Newly-admitted states

that were not bound to Revolutionary politics, such as Kentucky, were unable to form traditional factions, and thus brought a new dimension to the national stage.[2] As the United States entered into a single-party period, these new territories were far more susceptible to the wave of supposed national unity that had swept the nation. Throughout this era, federal politics largely maintained the status quo under the guise of factions. Politicians argued both in the open and behind closed doors over numerous national issues. Smaller, state-level coalitions quickly formed to guide voters on local debates when national parties could not. However, the relationship between these smaller communities and national politics was severed, or at least distorted, and in regard to presidential campaigns of the period, citizens did not experience the same tension and conflict as other eras of American history. This shift is clearly demonstrated in Kentucky's voting patterns during the election of 1824. On their own, the county-level returns of this election do not indicate a radically unusual pattern. However, compared to subsequent campaigns in the region, the election results and citizen participation in 1824 were an outliers and demonstrated how the Era of Good Feelings relieved national tension on ordinary citizens and profoundly impacted Kentuckians' behavior and outlook on the national political stage.

The scholarship on the Era of Good Feelings is extensive. Many of the developments in the early nineteenth century were crucial for the evolution of American politics, so naturally, historians have thoroughly analyzed this period. For decades, the general consensus amongst scholars was that the Era of Good Feelings lacked the political unity that many claimed. In fact, many describe the label of this period as a 'lie' or 'facade' rather than a decade of genuine political peace.[3] George Dangerfield, in his 1963 work *The Era of Good Feelings*, argues that "while feelings of one kind or another ran high during the Administration of Monroe, they were… invariably not good."[4] Contemporary historians concur with Dangerfield's assessment of this period. In Daniel Walker Howe's *What Hath God Wrought,* he explains that despite James Monroe's aspirations for true nonpartisanship, the preexisting divisions in national politics proved this goal to be futile. "Since virtually all ambitious politicians joined the Republican Party, the party ceased to have coherence… Sectional differences superimposed upon these divisions made for an even more complex grid of rivalries."[5]

In Matthew Mason's *Slavery and Partisan Conflict in the Early American Republic,* he makes it clear that these underlying tensions were not a secret to politicians, but rather a festering dilemma that eventually had to be resolved. "Loyal Northern Republicans' anxiety for the party and the Union bore witness to the power of this latest round of sectional appeal. They lamented the sectional dangers lurking behind their partisan hegemony in the Era of Good Feelings. They did their best to defend the white South against their erstwhile comrades' contumely. But they knew that could not stand as friends to slavery."[6] Mason thoroughly describes the conflict over slavery between Republicans in the north and the south, but more importantly, he draws the obvious connection between Northern Republicans and their Federalist predecessors. "Southern slavery encroached upon the interests as well as the liberties of white Northerners: these were the same themes and languages that the Federalists had been employing for years."[7] While the nation experienced a period of only one major political party, the factions that began to rise within them directly mirrored the two-party system that existed a few years earlier.

To many historians, the Era of Good Feelings is synonymous with the administration of James Monroe. In literature on this era, Monroe is continually cited as the primary proponent for nonpartisanship and national unity. In *The Presidency of James Monroe,* Noble E. Cunningham quotes the president's inaugural address as an example of Monroe's desire for political cohesiveness. "In closing his address, the new president remarked on 'the increasing harmony which pervades our Union. Discord does not belong in our system.' The American people 'constitute one great family with a common interest.'"[8] Robert Pierce Forbes, in *The Missouri Compromise*, argues that, as Monroe came into office, he saw "an unprecedented opportunity to unite the country."[9] In *What Hath God Wrought,* Howe states that "Monroe felt he enjoyed an unparalleled opportunity to achieve the widely shared aspiration of eliminating parties," a goal first advocated for in George Washington's farewell address.[10] In fact, Howe asserts that Monroe grew so popular with the American public because his nonpartisan ambitions heavily echoed Washington's.

Historians also point to Monroe's personal experience in the late eighteenth century as a key factor of his success. Both Howe and Cunningham cite James Monroe's role in the War for Independence as a cause for his popularity and success, the latter of whom identifies Monroe as "the last president of the United States to bring into office the record of a hero of the American Revolution."[11] Several scholars, including Howe and Forbes, even argue that Monroe's fashion choices made him a favorable and nostalgic choice for a nation remembering the Revolution. "Monroe still wore the 'small clothes' of the eighteenth century: knee breeches and buckled shoes, with powdered wig and three-cornered hat," writes Howe.[12] Regardless of whether the years of his administration held any positive feelings at all, James Monroe believed he was in a position to rid the nation of parties and finally reach the goal set by Washington decades before. Historians agree that Monroe exemplified the ideals of the Revolution through his actions and public presentation and truly strove for an era of good feelings.

In regard to Kentucky specifically, there is little to no historical work explicitly exploring how the Era of Good Feelings affected the commonwealth. In James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend's *A New History of Kentucky*, they discuss the politics of the early nineteenth century, but heavily focus on the conflict between Whigs and Democrats that followed the Era of Good Feelings.[13] During this time period, Kentucky, along with the rest of the nation, was recovering from the Panic of 1819 and much of the work in *A New History of Kentucky* reflects the coalitions that formed to address the economic crisis. In the late twentieth century, Robert M. Ireland published several books exploring Kentuckian counties, including *The County in Kentucky History* and *Little Kingdoms: The Counties of Kentucky, 1850-1891*. In his works, Ireland explores local politics, economics, and county courts within the state. In *The County in Kentucky History*, he explores how the courts and voting patterns in specific counties were commonly disparate and the justice systems often did not reflect the will of the county's citizens.[14] These historical works, however, do not draw the connections between Kentucky counties and national politics that are crucial for a full understanding of the period.

The presidential election of 1824 was the culmination of the Era of Good Feelings. Politicians had jockeyed for position under the guise of nonpartisanship for nearly a decade and as James Monroe's administration began its exit, a wide array of potential successors stepped into the limelight. The major candidates were John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and William H. Crawford. The South Carolinian John C. Calhoun initially ran as well, but he quickly abandoned the crowded presidential race for the uncontested office of vice president. Political parties could not narrow the field of candidates, so no singular figure won the necessary majority of electoral votes for victory. Andrew Jackson gained the most electoral and popular votes, yet without a majority winner, the Constitution ordered the three candidates with the highest electoral totals, Jackson, Adams, and Crawford, to be sent to the House of Representatives for the final decision.[15] Crawford's political experience had thrust him to preliminary success, however by the time the election was sent to Congress, severe health concerns had eliminated him from serious contention.[16] It was apparent that either Jackson or Adams would win the presidency, and the eventual victor needed the favor of the House of Representatives.

While Henry Clay was not a finalist for the presidency, he was the Speaker of the House and his endorsement granted the recipient an enormous advantage. After meeting with delegates from both campaigns, Clay backed Adams, another nationalist who favored policy similar to Clay's American Plan, which included protective tariffs and government-funded internal improvements.[17] This support ultimately granted Adams victory and he became the sixth President of the United States. Once he was elected, he appointed Clay as the Secretary of State, which at the time was viewed as a steppingstone to the presidency. Four of the previous presidents, including Adams, had first served as the State Secretary. While Clay first hoped for the presidency himself, this appointment was an adequate consolation prize.

In the election of 1824, Kentucky largely voted for Henry Clay. Political parties could not guide voters at the end of the Era of Good Feelings, so citizens were forced to seek direction from other factions or institutions. For many Kentuckians, the lack of party loyalty logically led to community allegiance and in 1824, this meant supporting Henry Clay's candidacy. While Clay's success in the state was expected, he did not dominate Kentucky's polls as his competitors did in their respective states. Clay won 72.4% of his state's popular vote as opposed to Andrew Jackson's 27.6%.[18] On its own, the nearly three-fourths majority appears to be a dominant result for the Kentucky native. However, in Massachusetts, John Quincy Adams won 82.3% of the votes and in Tennessee, Jackson astonishingly won over 97%.[19] Nonetheless, Clay won a strong victory in his own state, with over sixty counties having reported a majority for the Kentucky native. On their own, the returns from the election portray his state as fairly progressive due to their support for a strong nationalist that advocated for federal power. However, when compared to subsequent elections, it is clear that 1824 is an anomaly. Over the next several presidential elections, Kentucky's voting patterns were far more moderate, without any one candidate approaching the vast majority vote that Clay enjoyed in 1824.[20] The causes of this political phenomenon were undoubtedly the Era of Good Feelings, which obscured the differences between politicians and issues, leading Kentuckians to vote for a familiar name in a time of uncertainty.

Leading up to the election of 1828, Henry Clay campaigned for Adams, especially in Kentucky, though he faced significant opposition from Jacksonians in the state. Clay's political plan depended upon Adams serving for another term because once Adams stepped away after eight years, Clay would have been able to transition from Secretary of State to president, as was the unspoken tradition. However, Kentucky, which had strongly supported Clay four years earlier, did not support his long-term political goals when voting in the 1828 election. Kentucky Jacksonians resolutely campaigned against the Adams-Clay duo and their efforts were effective. In 1824, Jackson won a majority of the popular vote in only ten Kentucky counties. In 1828, that figure rose to 56.[21]

In some ways, Kentucky's support for Jackson was logical. He represented another frontier state, Tennessee, which had similar political and economic interests as Kentucky. Additionally, Jackson already had a strong reputation in Kentucky due to his military experience. In the Battle of New Orleans, he fought alongside the famed "Hunters of Kentucky," a battalion of riflemen that reportedly helped swing the tide of the battle. Kentuckians already knew

Jackson and saw him as a candidate for their own interests. However, the radical change in Jackson's success in the state was still improbable. His opponent, John Quincy Adams, had no personal ties to Kentucky except for his connection to Henry Clay. Adams' partnership and endorsement from Clay should have swayed the state further in the incumbent's favor. A vote for Adams, in more ways than not, was a vote for Clay.[22]

The difference between the elections in 1824 and 1828 were the formation of parties. In the former election, the lines between candidates were blurred to many citizens because there were no parties to cleanly differentiate. By 1828, Adams represented the National Republicans, an echo of his Federalist youth. Within a few years, they were known as the Whigs. Across the aisle was Jackson, who led a coalition of Crawford's supporters and his own to form the Democratic party.[23] For many Kentuckians, the Democratic platform was far more appealing than Clay's National Republicans. Since party caucuses were able to nominate a single candidate, the field of options was narrowed for voters and the stark difference between Jackson and Adams was suddenly defined through this new party system.

Another factor that led to Adam's loss in Kentucky was the fact that Clay had fallen from the graces of Kentuckians. The shadow of a so-called "corrupt bargain" hung heavily over Adams' reelection bid. After Clay had supported Adams in 1824 and Clay subsequently became Secretary of State, politicians and the media called foul play between the two. No one cried malfeasance with more aggression and vigor than Andrew Jackson, who attacked his two opponents until his eventual victory in 1828. When writing to an advisor about Clay's role in the agreement, Jackson claimed, "The Judas of the West has closed the contract and will receive the thirty pieces of silver… Was there ever such a bare faced corruption in any country before?"[24] Specifically in Kentucky, Clay's reliability was compromised. In 1824, as the presidential race was being decided by the House of Representatives, Kentucky's delegates were instructed to vote for Jackson. Instead, Clay used his influence to move their votes in favor of Adams.[25] To respond to these attacks, Clay took to the press and continuously defended his actions, claiming he had intended to vote for Adams from the beginning of the affair. In a letter in February of 1825, only five days before the presidential vote in the House of Representatives, Henry Clay acknowledged that his actions might upset Kentuckians, but he felt he had to follow his conscience. "I love [Kentucky]... But I have public duties to perform… In doing so, I may incur unfortunately her displeasure. Be it so."[26] Despite his addresses, many Kentuckians no longer trusted Clay to act in their best interest and once the new party system had formed in 1828, the state could clearly differentiate between Jackson and the Adams-Clay alliance.

Kentucky's lack of faith in Clay after 1824 was apparent, as support for the statesman waned in almost the entire state. Even his home county, Fayette, saw a drastic reduction in support after the Adams administration. Located in the heart of Kentucky, Fayette was one of the state's economic and cultural hubs, mainly due to its central location and its largest city, Lexington. Lexington served as the center of Kentucky's slave trade, a slowly growing and widespread industry in the state. While the institution was not necessary for the commonwealth's economy, slaves were still one of its main exports, along with hemp, bourbon, and cattle. Lexington was also a cultural center for Kentucky, described as the "Athens of the West."[27] While the state's urban areas were rapidly developing, Lexington served as a model for its developing neighbors with its innovative and lavish architecture, as it harbored some of Kentucky's wealthiest citizens. Ashland, the famed estate of Henry Clay, was located in Fayette county, which accounts for the strong ties the area had with the politician.

Leading up to the election of 1824, the *Kentucky Reporter* consistently expressed its support for the hometown candidate, Henry Clay, a sentiment shared by the majority of its readers. One article in February of that year argued why each of the other candidates would be a poor fit for the presidency and how Clay is the clear and obvious choice: "I ask every republican, who has the interest of party at heart… to unite heartily and unequivocally in the cause of Mr. Clay."[28] As the election progressed, the *Reporter* continued to attack any ideas of voting for electors pledged to other candidates. "Whatever effect such annunciations may have on the people of other states, we do not believe that there is even the *smallest probability* that any of these candidates… except those pledged to vote for Henry Clay, will have the pleasure of voting for anyone."[29] However, Clay's downfall became evident in December as the decision went to Congress without him. The *Kentucky Reporter* turned its attention towards other candidates, however, as previously seen, they were apathetic of the results if their preferred choice, Clay, was not feasible. "With respect to these two [Adams and Jackson], we feel the most perfect indifference."[30] Without distinct parties to differentiate Adams and Jackson, these two vastly different figures were comparable in the eyes of many Kentuckians.

Especially within Kentucky, the election results reveal how drastically attitudes changed between 1824 and 1828. Even in counties that were strongly supportive of Clay in the former election, this support did not carry over in the next. In 1824, while less than half of Fayette county actually participated, 77% of its voters were for Clay.[31] This equated to 846 votes in his favor, as opposed to 252 for Jackson. This was the largest sum of pro-Clay votes in any one Kentucky county. In 1828, Fayette supported Adams, which was in turn, support for Clay. Within the media, support of the incumbent often meant hostility towards the opposition, Andrew Jackson. Before the election of 1828, an editorial in Lexington began called the *Anti-Jackson Bulletin and Messenger of Truth.* True to its name, the

newspaper attacked the Tennessean general relentlessly. In one section, the editor reported a story from Jackson's days as a General, in which he ordered the execution of a soldier for a mild offense. "I am told that at *this* time General Jackson is mild, peaceable, decent, and rather religious. This was not the case at the time of the murder of Woods, for then he was violent, outrageous, and profane." The editorial continually painted Jackson as a barbarous murderer who was ill fit for the presidency and despite the clear bias in their title alone, they maintained their reporting was equitable and fair. "Our statements of fact...rest upon evidence. Our sentiments and opinions, impartial and conscientious."[32] However, despite the barrage of anti-Jackson attacks in the media, the Adams-Clay duo did not dominate the county as Clay did alone four years earlier. Adams won only 57% of Fayette's vote, which was still a strong victory, but demonstrated how even pro-Clay pockets of Kentucky were turning away from him. Other parts of the state were far more drastic.[33]

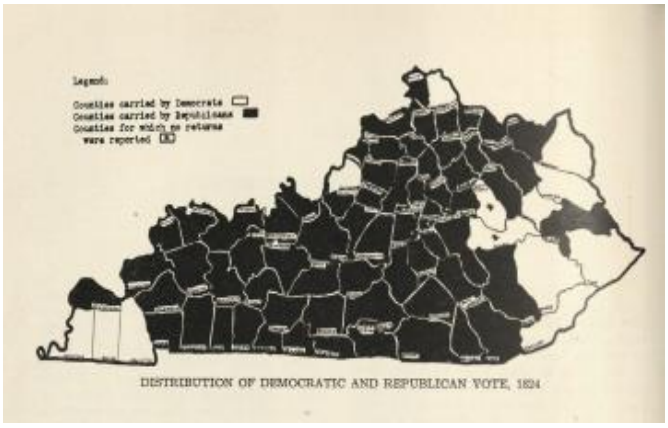

Figure 1. Map of Kentucky counties, election of 1824.

Figure 1 The counties in black are a majority for Henry Clay and the counties in white are a majority for Andrew Jackson. Maps are from *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948: A Compilation of Election Statistics and an Analysis of Political Behavior,* by Ruth McQuown and Shannon B. Jasper.

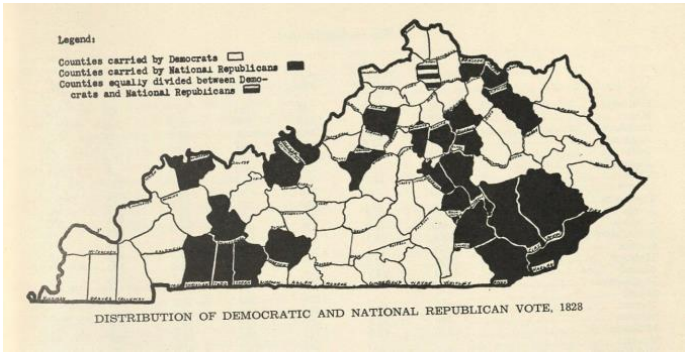

Figure 2. Map of Kentucky counties, election of 1828.

Figure 2 The counties in black are a majority for John Quincy Adams and the counties in white are a majority for Andrew Jackson. Maps are from *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948: A Compilation of Election Statistics and an Analysis of Political Behavior,* by Ruth McQuown and Shannon B. Jasper.

About 25 miles northwest of Fayette lies Franklin county, the home of Frankfort, Kentucky's capital. In terms of percentage, Franklin supported Clay at a higher rate than Fayette did in 1824. Of the 704 votes, 568, or 81%, of them were for Clay. In the next election, Clay and Adams lost substantial support in Fayette, but they still won the majority in the county. Franklin, on the other hand, had a much more drastic change. Despite Clay's endorsement and partnership with Adams, Jackson won 62% of Franklin voters.[34] This drastic change in opinion was clearly evident in the presidential election, but it was also mirrored in the congressional races. In the 18th Congress, the 6th District of

Kentucky, which included Franklin and Fayette counties, was represented by David White, a strong supporter of Clay in 1824. However, after only one term, he lost reelection and was replaced by Joseph Lecompte. Lecompte's election was an obvious demonstration of the shift in opinion within Franklin and Fayette. A militiaman during the war of 1812, Lecompte fought under Jackson at New Orleans as one of the famed "Hunters of Kentucky." He was an active and staunch Jacksonian Democrat and remained in office until the beginning of Jackson's second term, when Lecompte returned to his career in agriculture.[35]

Franklin's shift towards supporting Andrew Jackson was hardly an anomaly. More than 40 other counties that had a majority vote for Clay in 1824 turned in favor of Jackson in the subsequent election. Furthermore, most of the counties that already had supported him gained more support within their communities. For instance, Campbell county, which lies in the northern part of Kentucky's Bluegrass region, became far more united in their support for Jackson. The Tennessean had barely gained more than half of Campbell's popular vote in 1824, but in the next election, the county surged upwards to 75% for Jackson.[36] Andrew Jackson's campaigning paid off in Kentucky while Adams relied on his existing voter base in the state, a strategy that did not earn him many new voters. Only two counties, Harlan and Perry, had a majority for Jackson in 1824 and turned towards Adams in 1828, but both of these communities were small, their total votes numbering only in the low hundreds in the latter election.[37]

By only comparing the elections of 1824 and 1828, it seemed that Kentucky was simply moving away from Clay and towards Jackson and to some degree, this is true. While not an official candidate, Clay was a main issue of the election due to the "corrupt bargain" with Adams and he. Throughout the campaign of 1828 for his partners reelection, Clay repeatedly tried to justify his actions in the previous campaign and turn the blame towards his opponent. In a speech in 1827, Clay stated, "I have never done General Jackson, knowingly, and injustice… He has erected an impassable barrier between us, and I would scorn to accept any favor at his hands."[38]

By 1828, it appeared that Henry Clay had simply lost the favor of his home state. Even David White voted for Andrew Jackson, though he stated it had nothing to do with the 'corrupt bargain.'[39] However, this loss of faith is only partially accurate. While Clay did lose his state's trust, Kentucky itself was returning to its natural condition of moderation. In regard to politics in the 1820's, moderates can be defined as not swaying strongly in one favor of one party, candidate, or industry. South Carolina and Virginia were adamantly in favor of pro-slavery policy, Tennessee was overwhelmingly supportive of Andrew Jackson, and many citizens of Massachusetts were still lamenting the end of the Federalist party. Kentucky was not held too strongly by any of these social, political, or economic factors, therefore making it a particularly moderate state on the national stage. To add to this, Klotter asserts that Clay's political history of compromise "made all Kentuckians appear less polarized in national politics."[40] Not only do historians today view nineteenth century Kentucky as a moderate state, but Clay's contemporaries amalgamated his characteristics with his constituents.

As the Era of Good Feelings grew more distant, Kentucky's voting patterns began to reflect its moderate nature far more accurately than in 1824. Andrew Jackson won 27.6% of Kentucky's popular vote in 1824, but that figure rose to 55.4% in the following election. In 1832, as Jackson ran for reelection against Henry Clay, the president still won nearly half of Kentucky's votes at 45.5%.[41] In 1836, Martin Van Buren, Jackson's Secretary of State, vice-president, and protege ran against a collection of Whigs, the successors to Adams' National Republicans. Van Buren won nearly half of Kentucky's votes at 47.5%.[42] The election of 1824 was an outlier in the broader view of presidential politics in Kentucky. After the Era of Good Feelings ended and national parties were reintroduced, Kentucky began to vote far more moderate than 1824 suggests. Not only did this moderation better reflect the true nature of Kentucky politics, but it made the state far more susceptible to changes in the national political system and therefore, is a prime environment to understand the effects of the Era of Good Feelings.

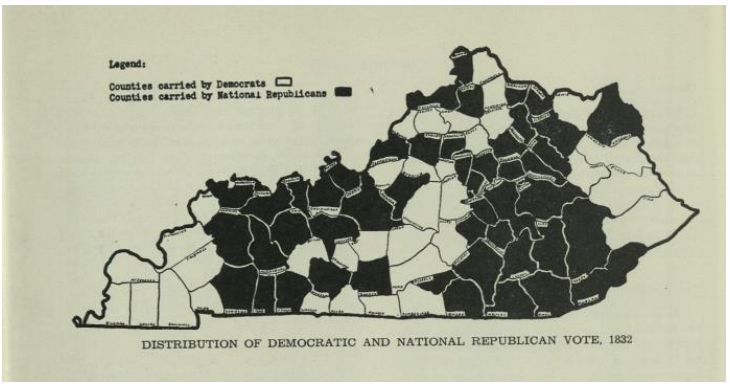

Figure 3. Map of Kentucky counties, election of 1832.

Figure 3 Counties in black are for Henry Clay and counties in white are for Andrew Jackson. Maps are from *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948: A Compilation of Election Statistics and an Analysis of Political Behavior,* by Ruth McQuown and Shannon B. Jasper.

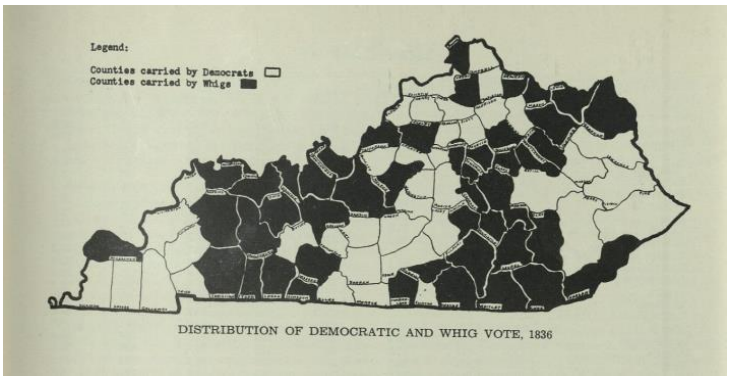

Figure 4. Map of Kentucky counties, election of 1836.

Figure 4 Counties in black are for various Whig candidates and counties in white are for Martin Van Buren. Maps are from *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948: A Compilation of Election Statistics and an Analysis of Political Behavior,* by Ruth McQuown and Shannon B. Jasper.

There were several factors that contributed to Kentucky's moderate nature, including its political history and its economy. Admitted in 1792, Kentucky lacked the ties to Colonial America that heavily influenced early politics in the original thirteen states. These earlier territories were largely bound to specific parties and factions based on the state's history and the figures that lived there, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson in Virginia or John Adams in Massachusetts. Kentucky was free of these preexisting loyalties and therefore, when the two-party system was disassembled, its citizens were not bound to specific platforms. When national parties could not guide the public, older states had long-established factions to help citizens while newer, western states did not. Additionally, Kentucky's constitution granted universal suffrage to white men over the age of 21.[43] In several other states, white men that wanted to vote were required to either own land or pay taxes to a sufficient degree, a tradition that persisted from the colonial era. By the time of the 1824 election, several states still restricted white male suffrage through various religious or property requirements.[44] As it lacked these civic barriers, Kentucky's election results better represented the entire public opinion rather than the elite in the state.

As a border state and a part of the western frontier, Kentucky was not a single-minded political entity. Several states were dominated by one faction or another, such as many southern territories being dominated by pro-slavery ideology, yet Kentucky was diverse in its political opinion. Even amid the Era of Good Feelings when the only prominent coalition was the Democratic-Republican party, the variety of opinion was apparent. In the years leading up to the

election of 1824, Clay obviously amassed substantial support in Kentucky because of his residency and experience on the national stage. In the 18th Congress, which spanned from 1823-1825, he was even serving as Speaker of the House. However, of the twelve Kentucky delegates in the House of Representatives, only eight supported Clay's, and eventually John Quincy Adams', candidacy. While eight of twelve still seems like a strong majority for Clay, it wanes in comparison to the support the other candidates received from their states. All but one of the delegates in Georgia, Massachusetts, and Tennessee supported William Crawford, Adams, and Jackson, respectively.[45] Even with their home-state candidate, Kentucky's voting behavior at the time does not reflect strong bias towards Clay, especially when compared to the bias from other states in similar positions.

A key reason for the unique political variety in Kentucky is the state's economy. Due to its climate and access to natural resources, Kentucky's economy was far from one dimensional. While southern states relied on cash crops from plantations and northern states embraced manufacturing, Kentucky had a wide ranging market that included farmlands, manufacturing, mining, and even shipping with its access to the Ohio River.[46] With the variance in business, there were no dominant industries that influenced politics. The most noteworthy intersection of politics and economics was the practice of slavery in the plantation system. Kentucky had an active slave trade within the state and many of its citizens and politicians were advocates for the institution. However, due to its temperate climate, Kentucky could not support vast plantations to the degree of states such as South Carolina or Virginia. In these hotter states, there was a much higher demand for labor, increasing both the need for slaves and prevalence of pro-slavery ideology. In Kentucky, however, there was not nearly the need for slave labor as in other states, and therefore, the economy was far more diverse. Kentucky politicians could not solely account for the plantation system when deciding on economic policy.

Because Kentuckians did not solely rely on slavery and cash crops for their livelihood, the ideology of slavery was not as ingrained in their culture. In the mid-1800's, southern culture began viewing slavery as a 'positive good' rather than a necessary evil, meaning that that institution not only benefited the slaveowners, but also benefited the slaves themselves by providing societal structure and purpose. However, according to James C. Klotter, the notion of slavery being a necessary evil stayed true in Kentucky throughout the Antebellum period.[47] While describing the horrid practice as 'necessary' in any sense is unsettling, it demonstrates that slavery did not have a hold on Kentucky's culture and economy as it did in several other states. Because Kentuckians lacked a single economic industry to support during the election of 1824, they were left to a system of non-party politics that led the state to cling to Henry Clay, even when his politics did not reflect all his constituents.

The importance of Kentucky's moderation cannot be overstated. Because Kentucky's true political condition was fairly moderate, as seen in the elections of 1828, 1832, and 1836, it is clearly evident that 1824 was an anomaly. Kentuckians' voting patterns in this election vastly differed from the subsequent three elections and the reason behind this phenomenon is the Era of Good Feelings. The political conflict surrounding the presidential election of 1824 did not reach most citizens because national factionalism did not stir discord in smaller communities in the same manner that partisanship did in later years. When writing to Henry Clay about the role of parties in the election 1828, Kentucky Congressman David White wrote that "party spirit and blind zeal… has superseded all rational… The reputations of the best men in the nation are offered up a common sacrifice upon the altar of prejudice."[48]

The results of the 1824 election shed light on the public opinion of not only Kentucky, but the entire nation. However, one of the most surprising national trends in this election was the pattern of civic participation, or rather, the lack thereof. In *Practicing Democracy: Popular Politics in the United States from the Constitution to the Civil War*, Daniel Peart explores the notably low voter turnout in the elections of this period in a chapter aptly titled "An 'Era of No Feelings'?" The 1820 election, in which James Monroe ran virtually unopposed, only about 10% of eligible voters cast their ballots.[49] While this figure is remarkably low, Monroe's reelection was largely expected and therefore, it is understandable why much of the American public believed their vote was unnecessary. Additionally, in 1820, presidential electors were selected by state legislatures, not the popular vote, meaning that the individual votes of citizens did not carry immense weight. It was not until 1824 that the majority of states began deciding electors based on the popular vote. With this new political influence granted to the people combined with a contentious election of several major national figures, the 1824 election set the stage for a spike in civic engagement. However, this did not happen. Less than 30% of eligible citizens voted.[50] Peart rightfully cites the absence of parties as the leading cause of the widespread political apathy. Leading to the election of 1828, politicians recognized the role parties played in dividing communities and drawing citizens to political matters. David White wrote, "Parties have been formed and arrayed against each other, and are made the organs of the most bitter and vindictive denunciations against men and principles."[51] When these parties were formed, it sparked interest for smaller communities in national politics. Partisanship leads to passion and conflict which in turn, drives people to the polls.

Kentucky was not exempt from this wave of nonparticipation. A mere 24.9% of the potential vote was cast in the 1824 election, which was less than the national average. Kentucky, more than most states, had reason to vote in the

election.[52] The crucial issues surrounding the election, most notably the implementation of internal improvements and protective tariffs, directly affected the growing industrial economy in the state. Also, Henry Clay was a major candidate and he had a strong reputation within the state. Kentuckians had a notable state figure campaigning for president, but even Fayette county, Clay's home, could not eclipse 50% of voter participation.[53] In terms of national elections and decisions, Kentuckians largely felt disconnected. Without political parties to follow, many citizens were apathetic to the presidency, even with a candidate from their own state. The Era of Good Feelings caused a wave of apathy among the general public that was juxtaposed against fierce contention between the presidential candidates. In April of 1824, John Taylor, a senator from Virginia, examined this issue by stating that "the election of a president is a great political curiosity. Partisans are zealous, and a great majority of the people are indifferent."[54]

The curiosity of presidential elections persisted throughout the Era of Good Feelings, however the answer to this was found in 1828. By the close of his term, John Quincy Adams had established the National Republican party and Andrew Jackson had formed the Democratic. Political tensions once again caught the attention of ordinary citizens and its effects were clear. There was an enormous spike in political participation in 1828. Across Kentucky, the total votes nearly tripled in number, mainly due to the national contention and new party system that reignited previous conflicts. In some Kentuckian counties, participation by eligible voters totaled over 100%, a testament to both ballot manipulation in certain areas and a radical investment in the election's outcome.[55] In Fayette county, nearly 83% of the voting pool cast their ballots as opposed to only 45% in the previous election. In the entire state, that figure was 68.2% as previous partisan tensions were reignited and the voting public was once again invested in presidential politics.[56]

Local politics, however, never experienced the same lapse in interest as national politics. Kentucky and the rest of the nation was continually concerned for regional and state issues which felt more pertinent than federal races and dealings. According to Peart and Smith, voter participation was at about 70% for local races in the early nineteenth century across the United States.[57] Kentuckians, like many state citizens, were more concerned with local matters than ones at the federal level. Kentuckians in particular had an enhanced relationship with their county and smaller community. In Robert M. Ireland's *The County in Kentucky History*, he explains how citizens' loyalty to institutions such as their churches, courts, and local governments made them far more invested in the outcome of local decisions than those of the far off national capital, Washington D.C.[58] The issue was not that Kentuckians, or citizens of any state, were apathetic about politics or elections. They were, however, apathetic about presidential politics, especially without the presence of national parties to drive their interest. Local elections and issues, on the other hand, were on the forefront of Kentuckians minds.

No issue permeated Kentucky politics during the Era of Good Feelings to the same degree as the Panic of 1819. Nearly halfway through James Monroe's administration, the United States suffered its first economic depression as credit was widely compromised. Kentucky was especially impacted due to the state's reliance on agriculture and therefore its reliance on credit. Debates rose in Kentucky over what the government's role was in addressing this Panic, and because the existing single-party system did not clearly differentiate the positions on issue, Kentucky created its own new parties to organize citizens on either side. As affected Kentuckians searched for support in this crisis, a new state party was formed to address the issue. The cleverly named 'Debt Relief' party, or simply the Relief party, was widely popular with citizens who were financially ruined and in response, the Anti-Relief party formed against them.[59]

In the subsequent state elections, the Relief party swept a majority in both houses of the state legislature. In 1820, passed bills to alleviate the damaged economy and support citizens impacted by the crisis, including abolishing debt imprisonment.[60] However, these new laws were quickly challenged in the state Court of Appeals by creditors and Anti-Relief judges. Creditors were unhappy with the new laws that helped their clients circumvent payments and financial responsibilities and in two major cases, *Blair v. Williams* and *Lapsley v. Brashear*, the new laws were deemed unconstitutional.[61] An editor for the *Kentucky Gazette*, pleased with the results, claimed that "the relief system has been tried. All are nearly convinced that the adoption of those laws was impolite."[62]

Creditors rejoiced at these rulings as the laws were no longer in effect, it seemed that the issue was settled. An Anti-Relief editorial questioned, "Is there a man in the state in his proper mind who can suppose for a moment that it is the wish of… the party called relief to revive those laws? No- No man can be so weak as to believe it unless his mind is haunted by witches and ghosts."[63] However, the Relief legislature was not overjoyed with the overturning of their policy. They realized that they could not directly ignore these rulings, so instead, they voted to abolish the Court of Appeals. With the support of the newly elected Relief governor Joseph Desha in 1824, a new court system was established that would be presided over by Relief judges, thus creating the New Court-Old Court controversy. The Old Court refused to give up jurisdiction in the state and the New Court began operating with the backing of the legislature. Until 1826, there were two Kentucky Court of Appeals taking cases, both of which claimed to be the legitimate court. The tension between the two even escalated to the degree that the New Court clerk, Francis P. Blair,

forcibly broke into the home office of Achilles Sneed, the clerk of the Old Court, to steal their records. Despite these drastic measures taken to assert the legitimacy of the New Court, this crisis did not persist long. By 1826, Kentucky had recovered from the Panic of 1819 and the Relief party was no longer needed to protect individuals affected by the economic crisis.[64] These politicians were voted out of office and the Old Court coalition reinstated the original appellate court as the sole judicial system in Kentucky. The Relief and Anti-Relief, which were also known as the New and Old Court parties, dominated Kentucky politics for nearly a decade and these groups became a part of the state political vocabulary. State politicians and figures were now designated within these parties, rather than by national parties and this conflict largely defined Kentucky politics during the 1820's.[65]

This controversy overtook Kentucky politics for nearly half a decade. Citizens stormed the polls in response to the Panic as the Relief party rose to dominate the state legislature. The media swarmed the conflict as tensions rose and neither side would budge. One newspaper article in *The Argus of Western America* argued the supremacy of the legislature over the courts, citing the constitution of Kentucky as evidence. "Judges shall hold their offices 'during good behavior and the continuance of their respective courts.' It has simply been asserted [by the anti-relief party] that the Court of Appeals is an exception to this power, when the Constitution contains no exception."[66] However, besides the bizarre events that transpired, the larger political context is just as noteworthy. This series of contentious political events, which included the abolition of an entire court system and at least one act of breaking and entering, all happened during a drought of participation in national elections. The radical difference between state and local participation reveals far less tension and conflict surrounding the presidential election during the Era of Good Feelings. For Kentucky, the difference between enthusiasm and apathy for politics were clear groups with which they could identify. Once state parties were formed and there were clear sides in front of the issues, citizens were both passionate and participatory.

The Era of Good Feelings was supposedly a period of national unity and low political conflict. These voting patterns in Kentucky reflected this ideology. Citizens were largely apathetic and when there was less partisan hostility, they did not believe it was necessary to vote in 1824, as demonstrated in the remarkably low voter turnout. When Kentuckians believed an election was important, as they did in 1828, they stormed the polls to ensure their voice was heard.[67] At the close of the Era of Good Feelings, the veil of nonpartisanship still hung over the nation, Kentucky included, which made the election of 1824 seem inconsequential to smaller communities. Of the citizens that did vote, they could not rely on a political party to guide their ballot. They were free, or more accurately forced, to vote for the person they preferred rather than the party. It made sense that Clay was a popular choice in 1824, but if Kentuckians truly preferred him, there would have been far more support for Adams in 1828 and for Clay himself in 1832. The truth of the matter is that in 1824, Kentuckians lacked the conviction to invest in the election and those who did, settled for a familiar name in a mob of seemingly comparable candidates. If the election of 1824 truly reflected the moderate values of Kentucky, the results would have been split far more evenly. The Era of Good Feelings reduced the tensions of national politics in smaller communities, as evident in Kentucky, while local issues continued to dominate the state political sphere.

Historians are correct in claiming that while this period was full of many feelings, few of them were good. National politicians jostled for position against each other and were forced into factional partnerships to achieve their goals. However, while higher level politics continued with a semblance of the status quo, smaller communities like Kentucky did not experience the same degree of sectional pressure in regard to national politics. In fact, Kentuckians viewed the presidential election as largely inconsequential and the citizens that were engaged enough to vote were lost without partisan guidance. The scholarship around this period should reflect the consistent animosity between national figures such as Adams, Clay and Jackson, but it would be false to declare that all political sentiments were negative in the years preceding 1824. In respect to this period being one of low-stakes, non-party presidential politics, Kentuckians did experience an Era of Good Feelings.

2. Acknowledgements

The author would like to express gratitude to Dr. Sarah Judson and Dr. Ellen Pearson for their instruction, critique, and assistance throughout this project. Also, to the Office of Undergraduate Research for funding much of the research for this project, without which would not have been possible. Lastly, to the Kentucky Historical Society and Katie Henning and Rob Aken of the University of Kentucky. Both organizations were instrumental in accessing many of these sources.

3. References

11 Thomas Smith, "The Question," *Kentucky Reporter*, December 20, 1824, accessed October 15, 2019, Kentucky Historical Society.

2 Many prominent issues of the early nineteenth century were originated in Revolutionary America, including debates over slavery and the role of the federal government. Many states, such as Virginia and Massachusetts, were mostly politically homogeneous, and therefore, large parts of their population already had strong opinions on major issues due to their state's history.

3 For example, see *What Hath God Wrought*, by Daniel Walker Howe, *The Era of Good Feelings*, by George Dangerfield, *John Quincy Adams*, by Robert V. Remini, and *The Presidency of James Monroe*, by Noble E. Cunningham Jr.

4 George Dangerfield, *The Era of Good Feelings* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952), 95.

5 Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 95.

6 Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 79.

7 Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 79.

8 Noble E. Cunningham Jr., *The Presidency of James Monroe* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 30.

9 Robert P. Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and its Aftermath,* (Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 2007), 19

10 Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 93.

11 Cunningham Jr., *The Presidency of James Monroe,* 1.

12 Howe, *What Hath God Wrought,* 91.

13 James C. Klotter and Craig Thompson Friend, *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018), 135.

14 Robert M. Ireland, *The County in Kentucky History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976).

15 US Constitution, amend. 12.

16 Henry Clay, *To the people of the congressional district composed of the counties of Fayette, Woodford, and Clarke, in Kentucky,* 1825, accessed November 11, archive.com, 4.

17 Henry Clay, *Mr. Clay's speech, at the dinner at Noble's Inn, near Lexington, KY,* July 12, 1827, accessed April 12, 2020, archive.com, 5.

18 Michael J. Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788-1860: The Official Results by County and State* Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland and Company Inc. Publishers, 2002), 34.

19 Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections,* 31-41.

20 Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections,* 44-70.

21 Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections,* 34.

22 Harlow Giles Unger, *Henry Clay: America's Greatest Statesman* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2015), 117.

23 Howe, *What Hath God Wrought,* 210.

24 Andrew Jackson to William B. Lewis, February 4, 1825, in *Andrew Jackson Papers, 1775-1874,* accessed March 20, 2020, Library of Congress.

25 Henry Clay, *To the people of the congressional district composed of the counties of Fayette, Woodford, and Clarke, in Kentucky,* 1825, accessed November 11, 2019, archive.coms, 19.

26 Henry Clay, *A supplement to the Address of Henry Clay to the public, which was published in December, 1827. Exhibiting further evidence in refutation of the charges against him, touching the last presidential election,* 1827, edited by Henry Clay, accessed April 10, 2020, archive.com, 22.

27 Klotter and Friend, *A New History of Kentucky,* 111.

28 Thomas Smith "Henry Clay," *Kentucky Reporter,* February 20, 1824, accessed October 15, 2019, Kentucky Historical Society.

29 Thomas Smith "Candidates for Elector of President and Vice President," *Kentucky Reporter,* May 31, 1824, accessed October 15, 2019, Kentucky Historical Society.

30 Thomas Smith, "The Question," *Kentucky Reporter*, December 20, 1824, accessed October 15, 2019, Kentucky Historical Society.

31 Ruth McQuown and Shannon B. Jasper, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948: A Compilation of Election Statistics and an Analysis of Political Behavior* (Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1950), 3.

32 “John Woods,” *Anti-Jackson Bulletin and Messenger of Truth,* September 27, 1828, accessed April 11, 2020, newspapers.com.

33 Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections,* 44.

34 Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections,* 34.

35 "18th Congress (1823-1825), House of Representatives," *Voteview.com,* UCLA Social Sciences Division, accessed October 5, 2019; *Voteview.com* is a digital database that has recorded each U.S. Congress from its inception to present day. It lists members of each chamber, their political affiliation, and votes as members of Congress.

36 Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 34.*

37 McQuown and Jasper, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky,* 2-3.

38 Henry Clay, *Mr. Clay’s speech, at the dinner at Noble’s Inn, near Lexington, KY,* July 12, 1827, accessed April 12, 2020, archive.com, 14.

39 David White, *A supplement to the Address of Henry Clay to the public, which was published in December, 1827. Exhibiting further evidence in refutation of the charges against him, touching the last presidential election,* 1827, edited by Henry Clay, accessed April 10, 2020, archive.com, 20.

40 Klotter and Friend, *A New History of Kentucky,* 142.

41 Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections,* 34-46.

42 Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections,* 47-60.

43 Second Kentucky Constitution, art. 2, sec. 8.

44 North Carolina was the last state to eliminate property requirements for white male suffrage in 1856. See Stanley L. Engerman and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, *The Evolution of Suffrage Institutions in the New World,* (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2005), 16.

45 "18th Congress (1823-1825), House of Representatives," *Voteview.com,* UCLA Social Sciences Division, accessed October 5, 2019.

46 Klotter and Friend, *A New History of Kentucky,* 116-21.

47 Klotter and Friend, *A New History of Kentucky,* 122-31.

48 David White, *A supplement to the Address of Henry Clay to the public, which was published in December, 1827. Exhibiting further evidence in refutation of the charges against him, touching the last presidential election,* 1827, edited by Henry Clay, accessed April 10, 2020, archive.com, 19.

49 Daniel Peart and Adam I.P. Smith, *Practicing Democracy: Popular Politics in the United States from the Constitution to the Civil War* (University of Virginia Press, 2015) ,124.

50 Peart and Smith, *Practicing Democracy,* 125.

51 David White, *A supplement to the Address of Henry Clay to the public, which was published in December, 1827. Exhibiting further evidence in refutation of the charges against him, touching the last presidential election,* 1827, edited by Henry Clay, accessed April 10, 2020, archive.com, 19.

52 McQuown and Jasper, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky*, 2.

53 McQuown and Jasper, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky*, 2-3.

54 John Taylor to John H. Bernard, April 8, 1824, John Taylor Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond.

55 McQuown and Jasper, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky*, 4.

56 McQuown and Jasper, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky*, 4-6.

57 Daniel Peart and Adam I. P. Smith, *Practicing Democracy: Popular Politics in the United States from the Constitution to the Civil War* (University of Virginia Press, 2015), 125.

58 Ireland, *The County in Kentucky History,* 1.

59 Kurt X. Metzmeier, *History of the Courts of Kentucky,* (University of Louisville, 2006), 6.

60 William Littel, *Reports of Cases at Common Law and in Chancery, Decided by the Court of Appeals of the Commonwealth of Kentucky,1823,* vol. 4 (Louisville, KY: Fetter Printing Co., 1899), accessed April 10, 2020, 48.

61 Thomas B. Monroe, *Reports of Cases at Common Law and in Equity, Argued and Decided in the Court of Appeals of the Commonwealth of Kentucky, v*ol. 7 (Frankfort, KY: Albert G. Hodges, 1830), accessed April 10, 2020, books.google.com, 588.

62 “Communications for the Kentucky Gazette,” *Kentucky Gazette,* July 22, 1824, accessed April 9, 2020, newspapers.com.

63 “Communications for the Kentucky Gazette,” *Kentucky Gazette,* July 22, 1824.

64 Metzmeier, *History of the Courts of Kentucky,* 6.

65 For newspapers using these terms see *Kentucky Reporter, Kentucky Gazette,* and *The Argus of Western America,* 1821 and 1826.

66 “Appeal to the People,” *Argus of Western America,* August 2, 1826, accessed April 11, 2020, newspapers.com.

67 McQuown and Jasper, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky*, 4-6.