John Quincy Adams: A Yankee Misfit in the White House

I The “Corrupt Bargain” of 1824

A. Candidates in 1824

1. John Quincy Adams (MA)

2. Henry Clay (KY)

3. William Crawford (GA)

4. Andrew Jackson (TN)

a. War hero

b. Had the strongest personal appeal, especially in the West

c. Campaigned against the forces of corruption and privilege in government

B. All four professed to be “Republicans”

C. Election Results

1. Jackson got almost as many popular votes as his next two rivals combined, but failed to win a majority of the electoral vote

2. House of Representatives votes (top three candidates)

a. Clay was omitted, but he was Speaker of the House and was in the position to make the election

b. Crawford had a stroke

c. Jackson was hated by Clay, who challenged him to his popularity in the West and hated Jackson’s display of military strength in Florida

d. The only candidate left was Adams, Clay assured him of his support

3. Thanks to Clay’s behind-the-scenes influence, Adams was elected

a. A few days later, Adams announced that Henry Clay would be the new Secretary of State. This office carries huge prestige

b. Jackson’s supporters felt , Adams had bribed Clay

4. Reaction of Americans

a. Many people thought it was a “corrupt bargain”

b. Jackson condemned Clay as the “Judas of the West”

5. Reality of What Happened

a. No evidence has been found to prove that Adams and Clay entered into a formal bargain

b. Clay was a natural choice for secretary of state

II President John Quincy Adams

A. Character/Looks

1. Short, thick, and bald

2. Went swimming naked in the Potomac

3. Irritable, sarcastic, and tactless, but honest

4. Had a great knowledge of foreign affairs ( former Secretary of State)

5. After his presidency, he served in the House or Representatives, where he argued against slavery and the removal of Native Americans

B. Bad Start

1. Charges of “bargain” and “corruption”

2. Fewer than 1/3 of the voters had voted for him

3. Adams refused to oust efficient officeholders in order to create vacancies for his supporters (If the president would not reward party workers with political gains, why should they labor to keep him in office?)

C. From Nationalism to Sectionalism & States’ rights

1. The nation was turning away from the nationalistic views they had after the Treaty of Ghent and turning to States’ rights and sectionalism

2. Adams, however, was nationalistic:

a. The construction of roads and canals (thought it was a State/local job – what’s next, slavery?)

b. A national university (thought it would be a heavy financial burden and the government would continue hated tariffs)

c. Astronomical observatory (thought it was a waste of money)

d. Wanted to curb speculation (westerners wanted wide-open expansion)

3. Public reaction to these proposals was unfavorable