The American Revolution Twice Recalled: Lafayette's Visit and the Election of 1824

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In dealing with the presidential campaign of 1824 historians commonly dwell upon two political themes. First they lament that the contest revolved around personalities and was not settled on the basis of the candidates' stands on the specific political questions of the day, such as the tariff, the United States Bank, the lingering effects of the Panic of 1819, debtor relief, land policy, internal improvements, and slavery. After treating these classic sectional issues in detailed fashion, a widely used textbook explains that one important reason why they "were not severely disruptive was that the major politicians, hotly competing for the Presidency, were unwilling to risk alienating any section by taking too extreme a position. . . . The Presidential fight was therefore waged on largely personal grounds. . . . The maneuvering among them [the contenders] was complex, the infighting savage." Having lamented that the specific political issues of the early 1820s had so little bearing on the campaign, historians then go on to say that the battle for the presidency reveals far more about the general political movement which characterized early nineteenth century America—democratization. "The election of 1824," reiterates an important new textbook, "witnessed the dying out of old established practices and the first surgings of the new democratic political unrest."*7

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The contemporary campaign literature, however, especially newspapers and promotional pamphlets, suggests that attitudes and events essentially nonpolitical and revolving around questions other than personality had a great impact upon the nature and outcome of the campaign. The patriotic presuppositions underpinning much of the campaign oratory have received little study. More specifically, it could be argued that the great patriotic event of 1824, the visit of the Marquis de Lafayette to the United States, had more connection with the presidential election of that year than did many of the specific and general political questions which have so fascinated historians over the years. "When General Lafayette revisited the United States in 1824-1825," says one of the few textbooks which even mentions that truly national event, "the glorious past was revived as never before." But no connection is made between this great patriotic event and the election which occurred in the midst of it. In another chapter readers are told in typical fashion that "the election was decided on the basis of personalities as well as sectional issues."3

It would be ludicrous to argue that there was a simple cause and effect relationship between Lafayette's visit and the nature and outcome of the presidential campaign of 1824. But it would surely be surprising if two of the most important American events of 1824 were as entirely unrelated as history books have made them seem. Rather, it appears probable that Lafayette's visit had some real if unquantifiable bearing upon the campaign and, far more importantly, that both the visit and the campaign bore testimony of a dominant American trend as the nation moved closer toward its half century milestone. Both events, in short, reveal an introspective groping for self-awareness and self-realization which kept leading men back to the Revolution. Both, therefore, can serve as focal points for an investigation of an important cultural phenomenon which has been too little studied: the desperate desire of the American people to maintain for as long as possible some physical and spiritual connection with the Revolutionary generation and the psychological impact of their increasing realization that, for all their longing, the age of the Revolution seemed nonetheless to be passing away.

Historians have traditionally accepted the view that Americans of the 1820s, like almost all Americans of almost all generations, were restless and forward looking, impatient with the past and supremely optimistic about the future. In recent years, however, intellectual historians have found much evidence that Americans sought security in conditions that existed (or that they imagined to have existed) before technology began to alter things fundamentally. Indeed, scholars are just beginning to realize the profound degree to which nostalgia existed in pre-Civil War America. One very insightful intellectual historian has written that antebellum Americans were "uneasy in the midst of political and technological change," that they "struggled to remain agreed on the tactics and goals of man in political society," that their "desire to elude personal and national peril" caused them to seek reassuring symbols of unity "in the nation's first age of insecurity." The same author promised, and wrote, a succeeding study in which he explored "the broader dimensions of American nationalism in the nineteenth century, concentrating on this subsoil of terror."

Such pioneering works dealing with American fear and nostalgia would be complemented by a book length study dealing exclusively with the passing of the Revolutionary generation and the psychological impact of the demise of the fathers upon sons who had deified them and found in their manmade deities great sources of national unity, strength, and inspiration. There is much evidence to suggest that the fear of losing the physical and spiritual ties with the Revolution assumed the proportions of a national trauma, one that reveals much about American conceptions of national character and purpose. This article is presented as nothing more than a footnote to that broader study. Hopefully, it does suggest

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*Paul C. Nagel, One Nation Indivisible: The Union in American Thought, 1776-1861 (New York, 1964), vi. In his subsequent book, This Sacred Trust: American Nationality, 1798-1898 (New York, 1971), Nagel has dealt brilliantly with this American fear of national failure. Despite the hoary myth of exuberant and unending optimism, then, it now seems that past Americans were also backward looking and even prone to deep pessimism about the future. Other recent works which have at least touched upon various aspects of this general theme are John William Ward, Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age (New York, 1965); Marvin Meyers, The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief (Stanford, 1957); Leo Marx, The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America (New York, 1964); and Fred Somkin, Unquiet Eagle: Memory and Desire in the Idea of American Freedom, 1815-1860 (Ithaca, 1967).*
that seemingly disparate events bore surprisingly similar relationships to the general American disquietude over the passing of the Revolutionary generation.

Although Lafayette did not arrive in the United States until August of 1824, the anticipation of his visit preoccupied the American people for many months. "The wisest and the best of our citizens press him to their hearts," declared the Richmond, Virginia, *Enquirer* more than six months before the Frenchman came. "The only free nation of the globe receives with acclamation the generous foreigner, the adopted son, who contributed to make her free. There is something in the anticipation of this spectacle which warms every grateful bosom. . . . We shall kindle again the brightest flame which ever warmed our citizens. We shall revive, as it were, the spark of '76, and the patriotism which it kindled." With Lafayette, it was hoped, would come a revival of the vaunted Spirit of '76. Moreover, a sincerely enthusiastic reception of Lafayette would do much, at least one editor felt, to prove that the American Republic was not ungrateful. By discrediting the old maxim of republican ingratitude, which many Europeans doggedly persisted in believing, Lafayette's reception by the American people would lend moral support to the cause of republican liberty throughout the world.6

Physically Lafayette entered the country at New York City. But the intensity of the national contemplation which preceded the French hero's coming meant that psychologically his arrival was a major event in every American city and town. "GENERAL LA FAYETTE ARRIVED!" declared newspapers all over the land as they described the local demonstrations which had greeted these glad tidings.7 The worthy patriots of Jackson, Missouri, were well aware that the illumination of their town in honor of Lafayette's visit was no more than the proverbial widow's mite when compared with the grandiose demonstrations in the great cities of the East. Still, the souls of Jackson's citizens, like the widow's, were pure; for their minds were fixed on the deeds of Revolu-

6 Richmond, Va., *Enquirer*, quoted in the Milledgeville *Georgia Journal*, February 17, 1824.
7 Salisbury, N. C., *Western Carolinian*, October 5, 1824.
tionary days, and in their own small way they felt compelled to give “vent to the effusions of . . . [their] hearts. Since the days of the immortal Washington no circumstance could have given birth to recollections so delicate and interesting to the citizens of the United States, as the arrival of this distinguished man.”

No visitor in the history of the nation has ever moved the hearts of Americans with the force of this Frenchman. He visited every state, and everywhere he brought “delicate and interesting” recollections to American minds. Wherever he stopped, he was lauded. Even the most indirect and perfunctory contact with “the Nation’s Guest” sent men’s minds back to ’76. When George Washington Lafayette, who had accompanied his father to America, requested that a New York milliner make him a hat, the proud hatter promptly did so; but he refused to take payment, “observing that all the hats he could supply the LA FAYETTE family, WERE PAID FOR FORTY YEARS AGO.” When time or circumstance would not permit Lafayette to be present, he was honored in absentia as the days of ’76 were fittingly recalled. Gathered in the presence of twenty-two Revolutionary veterans on the anniversary of Cornwallis’ surrender, the citizens of Franconia and neighboring New Hampshire towns solemnly named the highest mountain in their midst Mount Lafayette. (That eminence was in the same range with, but appropriately a little lower than, Mount Washington.)

Truly, Lafayette and all he personified permeated the American consciousness. As one Virginian observed, the distinguished visitor from France was the order of the day. “Every thing, animate and inanimate, is La Fayette. The next generation will be a generation of La Fayettes in name, if not in principles. We are as likely too to have a La

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8 Jackson, Mo., Independent Patriot, September 25, 1824.
10 New York Statesman, quoted in the Charles-Town, Va., Farmers’ Repository, September 1, 1824.
11 Haverhill New-Hampshire Intelligencer, October 27, 1824.
Fayette President as any other; all the candidates, we believe, are thrown entirely into the background. Puffing, slander, and intrigue, are alike unavailing. All must yield, for a time at least, to the enthusiasm of the people." Even the most hardhearted politicians, it seemed, were powerless to resist the moral force of Lafayette's sojourn.

In thus honoring Lafayette the nation was really honoring more than one man. Looking backward from their vantage point of nearly half a century, Americans were paying homage to what they regarded as a whole generation of men preeminent for virtue, courage, and patriotism, a generation which had established a republican model for a tyranny ridden world. Lauding the fathers of the Revolution was an old patriotic tradition, of course, not something new. But it did have a special poignantly in 1824. By that year a generation of men not present at the creation of the Republic was coming to the fore, and there was serious apprehension lest the sons of more famous sires falter, thereby jeopardizing the world's only viable experiment in self-government. Modern degeneracy was a theme for which the sons had developed a telling fascination. "The rising generation," read one toast at a Fourth of July celebration in Georgia in 1823, "may they ever be taught to admire and to practice the virtue, piety, and patriotism of those, who at the expense of so much blood, and such devotedness of character, purchased for us the privileges both civil and religious which we now so richly enjoy."13 "Let the Celebration of the birth day of our liberty, ever prove to the world that Americans have not degenerated," agreed a Connecticut gathering on the same day.14 But, as everybody knew, it would take more than a celebration of the Fourth of July to prove that: it would take nothing less than daily lives dedicated by deeds to the hallowed—if not always adequately defined—principles of '76.15

12 Richmond, Va., Visitor, quoted in the Cumberland Maryland Advocate, November 1, 1824.
13 Milledgeville Georgia Journal, July 15, 1823.
14 New-London, Conn., Republican Advocate, July 9, 1823.
15 For examples of the popular belief that American degeneration was indicated by such alleged trends of the 1820s as the increasing fondness for fashion, luxury, and idleness; the increasing disregard of religion and especially the Sabbath; the growth of a haughty aristocratic spirit unbecoming free men; the rampant growth of personal and political ambition; and the strengthening of sectional passions, see the Georgetown, D. C., Metropolitan, January 21, 1823; Jackson, Mo., Independent Patriot, Janu-
PORTRAIT OF THE MARQUIS DE LAFAYETTE
BY SAMUEL F. B. MORSE

Courtesy Art Commission of the City of New York.
Reproduced from Edgar Ewing Brandon, comp. and ed.,
Lafayette, Guest of the Nation . . . (Oxford, Ohio:
Oxford Historical Press, 1936), frontispiece.
For a generation filled with more of a sense of foreboding than has commonly been imagined, the physical presence of Lafayette brought the comforting spiritual presence of the Revolutionary generation. And in the presence of that generation which had first defined "Americanness," Americans of 1824 felt that they knew who they were and what they were about in the world. Although the "Boston Bard" may have been referring to flesh and blood children when he wrote his "Childhood Pleading the Stay of La Fayette," his poem had a profounder significance for a nation painfully aware that it was caught in between a glorious generation of fathers and a potentially less glorious generation of sons. Whether consciously or not, the poet was expressing the desire of a nation which did not want to lose the childlike innocence of the early Republic, the Revolutionary virtue symbolized by the fleeting presence of Lafayette.

What shall we do? How plead thee stay?
But, surely, thou wilt not depart!
Our little hands shall bar the way,
And we will twine us round thy heart.  

For a nation which had found some measure of psychological security in the legend of Revolutionary virtue only to find that that generation was passing away, for a nation which had all but deified the founding fathers only to find the sons morally dwarfed in their presence, for a generation of sons painfully aware of America's mission to teach the world the truths of politics and fearing itself less worthy than the nation's founders, there was a kind of security in the presence of Lafayette, who, after all, typified the spirit of the Revolution. "Sometime during the decade after the War of 1812 America turned the corner into the nineteenth century," writes a perceptive modern student of the meaning of Lafayette's visit. "Looking back with a stabbing sense of loss, the nation pressed Lafayette to its heart in a last communion

ary 10, 1824; Wilmington Delaware Gazette, February 25, 1823; Clarksburg, Va., Intelligencer, June 19, 1824; Hartford Connecticut Courant, May 27, 1823; New-London, Conn., Republican Advocate, February 26, 1823; and Cahawba Press and Alabama State Intelligencer, July 26, 1823.

34 New York Commercial Advertiser, quoted in the Cumberland Maryland Advocate, October 11, 1824; and in the Detroit Gazette, September 24, 1824.
with its youthful self. When he was gone the world of the Founders had vanished forever."

The moral suasion of Lafayette the Revolutionary symbol was very great; but although Lafayette's visit may have intensified the nostalgic spirit of patriotism which pervaded the country in 1824, the Frenchman's presence did not create that spirit. In fact, patriotic nostalgia not only helped to make the visit the stupendous national success it was but manifested itself in other forms as well. The rhetoric of the presidential campaign of 1824, like the rhetoric of Lafayette's tour, was largely retrospective. Here too are juxtaposed the days of '76 and modern times, the age of the fathers and the age of the sons, the virtuous years and the years of degeneracy. Those countless Americans who had made the Revolutionaries their models found little that was reassuring as they witnessed a campaign already well underway in 1823. Many feared that they were living at the dawning of a new age of intrigue. Hezekiah Niles, famous Baltimore exponent of nationalism, wrote: "It is the opinion of many, and certainly mine, that there is a greater amount of political intrigue now existing in the United States than there ever was before." The complaint of an unknown New York editor was the same. Partisans "are now exhibiting as disgusting a picture of the degrading, vindictive, selfish and slanderous spirit of faction, as

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18 Niles' Weekly Register, quoted in the Wilmington Delaware Gazette, August 8, 1823; and in the Hartford Connecticut Courant, August 12, 1823.
the annals of party warfare have ever presented."19 Political intrigue, it was thought, was on the increase; intrigue and republicanism, it was feared, were simply incompatible.20

With the nation supposedly threatened by political intriguers in 1824, Americans felt the country clearly needed a man at the helm as selfless as the founding fathers. Precedent as well as patriotism seemed to dictate such a policy. Beginning with George Washington and continuing through the incumbent James Monroe, every President had earlier been tested in the crucible of the Revolution. Either in the field or in the council every President had first been a Revolutionary. Lamentably, this continuous line of Revolutionaries-become-Presidents seemed about to be broken.21 Americans would now have to choose for their Chief Magistrate a man formed of baser metal. "I view the approaching election with great solicitude... because it is about to make a new experiment of our frame of government," wrote a Washington correspondent of the Richmond, Virginia, Enquirer early in 1823. "Hitherto, revolutionary services have given a few men preponderating claims to the presidency; but the small remnant of this class being precluded by weight of years, if by nothing else, the time has now come when the nation must select for this exalted station, one among several, who are equal or nearly equal in talents, services and virtues."22 Much has been made of the egalitarian theme in the election of 1824, but apparently in the minds of contemporaries democratization had not yet made men of later vintage the equals of the war tested patriots of '76.

In fact, the preference for Revolutionary leaders was one of the few points on which the partisans of all presidential

19 Canandaigua, N. Y., Repository, quoted in the Milledgeville Georgia Journal, December 2, 1823.
20 On the dangers posed by an allegedly increasing amount of political intrigue see also the Milledgeville Georgia Journal, December 2, 1823; February 17, 1824; Wilmington Delaware Gazette, August 8, 1823; Hartford Connecticut Courant, August 19, 1823; Vandalia Illinois Intelligencer, February 15, 1823; and Cahawba Press and Alabama State Intelligencer, October 2, 1824.
21 On the great importance of keeping alive for as long as possible the tradition that only Revolutionaries became Presidents see the Nashville, Tenn., Constitutional Advocate, August 13, 1822; Wilmington Delaware Gazette, November 13, 1823, quoting an unidentified Philadelphia paper; and Cahawba Press and Alabama State Intelligencer, December 13, 1823.
22 Richmond, Va., Enquirer, quoted in the Milledgeville Georgia Journal, February 25, 1823.
contenders could agree. "My invariable rule has been, in
regard to elections and appointments, always to prefer the
candidate, if equal to the necessary duties, who had been
actively engaged in the Revolutionary war," wrote a Ken-
tuckian who used the pseudonym "Philo-Jackson." There
was "certainly much sound sense" in using that criterion
for worthiness, affirmed a pro-Jackson editor in Florida Ter-
ritory, for "that momentous period was well calculated to
'try men's souls,' and test their principles." As long as
popular gratitude for their Revolutionary services had
brought men to power, declared a supporter of John Quincy
Adams in similar fashion, there had been no place for the
dangerous intrigues becoming common in 1824. Monroe and
his predecessors had not been wooers of the people. Instead,
ye had been wooed by the people. There was a great risk
involved in selecting a man of self-alleged promise, rather
than a man of proven Revolutionary worth. But in 1824 the
nation would simply have to take that risk. An Adams man
who had dubbed himself "Algernon Sidney" agreed, but
felt that, in the selection of the sixth President, it was "un-
doubtedly incumbent on . . . [Americans] to recur to revolu-
tionary principles, though . . . [they were] deprived of the
services of revolutionary men."

Since the friends of all the contenders insisted that they
favored that man whose principles approximated "the nearest
to the primitive republicanism of the Revolution," why not
allow the venerable veterans of '76 to select the next Presi-
dent? Surely they knew republican virtue when they saw it.
Let the electoral college be made up entirely of "surviving
statesmen, patriots, and soldiers of the Revolution, to be
selected without regard to party distinctions, or predilections

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22 Philo-Jackson, pseud., The Presidential Election, Written for
the Benefit of the People of the United States, but Particularly for Those
of the State of Kentucky (2nd series, Louisville, 1823), 17.
24 Pensacola Floridian, May 3, 1823.
25 Anonymous, Sketch of the Life of John Quincy Adams; Taken from
the Port Foliio of April, 1819. To Which Are Added, the Letters of Tell:
Originally Addressed to the Editor of the Baltimore American. Respect-
fully Submitted to the Serious Consideration of Those Freeholders of
Virginia, Who Desire to Exercise the High Privilege of Voting for a
President of the United States at the Approaching Election (n. p., 1824),
12.
26 Algernon Sidney, pseud., Principles and Men: Considered with Ref-
erence to the Approaching Election of President. By a Citizen of Rhode-
Island (Providence, 1823), 3.
for any of the candidates now before the public.” Such was the suggestion of a New Yorker who, sensitive to the dissen-
sion resulting from partisan politics, saw in the signs of the
times a way of ending such bickering. In defense of his elect-
oral proposal he wrote: “This is the season for paying com-
pliments to revolutionary principles and revolutionary vir-
tues.” Thus there could be no better time for honoring Revo-
lutionary worth, for “the shores of our country, from
Louisiana to Maine, are about to ring with shouts at the
arrival of La Fayette.”

Although nothing came of the New Yorker’s electoral
scheme, the nation was seeking to extend the reign of Revolu-
tionary principles in the executive mansion. The advocates
of every contender understood the necessity of showing that
their favorites had Revolutionary principles if not Revolu-
tionary deeds to their credit. Since even William H. Craw-
ford (1772-1834), Henry Clay (1777-1852), and John C. Cal-
houn (1782-1850) had all been born before the Revolution
ended, they were, in a sense, men—or at least boys—of the
Revolutionary era. The burden of proof was heaviest on Cal-
houn, the youngest of the candidates. When critics cried out
that the South Carolinian, who was only in his forty-third
year, was too young to be President, a Marylander replied in a
way which revealed clearly enough that his models were Revo-
lutionary ones. “Forty-three was the age of WASHINGTON
when he grasped in his hands the destinies of his country,
and carried them triumphantly through the appalling dangers
and difficulties of the revolution.” Only chronology, not prin-
ciple, had prevented Calhoun from being a man of ’76. Why
more than a dozen years before, as everybody knew, Calhoun
had been hailed “as resembling one of the old sages of the
old Congress.” Neither Calhoun, nor Clay, nor Crawford
had seen Revolutionary service, however. Nor were they the
sons of the men who had acted most conspicuously in Amer-
ica’s Revolutionary cause. Thus the contentions that they were
Revolutionaries at heart lacked a certain plausibility which
attached to the claims of the other two candidates.

Advocates of John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) argued

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27 New York Statesman, quoted in the Evansville, Ind., Gazette, Au-
gust 12, 1824.
28 Anonymous, An Address to the People of Maryland, on the Subject
solemnly that it was their love of Revolutionary principle—nothing less—which had led them inexorably into the New Englander's camp. Their quest, simply stated, had been to find the candidate whose character was most closely formed "after the model of our revolutionary fathers." They stated their conclusion just as simply: "JOHN QUINCY ADAMS . . . approaches nearest to that combination of excellence . . . and is therefore the best qualified to be our next President." To support their contention Adams followers pointed out that the effect of the Revolution on all who lived through it "must have been deep and indelible." On the New Englander the effect was all the more profound because he "had just reached the age, when impressions are most easily made, and with most difficulty effaced." His father's important role as advocate of the Declaration of Independence, his mother's earnest prayers for the success of the American cause, the younger Adams' wartime travels with his father to France where "he was surrounded by the friends of American liberty and Independence"—all these circumstances and many more "must have combined to produce on the mind of young Adams, an impression, which no subsequent events could have obliterated. . . . That impression, it would be madness to doubt, must have been friendly to the principles of the Revolution." 26

Such arguments may have satisfied many who sought a man of true Revolutionary virtue in 1824. Certainly they were more plausible than the arguments of those political alchemists who tried to transform individuals who had been mere toddlers when the peace treaty was signed into bonafide men of '76. But there was a fundamental flaw in the pro-Adams logic which Jacksonians saw at once. Basically, according to the pro-Jackson men, arguments used by the followers of the New Englander amounted to little more than clever attempts to prove Revolutionary virtue by association. Take away the crucial "must have been's" and what was left? John Quincy Adams may have been born in the shadow of Bunker Hill, near the cradle of the Revolution. He may

26 Anonymous, Sketch of the Life of John Quincy Adams . . . [and] the Letters of Tell, 13-14. For another interesting attempt to establish the younger Adams' Revolutionary credentials see "A Subscriber," Shawneetown Illinois Gazette, October 23, 1824. The writer of this letter made much of the fact that Adams "was born in sight of Bunker's Hill."
have been born the son of the Declaration's able advocate. But accidents of birth apart, what had Adams actually done during the war to prove that the moral influence of the Revolution had moved his soul?30

Although Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) was barely four months Adams' senior, he had the coveted distinction of being the only candidate for President in 1824 who had actually seen service in the Revolution. After the crushing American defeat at the Battle of Camden in 1780, Jackson had seen limited action in defending the Waxhaws from the British and their many Tory allies. Taken prisoner and ordered to black a British officer's boots, Jackson had refused and received for his refusal a sabre blow across the head and hand. The scars from these wounds he carried to his grave. But Jackson's two brothers and his mother were unluckier still: all three of them had lost their lives before peace came to the Carolina countryside. Viewed objectively, Old Hickory's Revolutionary role had been a meager one. That it was magnified to such monstrous proportions by his supporters in 1824 was a better indication of the nation's strong desire to maintain its human connection with the Revolutionary age than it was of Jackson's actual Revolutionary valor or importance.

Although Jackson's Revolutionary sacrifices had been mentioned in John H. Eaton's famous biography of his fellow Tennessean, which was first published in 1817,31 Old Hickory's part in the War for Independence had been understandably eclipsed in that work by his more glorious role in the War of 1812. But Eaton changed his focus in 1824. In his "Wyoming" letters in support of Jackson's presidential bid, Eaton now appealed more to the nation's preoccupation with the supposed loss of Revolutionary virtue by stressing Jackson's war tested

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30 Pro-Adams men discussed and attempted to counter these assaults upon the idea of Adams-as-Revolutionary-in-spirit. See, for examples, the Cumberland Maryland Advocate, August 30, 1824; and the Lynchburg Virginian, quoted in the Rockville, Md., True American & Farmers' Register, August 13, 1824.

31 John Henry Eaton, The Life of Andrew Jackson, Major-General in the Service of the United States; Comprising a History of the War in the South, from the Commencement of the Creek Campaign, to the Termination of Hostilities before New Orleans (Philadelphia, 1824), 10-13. The first four chapters of the biography, as Eaton explained on page v in the preface, were the work of Major John Reid, "who was an eye witness to the events recorded by him. For those the present author is not responsible; for the residue he is."
American Revolution Twice Recalled

Revolutionary worth. "Remember," the author exclaimed in a series of letters to the people of the United States, "he was of the Revolution!"32 And then, to make sure that none forgot, "Wyoming" repeatedly returned to the theme of his subject's Revolution tested virtue, declaring that that alone was enough to make the Tennessean President.33 What had been only briefly mentioned in 1817 was in 1824 the subject of frequent reminders.

The reason for Eaton's change of emphasis seems clear enough. As the Republic moved toward its half century mark, the passing years took a heavy toll in Revolutionary patriots. Fewer and fewer men of '76 remained; consequently, by 1824 even the meagerest claim to Revolutionary service brought some measure of fame. The great honor which attached to the association was indicated by the widespread attention given to the deaths of Revolutionary veterans. "Another Revolutionary Hero gone!" declared newspaper headlines whenever one of these worthies passed on to his reward. Such a notice announced the death of Archibald Gresham, a seventy year old Georgian, in 1823, but the name of almost any recently deceased Revolutionary might have been inserted into the stylized obituary. "During the days which tried men's souls, he was actively engaged in defending the rights of his fellow-citizens... and was in many sore conflicts with the British and Tories. He was a republican in principle, and always manifested a zealous attachment to the principles of this government."34 Few specifics were mentioned because they were not needed; this was not a description of the Georgian's life so much as it was a conclusion of patriotic logic. As many American citizens of this period reasoned: Esquire Gresham (or Mr. X) fought on the American side in the Revolution; therefore, he had met the be-all and end-all test for "zealous attachment" to American principles.

Realizing that theirs was an age in search of Revolu-

32 [John Henry Eaton], The Letters of Wyoming, to the People of the United States, on the Presidential Election, and in Favor of Andrew Jackson. Originally Published in the Columbian Observer (Philadelphia, 1824), 5.
33 Ibid., 5-6. For more on the theme see 48, 51, 55, 57, 93, 95, 103. For a detailed analysis of the overall image of Jackson which emerged from Eaton's promotional efforts see Robert P. Hay, "The Case for Andrew Jackson in 1824: Eaton's Wyoming Letters," Tennessee Historical Quarterly, XXIX (Summer, 1970), 139-51.
34 Milledgeville Georgia Journal, March 18, 1823.
tionaries to honor, Jackson's supporters hammered away at the Jackson-was-a-Revolutionary theme. There was really nothing more to tell than had been briefly told in the biography back in 1817; but if Jackson's Revolutionary War record lacked length and detail, frequent repetition of the basic fact that Old Hickory alone, of all the presidential aspirants, had such a record at all could be counted on to compensate for that defect. Let the voters remember that Jackson was "cradled in the war of the revolution." Let the voters be fully aware that General Jackson was "the only revolutionary character before the people, as a candidate for the Presidency." Let the voters ponder well the fact that he was the last of the Revolutionary worthies who could aspire to the presidency. Said one editor: "with him we will have to close the volume, and commence a new era: then will we have to look to those whose claims arise out of Congress services, and missions to Europe."

It has usually been thought that Jackson's pose as a friend of the people was his cleverest campaign ploy. To many of the first Jacksonians, however, Revolutionary deeds were worth more than a thousand empty boasts that one loved the sovereign people. Because it was an age when suffrage requirements were being lowered, championing the people was part and parcel of running for office. Indeed, man-of-the-people cant unsupported by evidence was so common that it became for many a wearisome sound. "The specious title of the 'People's Candidate,' &c. has been so often blazoned forth, that it has lost all its significance ...," insisted an Indiana editor. Let the candidates offer proof that they loved the people. In their resolution supporting Jackson, Alabama legislators insisted that it was Old Hickory's defense of liberty which proved that he was truly the people's friend. "In our revolutionary struggle he united himself with the

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35 Cumberland Maryland Advocate, October 11, 1824.
36 Nashville, Tenn., Constitutional Advocate, August 13, 1822.
37 Pensacola Floridian, August 16, 1823.
38 In preparation for the 1824 election Jackson's "political mentors executed a tour de force when they presented him to the electorate, not only as the 'Nation's Hero' but also as the 'People's Friend.' The former designation was wholly accurate from 1815 onward, but he had only begun to win the latter." Dumas Malone and Basil Rauch, The Republic Comes of Age, 1789-1841 (New York, 1960), 153. See also Henry Bamford Parkes, The United States of America: A History (3rd ed., New York, 1968), 240.
39 Richmond, Ind., Public Leger, June 26, 1824.
friends of liberty and independence... his deeds of valor in the second war of independence has [sic] given to him a renown which time can not efface.—He is the man of the people, because he has gloriously defended and protected their rights and liberties.” Jackson was the people’s friend all right, and he had begun to prove it as far back as the dark days of the Revolution. Those other self-styled friends of the people—what evidence did they have to offer? In calling upon their countrymen to make Jackson the Revolutionary their President, pro-Jackson men were making their campaign relevant to a climate of opinion which also obliged Americans to demonstrate the truth of republican gratitude by welcoming Lafayette. To reward Jackson with the presidency, asserted his followers, would be to honor the entire Revolutionary generation and to keep unbroken the human link between the age of the fathers and the age of the sons. Old men came forward declaring that that was all they wanted to do. “Philo-Jackson,” who had “performed during the Revolutionary War, the duty of a private soldier upon several occasions,” described a typical member of the Revolutionary age—in this case himself: “he then loved and yet loves liberty. He wants nothing. He hopes for nothing... He wishes to make you the instruments of perpetuating the liberty which Washington secured, and of bringing back the general character of the country, to what it was, when Washington lived and acted.” And young men enamored of democracy placed the maintenance of the human connection between their age and the early Republic ahead of Old Hickory’s democratic instincts as a reason for supporting “the last surviving hero of the Revolution,” Andrew Jackson. “It is true we are of another generation, but we are not degenerate,” affirmed the resolutions of the Democratic Young Men of the City and County of Philadelphia, who had met, appropriately enough, near the spot where the Revolutionary fathers had first decreed the nation into being.

40 Cahawba Press and Alabama State Intelligencer, December 13, 1823. 41 “Philo-Jackson” argued that the other contenders who posed as friends of the people had virtually nothing to recommend them apart from their dubious distinction of being the perennial holders of office. “I would as soon depend upon the fortuitous turn of a copper, as I would upon any preference, which might be given on the score of their offices and talents.” Presidential Election, 4. 42 Ibid., 12.
“Although not actors in the *Revolution*, its pure and ennobling spirit has descended upon us. . . . In this spirit do we emulate its deeds. In this spirit do we solemnly resolve to support *Andrew Jackson* as our next President. In him we behold a golden link between two generations. He connects us with our venerated sires of the days of *Seventy-Six*. He is a bond between the creators and the heirs of liberty. . . .”

Both Jackson and Lafayette seemed to many to be “golden links” because they lived on well into the nineteenth century after having been actively engaged in America's struggle for nationhood. Well might they be called golden, for they were among the precious few men remaining who were seemingly capable of holding together, in an era of rapid social, economic, and political change, the world of the sires and the world of the sons. Perhaps many who first greeted Lafayette and then strode off to the polls to vote for Old Hickory did not consciously recognize the degree to which their two separate actions were manifestations of the same ideas and attitudes—were, in fact, fathered by a common hope: the desire to perpetuate into the uncertain and increasingly complex future the security of a past which patriotic tradition had made simple, sure, and virtuous. But when the campaign seemed to reveal glaring contradictions between the nation’s treatment of Jackson and its reception of Lafayette, some hastened to point them out. How could they fail to see how inconsistent they were, those who venerated Lafayette and with the same voices went about “stigmatizing another war-worn veteran of the revolution with the blackest crimes?”

Alas, lamented pro-Jackson men, there were those who would have calumniated the great Lafayette himself had he been a candidate for a public post; for the new breed of intriguing politicians, never having peered into their fathers’ hearts, desired office more than virtue itself. “But the same feeling of gratitude for revolutionary services which welcomes La Fayette to our shores, pervades the nation in favor of Andrew Jackson, and will be evinced, not by empty professions, but by elevating this last surviving soldier of—

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the revolution on whom this honor can ever be conferred, to
the first office in the gift of a free people."\footnote{44 "LA FAYETTE AND JACKSON," Pittsburgh Allegheny Democrat, quoted in the Charles-Town, Va., Farmers' Repository, September 29, 1824.}

That some contemporaries consciously thought them so is all the more reason to consider the election of 1824 and Lafayette's visit as connected rather than as disparate events. Although it cannot be measured quantitatively, there was a nationally introspective quality to the campaign closely akin to that which characterized the American sojourn of the great French hero of the American Revolution. The visit of Lafayette actually led to an intensification of the retrospective, patriotic spirit which pervaded America and affected the entire tone of American life in 1824. This prevailing climate of opinion dictated that the campaign of 1824 be a search for a sixth President who resembled the Revolutionary fathers. This the more astute promoters of all the contenders understood full well. In both the great events of 1824—Lafayette's return to America and the presidential election—the quest was the same: for some living symbol of the American Revolutionary tradition. Given the criterion by which the candidates were being judged, Jackson's "pretensions" seemed the most tenable.

The election returns provide a kind of pragmatic test for the thesis that Jackson, like Lafayette, symbolized a hallowed Revolutionary tradition that Americans of 1824 did not want to lose. Interestingly enough, and perhaps not entirely coincidentally, the candidates finished almost exactly in the order of their births. No contender received a majority, but Jackson, whose claim to Revolutionary fame seemed most plausible, received the largest share of both popular and electoral ballots. Adams, who, advocates claimed, had formed his character while in intimate contact with the founding fathers, finished second in the popular and electoral balloting. Crawford, a four year old when independence was declared, was third in the electoral college; and Clay, of 1777 vintage, finished fourth. (Crawford and Clay received roughly the same number of popular votes, in round figures 47,000 each). The fifth and youngest contender, Calhoun, no more than a babe in arms when the Revolution ended, found so little support for his campaign (which most Americans never con-
sidered anything more than a youthful indiscretion) that he withdrew and contented himself with the vice presidency.  

Consideration of the patriotic spirit which pervaded the country in 1824 adds a new dimension to the election of that year. The campaign of 1824 has long been scrutinized for what it reveals about the growth of the democratic spirit (and, seemingly, for what it reveals about the eternal propensity of ambitious politicians to revile each other). But certainly it may also be seen as a chapter in the continuing story of the American quest for national self-awareness. The campaign of 1824, like Lafayette's visit, was one of those events which stirred up thinking and sent men seeking American first principles. It was, like Lafayette's visit, a profound challenge to American presuppositions, for it brought to the imagination the prospect of a world in which there would be no men of '76, a world in which the empty promises of political maneuvering would have replaced the proven worth of Revolutionary virtue as the surest way to place, power, and preferment. Many patriots feared that they were living in a transitional age, an age between the virtuous fathers and their meaner sons, an age which threatened to carry them inexorably into that brave new world of intrigue where even the survival of mankind's republican hopes would be threatened. Is it any wonder, then, that having peered into that world from the precipice of 1824, they drew back reluctant to enter? Is it any wonder that Americans sought in their presidential candidates what they had found in the great Lafayette—that Revolutionary virtue which would be all the more necessary in the menacingly uncertain future?

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