

The Values That Created Mayhem

*A History of the American
Whig Party*

K.A. PICKETT

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the education reformers of both
present and past.

CONTENTS

	Acknowledgments	i
1	We Were the Whigs	3-9
2	A Well-Attended Party	10-14
3	Battling Westward Expansion	15-20
4	A Long, Divided Guest List	21-25
5	The Death of a Party	26-31
6	Louisiana Is a Fine Example	32-36
7	Chapter Name	37-41

ONE

WE WERE THE WHIGS

“To develop our resources and encourage domestic industry, improve the means of intercourse and education, advance our agriculture, commerce and manufactures, improve our laws and their administration, and thus make us a homogeneous people, all elevated and adorned with a taste and refinement becoming the members of a glorious republic.”

— From the Official Whig Political Agenda

To say the least, King Charles of England was not particularly well-liked by his subjects. Nowhere was this truer than in 17th century Scotland where his opposition originated and gave birth to the world’s very first Whig Party. British citizens in England organized their own resistance to the royal family, calling themselves “Whigs” as a tribute to their Scottish brothers and sisters.

The name then traveled to North America where colonists who sought independence from Britain adopted it for themselves in the 1760s. While the Whigs remained a thriving political party within the UK, the term essentially became inactive in America after the Revolutionary War—that is, until the mid 19th century. A growing discontent for the Democratic President Andrew Jackson was beginning to take the country by storm.

Fascinatingly, those who disliked Jackson and his policies were so ideologically diverse, they had a difficult time uniting under one party platform. Distinguishing it from all other political parties throughout American history, it is this diversity that not only forever characterized the Whig Party, but let to its death just 20 years after its establishment.

Opponents of Jackson ranged from slave-owners in the South, abolitionists in the North, educational reformers, those

TWO

A WELL-ATTENDED PARTY

"I should say that one has the best cause, and the other contains the best men."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

The American Whigs of the 19th century were originally members of two separate political groups that both opposed President Jackson and his administration. Democrats claimed that the Whigs were merely successors to the widely disliked Federalist Party, but Whigs were actually derived from Thomas Jefferson's Republican Party of the 1790s, the political challenger to the Federalists.

Jacksonian Democrats advertised themselves as the party for the rights of the states while stressing the rhetoric of Jefferson. However, Whigs more clearly explicated Jeffersonian principles than the Democrats. Paradoxically, these very Jeffersonian Republicans later opposed various Federalist actions from a program for centrally based national development favored by Democratic Whigs.

THREE

BATTLING AGAINST WESTWARD EXPANSION

*"We are now the invaders, driving the people of another nation from
their homes."*

— John McLean, American jurist and Whig politician

Whigs assembled upon a platform that called for diversification of the nation's economy and a return to values and moral standards that would guarantee domestic agreement and social unity. They believed there was no split between external and internal politics, that the two were inseparable and intertwined.

Contending that diplomatic energy and resources should be reserved for the growth of business and commercial development, Whigs dismissed the colonization of American territory and argued that maintaining the nation's independence and ensuring its further economic progression was most important.

They criticized the ideology of expansionist United governments, as they would not only violate regional treaties, but also interfere with the nation's economic growth. The Whigs argued that the property of the United States should not be used to support the interests of other nations, and that the nation's resources should be used to support the interests of the United States.

FOUR

A LONG, DIVIDED GUEST LIST

*"I have a difficult position. I shall try to keep my conscience;
though, in so doing I may lose my office."* — Horace Mann,
Massachusetts Congressman

Upon the formation of the Whig Party, its leaders knew that winning elections and defeating the Democrats would be an arduous task. Not only because the Democrats were the most popular party in the Union at that time, but because Whig supporters differed so vastly in their beliefs depending on whether they resided in the North or the South.

However, the creation of one articulate platform was indispensable to their national campaign, and as they sought ways to galvanize and unite all of the dissenting voices amongst their voters, the method employed by the Whigs was to formulate a message based upon major ideologies and principles that would unify the objectives of any voter, regardless of their views on individual political issues.

Whigs recognized their platform as one that was "moderate" and "middle," the different supporters and voters came to the North and those who resided there in the South. However, Whigs also recognized their coalition around the anti-slavery platform would have to be a Congress and state legislatures that would

FIVE

THE DEATH OF A PARTY

“The clash between the president and the congressional wing of the party have thus been seen as the dominant themes of that administration and as the major causes of the Whig downfall.”

— Michael Holt, Whig historian

The Whig Party was not one of convenience, to say in the least. No matter the praise they received from press or their innovative political methods of directly addressing voters, Whigs could not overcome the fragmentation caused by dissenting views and contradictions within their Party's platform. After a series of political victories,

Whigs were defeated in the presidential election of 1852. Although they returned to the White House in 1856, it would be the last election that the Whigs could organize and effectively put up a candidate. The compromises they made to ally with Democrats to successfully overthrow Stephen A. Douglas from the Western territories, they considered paid their price later with the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which heightened tensions in the northern states to the Fugitive Slave Act.

Whigs were unable to organize an effective campaign for the 1856 election of the President, which was won by Democrat. This election suggested to the anti-slavery side

SIX

LOUISIANA IS A FINE EXAMPLE

"The Bee has never said that no Southern Whig can or should support Genl. SCOTT... What we have said, once, twice, and twenty times was that Southern Whigs would not and could not support Genl. SCOTT unless his opinions touching Slavery and the Compromise should be distinctly known, and should accord with the South."
— Editorial from Whig Newspaper, The New Orleans Bee

When choosing a state to exemplify the Whig Party's peculiar formation, split, and end, the case of Louisiana is an exceptionally helpful example. Examining contrasting state and national issues within the Whig Party, Louisiana encompasses Southern concerns for slavery, Southern desires for an activist government, and the compromises made between the two that helped to bring the Whigs into political power.

Despite divisive matters that played out at the Federal and state levels, Louisiana was originally home to the South's most energetic Whigs. Eagerly supporting the Union, Louisiana Whigs demonstrated for the rest of the country the Party's political influence and vigor. Representing an amalgamation of White Southerners, Republicans, and Democrats who supported Southern values, Louisiana joined Whig candidates to their government's office in 1845 and 1846.

Whigs also won the majority of positions within the

SEVEN

A SHORT LIFE, BUT A LONG LEGACY

“Beyond all other devices of human origin, [education] is a great equalizer of the conditions of men, - the balance wheel of the social machinery.... It does better than to disarm the poor of their hostility toward the rich: it prevents being poor.”

— Horace Mann, 1848

While the Whig Party was relatively short-lived compared to other political parties within the United States, it left behind a significant legacy despite the brevity of its existence. First, Whig ability to hold its own and compete closely with Democrats steadied American politics during an era in which the Union was endangered by the ideological divergences regarding the extension of slavery into new territories in the West and Southwest.

Second, the Whig Party significantly affected public education and its Federal funding more than any other political organization. Third, Whigs consolidated the north and northwestern states around their self-interest in the protection of northern American politics. Fourth, leaders of the Whig Party were the first to publicly question the morality and coverage of the national political process in our nation. Finally, they showed the way regarding an ethical government and the ethical nature of the law.

The expansion of public education within the United States and the success of common schools are both due to public influence. Significant government action, such as public support for education, was a political position regarding

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Author of *The Receptacle*, *To Really Know the Narcissist*, *Girl Carnival*, *You Can Only Keep as Much as You Can Carry*, *My Brother's Keeper*, and *Another Memoir*, Kaylie Ann Pickett graduated from the University of Indianapolis with a BA in political science, and is pursuing her MFA in creative writing at the University of San Francisco. In her spare time, Pickett enjoys playing the piano, listening to blues music, and taking long naps with her cat, Bubba Ghee.