Our Worst Presidents
A Rough Course Schedule

- Lecture 1: Intro and Methods
- Lecture 2: Post-Jackson: Van Buren, W. Harrison, Tyler
- Lecture 3: Sectional Tensions: Zach Taylor, Millard Fillmore
- Lecture 4: Impending Crisis: Pierce, James Buchanan
- Lecture 5: Reconstruction: Andrew Johnson, Grant, Hayes
- Lecture 6: Gilded Age: Garfield, Arthur, Ben Harrison
- Lecture 7: The 1920s: Harding, Coolidge, Hoover
- Lecture 8: The 1970s and Our Times
Post-Jacksonian Era Presidents, 1837-1845

Martin Van Buren
Ted Widmer

William Henry Harrison
Gail Collins

John Tyler
Gary May
Sectional Tensions, 1849-1853

ZACHARY TAYLOR
JOHN S. D. EISENHOWER

MILLARD FILLMORE
PAUL FINKELMAN
“Impending Crisis” Presidents, 1853-1861

FRANKLIN PIERCE
MICHAEL F. HOLT

JAMES BUCHANAN
JEAN BAKER
Gilded Age Presidents,
1881-1893

JAMES A. GARFIELD
IRA RUTKOW

CHESTER ALAN ARTHUR
ZACHARY KARABELL

BENJAMIN HARRISON
CHARLES W. CALHOUN
The 1920s: Harding, Coolidge, Hoover

Warren G. Harding
John W. Dean

Calvin Coolidge
David Greenberg

Herbert Hoover
William E. Leuchtenburg
Nixon and After, 1969-1981

Richard M. Nixon
Elizabeth Drew

Gerald R. Ford
Douglas Brinkley

Jimmy Carter
Julian E. Zelizer
Recent Times, 1989-today

GEORGE H. W. BUSH
TIMOTHY NAFTALI

GEORGE W. BUSH
JAMES MANN

FEAR
TRUMP IN THE WHITE HOUSE
BOB WOODWARD
Observations on Changing Interpretations and Context

- No consensus on these contentious issues at the time
- Federalists (Hamilton) on Jefferson
- John Marshall, all of the Whigs, and MANY Democrats, on Jackson and Indian removal
- John Tyler and his Whig opponents
- The entire debate over slavery
Observations on Changing Interpretations and Context

- A. Johnson and the Republican Critique
- Look at FDR and internment
- Trump and the child separation policy
- Arthur’s comment about “definitive”
- All good history is “revisionist” history
- If not, we’d be reading Francis Parkman exclusively
MARTIN VAN BUREN
TED WIDMER
THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT'S
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Problems of the “Spoils System”

- Poor quality of appointments
- Officials appointed for party loyalty, not qualifications
- System lent itself to widespread corruption: Politics became a contest for spoils, not principles
- Executive officials, particularly presidents, besieged by office seekers
Samuel Swartwout

- Swartwout's 1830 appointment by Jackson was strongly opposed by Van Buren
- Swartwout was re-appointed by Jackson for another term of four years; left office at the expiration of his term in 1838
- He went to England when it was revealed that he had embezzled $1.2 million
Samuel Swartwout

- Swartwout, Texas, (outside of Houston) was named after him.
- His story is the origin of the term “Swartwouted out”: defined as the embezzlement of large sums of money and subsequent escape to a foreign nation.
A Kind of Anti-Governance

- Unlike other presidents, Jackson defined himself not by enacting a legislative program but by thwarting one.

- In eight years, Congress passed only one major law at his behest: the 1830 Indian Removal Act.

- Jackson vetoed twelve bills, more than all his six predecessors combined.
Indian Removal
Jackson and Indian Removal

- John Marshall’s injunction
- Beyond the human rights issues, Indian Removal also fueled rampant land speculation, not just settlement
- Created speculative bubble
- Expedited expansion
- But there was still no way to facilitate expansion without exacerbating sectional tensions
Martin Van Buren: The Big Picture

- One of the shrewdest politicians in U.S. history
- A genuine founder, albeit of another generation
- The architect of the “Second Party System”
- Struggled as president with an economic depression (1837-)
Changing Interpretations

- Among surveys of historians:
  - Reached a high of 15 (B) in 1948, and 21 (B) in 1996
  - Low of 34 (D) in 2017
- High marks for: Intelligence, Party Leadership
- Low Marks for: Economic Management
Historical Reputation

- Q: What has prevented Van Buren from being perceived as good or great?
  - A: Economic calamity and feeble response to it; Indian removal; Amistad case

- Q: What has prevented Van Buren from descending into “failed” territory?
  - A: Other factors: foreign policy, party leadership, intelligence, etc.
The Big Picture: Martin Van Buren

- Eighth President, 1837-1841
- Founder, Democratic Party, 1824-
- Indirect founder of the Whigs?
- Ran for President: 1836: Won
- 1840: Lost Reelection
- 1844: Lost Nomination
- 1848: Free Soil Nominee
- Indirect founder of the GOP?
He Appeared on Four National Tickets (presidential nominations in italics)

- Adams (4): 1789, 1792, 1796, 1800
- Van Buren (4): 1832, 1836, 1840, 1848
- FDR (5): 1920, 1932, 1936, 1940, 1944
Van Buren in Context

- Few politicians better prepared for the presidency
- State legislator, U.S. Senator, New York Governor, Secretary of State, Vice President
- Q: Why did he come up short?
- A: he was trapped by his Jeffersonian/Jacksonian ideology
Early Life
Physical Appearance

- Short in stature, a small, sturdily built, figure; stood about 5 feet 5 inches tall
- Fair complexion, small brilliant, deeply set blue eyes
- Sandy to auburn hair
Physical Appearance

- Prominent forehead became increasingly prominent as his curls receded with age
- He spoke rapidly with crisp enunciation
- When excited, a Dutch accent crept into his speech
Physical Appearance

- Later, he was distinguished by a crown of unruly white hair
- And “epic” side-whiskers!
- He dressed impeccably
- His smart appearance often the subject of scorn in the press
Character and Temperament

- From an early age he was an engaging conversationalist
- Good-humored, clever, witty, optimistic, cheerful, quick to laugh
- His wit, charm, courtesy, and good manners made him a highly sought after party guest
- Polished and captivating, urbane, courteous, self-assured, adaptive, blending dignity with ease
Another First-Class Temperament

- Gracious, calm, respectful of others
- His grace and good manners legendary (Henry Clay in the Senate incident)
- Genuinely good listener; valued the advice of others
- Never scapegoated, never employed demagoguery
- Deliberative, not impulsive
Van Buren’s Style

- In politics, he preferred to listen to others talk rather than to expound his own views (!)
- Drawing others out while keeping his own opinions closely guarded
- Gained a reputation as a shrewd operator: One colleague asserted, “rowed to his object with muffled oars”
Political Skill

❖ Amos Kendall: “Van Buren glides along as smoothly as oil and as silently as a cat.”

❖ “If he is managing at all it is so adroitly that nobody perceives it.”
A Wiley Dutchman

- His nicknames, the Red Fox of Kinderhook and the Little Magician, reflected his image.
- He spoke cautiously, often in carefully worded phrases that left listeners ambivalent about his objectives.
- Ambitious but also a man of genuine principles.
No President Ever Earned More Nicknames

- The Little magician
- Old Kinderhook
- Red Fox of Kinderhook
- The American Talleyrand
- The Careful Dutchman
- The Enchanter
- The Sly Fox
- The Sage of Lindenwald
- The Great Manager
- The Master Spirit
- Matty Van
- Little Van
- The Mistletoe Politician
- O.K. (for Old Kinderhook)
- Machiavellian Belshazzar
- Matty Van the Used Up Man
- Martin Van Ruin
BIRTHSITE

MARTIN VAN BUREN, EIGHTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES, WAS BORN AT THIS SITE DECEMBER 5, 1782.

STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

NEW YORK
Received at a royal reception by Queen Adelaide of the Netherlands

A curious Queen politely asked the distinguished Dutch-American how far back he could trace his ancestry
“Vintage Van Buren”

- Van Buren bowed deeply and responded, ‘As far back as Kinderhook, Your Majesty.’

- Widmer: That was vintage Van Buren, saying everything and nothing at once
The name Kinderhook has its root in the landing of Henry Hudson in the area, where he was greeted by Native Americans with many children. With the Dutch Kinder meaning child and hoeck meaning bend or hook in the river, the name literally means “bend in the river where the children are.”
Benedict Arnold after the battle of Saratoga
Aaron Burr concealed himself briefly in Kinderhook after fatally wounding Alexander Hamilton
Washington Irving lived in Kinderhook in 1809 after the death of his fiancée, where he wrote portions of *A History of New-York from the Beginning of the World to the End of the Dutch Dynasty*. 

ICHABOD CRANE
WASHINGTON IRVING BASED THE CHARACTER ICHABOD CRANE IN THE LEGEND OF SLEEPY HOLLOW ON KINDERHOOK SCHOOL TEACHER JESSE MERWIN.
Jennie Jerome, later to become mother of Winston Churchill, lived in Kinderhook after her father acquired Van Buren’s home, Lindenwald.
The Rise of Van Buren

- Born 1782 into a Dutch environment in Kinderhook, NY; first president not born a British subject
- Of Dutch ancestry, Not Anglo-American; spoke Dutch as a first language
- Childhood in tavern; father Abraham a Jeffersonian Democrat
The Rise of Matty Van

- Family tavern a popular stop on the NYC-Albany road: Guests included Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr (not at the same time)

- Initially apprenticed with local Federalist lawyers; remained a Democrat

- Burr faction of party; became a Dewitt Clinton Republican, bitterly split with him after 1812
The Rise of Van Buren

- Created the Bucktail Faction
- U.S. Senate, 1821
- Creation of the Albany Regency, 1822
- Determined to create a national party
- Saw national parties as a way of undermining sectionalism and preserving the union
Van Buren, the “Bucktails,” and the “Albany Regency”

- Party government is essentially representative government
- A disciplined party system would produce a more democratic government, in fact it transferred the government from the ‘few’ to the ‘many’
The Rise of Van Buren

- Backed William Crawford in 1824; Shifted to Andrew Jackson after 1825
- Created a national party structure around Jackson, allied with Richmond Junto and Natchez
- National parties could bind the sections and promote unity!!!
- Alliances with Amos Kendall in Kentucky and New Hampshire’s Isaac Hill
Van Buren was no ivory tower political philosopher but rather a hard-working, day-to-day politician

- He observed that political conflict, both among allies and between opponents, was unavoidable
- The trick was to manage conflict
- Thus, parties
Van Buren and the Creation of the Second Party System

- When he arrived in Washington during the so-called Era of Good Feelings, the party system was in complete disarray.

- FOUR candidates self-nominated for president in 1824; the outcome was a debacle.
Van Buren recognized that the framers’ original structure could not accommodate a genuine democracy.
Realignement, 1824-1828
Historical Analysis

- Jacksonian Personality Cult: No other president in the 19th century would enjoy Jackson’s fanatical support.
- It would have been difficult for ANYONE to follow Jackson.
- That Van Buren was a deliberative man, known for his brain rather than his fists, made the succession all the more problematic.
1835 Democratic Convention, Baltimore

- To assure the nomination of Jackson’s handpicked successor
- Tennessee refused to send delegation
- Unwilling to lose those votes, Dem managers went to a tavern, found a random Tennessean named Ed Rucker, who just happened to be in Baltimore, and made him a one-man, fifteen-vote delegation
- “Rucker” became a verb
Marketing Van Buren

- A short, balding man with no military background, Party managers found it difficult to invent a heroic backstory.

- Unlike Jackson, he did not enjoy feverish support.

- Moreover, whereas opposition to Jackson had been diffuse and disorganized, the Whigs were learning from Van Buren’s example.
Election of 1836
Van Buren Defeats Three Whigs
From Vice President to President

- In an era when the vice presidency seldom led to the White House, only Van Buren, among the 21 who held that office from 1802 to 1900, managed to be elected president.

- Four others achieved the presidency because the incumbent died; none of those four accidental presidents subsequently won election in his own right (until 1904).
Van Buren struggled with unresolved issues from the Jacksonian era:

- Economic calamity
- The collapsed banking sector
- Indian removal and land speculation
- Growing sectional polarization
The Substance of Van Buren’s Presidency

- Panic of 1837 and Economic Depression
- Independent Treasury
- Indian Removal
- Amistad Case
- Tensions with Britain
AMERICA'S FIRST GREAT DEPRESSION

ECONOMIC CRISIS AND POLITICAL DISORDER AFTER THE PANIC OF 1837

ALASDAIR ROBERTS
Van Buren’s Challenges

- The rise of the opposition Whigs: Whigs began to replicate Van Buren’s party organizing.
- Young Whig managers, such as New York’s brilliant Thurlow Weed, copied Van Buren’s tactics.
- In Van Buren’s homestate, the Whigs captured the statehouse and governorship in 1838 (William Henry Seward, age 37).
Van Buren and the Texas “Poison”

- Boldly reversing Jackson’s policies, Van Buren sought peace.
- This proved less popular than Jackson’s angry bellicosity.
- Van Buren proposed a diplomatic solution to a long-standing financial dispute between American citizens and the Mexican government.
Van Buren and the Texas “Poison”

- Rejected Jackson’s threat to settle it by force
- Peacemakers may be blessed, but not when they’re president
Van Buren and Texas

- Likewise, when the Texas minister to Washington proposed annexation in August 1837, he was told that his proposal could not be entertained.

- Constitutional scruple and fear of war with Mexico were the reasons for the rejection.

- Concern that it would precipitate a clash over the extension of slavery undoubtedly influenced Van Buren.
The Texas Challenge

- Northern and Southern Democrats followed an unspoken rule:
- Northerners helped quash anti-slavery proposals and Southerners refrained from agitating for the annexation of Texas
- Texas withdrew the annexation offer in 1838
Van Buren’s Diplomacy

- Shrewd diplomacy toward Britain
- A less skilled president would have blundered into an ill-advised and potentially catastrophic war
- His actions damaged him politically (he lost all of NE except NH in 1840)
- No points for prevention; “crisis management,” yes, but not prevention
1840 Election
Attacks on Van Buren

- Whigs charged that Van Buren was a sensual aristocrat
- He preened about the White House like a peacock
- Drank imported wines and ate with golden spoons
- He deliberately landscaped the White House grounds to resemble “Amazon bosoms”
The 1840 Election

- Copying the tactics of the Democrats, the Whigs ran William Henry Harrison and claimed for him a simple farming background by using a log cabin as their symbol.

- They ridiculed Van Buren’s stylish clothes, calling him a dandy, and revived the charges that he was an unscrupulous politician.
The Whigs led songfests that celebrated Harrison as the hero of the common man and lampooned Van Buren as an effete eastern dandy addicted to French wine.
Election of 1840: Van Buren driving a carriage called “Uncle Sam’s Cab,” which wrecks on a pile of “Clay,” representing Henry Clay; Harrison, depicted as a locomotive, bears down on Van Buren.
Matt's Perilous Situation Up Salt River

It's a pity to let the poor fellow drown. I had an idea of making him Inspector of Cabbage at Farkleberry for that's all he good for, but I decide to roll him. Oh what a rogue!

Tariff
Hoof's Trial
Negro Suffrage
Sub Treasury
Standing Army
200,000 Men.


Whig Cider

Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1846 by J. Gault in the District Court of the S. District of New York.
Superficially it appeared to be a Whig landslide. But the total margin of Whig victory in four crucial states – PA, NJ, NY, Maine – was only 16,000 votes combined.
A shift of only 8,000 votes (out of a total of 2.4 million votes) would have given Van Buren 90 additional electoral votes and an electoral college victory of 150 to 144.
Defeat, 1840

- In contrast to both Adamses, Van Buren proved extraordinarily gracious in defeat.
- He warmly greeted the president-elect at the latter’s hotel in Washington.
- He invited him to the White House as a guest of honor at one of his dinner parties.
Defeat, 1840

- Van Buren even offered to vacate the White House early so that Harrison and his family could move in well before inauguration.

- Van Buren was prepared to attend the inaugural, even the inaugural festivities, although he wasn’t invited by the Whigs.
Free Soil Ticket, 1848

Martin Van Buren

Charles F. Adams
Notable Scholar Surveys

- Schlesinger, 1948: 15 (B)
- Schlesinger, 1962: 17 (C)
- M-B 1982: 20 (C)
- CT 1982: 18 (B)
- Siena 1982: 21 (C)
- Siena 1990: 21 (C)
Notable Scholar Surveys

- Siena 1994: 22 (C)
- R-McI, 1996: 21 (B)
- Schlesinger, 1996: 21 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2000: 30 (C)
- WSJ, 2000: 23 (C)
- Siena, 2002: 24 (C)
- WSJ, 2005: 27 (C)
Notable Scholar Surveys

- C-SPAN, 2009: 31 (C)
- Siena, 2010: 23 (C)
- USPC, 2011: 27 (C)
- APSA, 2015: 25 (C)
- C-SPAN, 2017: 34 (D)
- APSA, 2018: 27 (C)
- Aggregate: 24 (C)
Martin Van Buren
Siena College Criteria

- Background: 16 (B)
- Party Leadership: 13 (B)
- Communication: 23 (C)
- Rel. w/Congress: 19 (B)
- Court Appointments: 24 (C)
- Handling of Economy: 38 (F)
- Luck: 33 (C)
Siena College Criteria

- Ability to Compromise: 13 (B)
- Willing to take risks: 32 (C)
- Appointments: 25 (C)
- Overall ability: 24 (C)
- Imagination: 24 (C)
- Domestic: 27 (C)
- Integrity: 29 (C)
Siena College Criteria

- Executive Ability: 23 (C)
- Foreign Policy: 25 (C)
- Leadership: 27 (C)
- Intelligence: 22 (B)
- Avoid Mistakes: 27 (C)
- Experts’ View: 24 (C)
- Overall: 23 (C)
C-Span Criteria: Martin Van Buren

- Public Persuasion: 30 (C)
- Crisis Leadership: 35 (F)
- Econ Management: 40 (F)
- Moral Authority: 33 (C)
- International Relations: 26 (C)
- Administrative Skills: 26 (C)
C-Span Criteria: Martin Van Buren

- Relations w/ Congress: 28 (C)
- Vision/Setting agenda: 33 (C)
- Pursued Equal Justice: 30 (C)
- Context: 33 (C)
- Overall: 34 (D)
Siena College: Handling the Economy

- 43 Herbert Hoover
- 42 George W. Bush
- 41 James Buchanan
- 40 Jimmy Carter
- 39 Warren Harding
- 38 Martin Van Buren
- 37 Andrew Johnson
- 36 Gerald R. Ford
- 35 B. Harrison
- 34 Franklin Pierce
C-Span: Economic Management

- 43 Herbert Hoover
- 42 James Buchanan
- 41 Franklin Pierce
- 40 Martin Van Buren
- 39 John Tyler
- 38 W.H. Harrison
- 37 Andrew Johnson
- 36 George W. Bush
- 35 Harding
- 34 Fillmore
Economy: Siena, C-Span

- Where is Andrew Jackson?
- Siena: 28
- C-Span: 26
Van Buren: Historical Assessment

- A shrewd but principled political leader
- Played a major role in creating a new concept of political parties and in forming the Democratic party
Historical Assessment

- Once perceived as an average president; now seen as below average, although not quite a “failure”
- Cannot escape criticism for the Panic of 1837
- Would he have fared better had he come earlier (ie: Madison)
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The Big Picture

- The first Whig President
- The first president to die in office
- The shortest span in office
Interpretations

- Q: What has prevented Harrison’s rise?
  - A: Brevity

- Q: What might prevent his further decline?
  - A: Brevity
Early Life
Physical Characteristics

- He had a long, thin, angular face, of fair complexion
- Distinguished by a long sharp-bridged nose, closely set eyes, thin lips
- A female observer once described his expression as “serene and engaging”
Wm. Harisson. 1800.
Early Harrison

- From a distinguished Virginia family
- Sought an army career and took part in Anthony Wayne’s successful expedition against the Indian tribes of the Northwest
- Became a western military hero
His record in that field was less incompetent than most of the major military and civilian leaders responsible for the rashly-launched, poorly-conceived, and ineptly-run War of 1812.
Territorial administrator, congressman, and diplomat
Early Harrison

- Frequent officeholder
- Secretary of the Northwest Territory
- Delegate to Congress
- Territorial Governor, U.S. Congress, state senator
- United States senator, Minister to Columbia
A Marketable Candidate

- In 1828 and 1832 Andrew Jackson had easily defeated politicians such as John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay.
- Jackson’s triumphs were based partly on his reputation as a military hero.
- Leaders among the Whig opposition saw that Harrison could be marketed like Jackson.
A Marketable Candidate

- To the Whigs, he could be presented as a popular military hero of their own

- Voters who had once rallied for “Old Hickory” might go for “Old Tippecanoe”

- In any event, a “war hero” on the ticket would galvanize Whig turnout
“A Whig Version of Jackson”

- Astute political leaders such as Thurlow Weed copied Van Buren’s methods of organization.

- Weed thought that Harrison could be marketed to represent many of the features that had made Jackson such a popular figure.
It was not Harrison’s ability but rather his political availability that attracted Whig political managers.
In the 1836 presidential season, Harrison was put forward by politicians in a few northern states, and he drew seventy-three electoral votes—a very strong showing for a sectional candidate.
Always a supporter of Henry Clay, Harrison led the Whig ticket in 1836 and did very well. He won 7 states, 73 electoral votes, 36.5%.
1840 Election
Perceptions of Harrison

- Marketed as a vigorous and dynamic war hero
- His campaign claimed he drank hard cider and lived in a log cabin
- The truth was something else altogether
Henry Clay: The Great Compromiser

- Henry Clay was one of the most popular and admired politicians of the antebellum era.
- He was hailed as a political wonder, the magnificent “Harry of the West”.
- Championed as “The Great Compromiser,” a statesman who on more than one occasion saved the Union.
TIPPECANOE AND TYLER TOO

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON

For President of THE UNITED STATES

1840
1840 Whig Nomination

- Daniel Webster’s support threw the convention behind Harrison, and John Tyler of Virginia was chosen as Harrison’s running mate.

- As was the practice of the day, the “God-like Daniel” was given the plum of Secretary of State.
1840 Whig Nomination

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In front of a log cabin, a shirt-sleeved William Henry Harrison welcomes a soldier, inviting him to rest and partake of a barrel of hard cider. Nearby another soldier, already seated, drinks a glass of cider.
Old Tip he wears a homespun coat
He has no ruffled shirt-wirt-wirt
But Mat has the golden plate
And he’s a squirt-wirt-wirt
The Whigs outdid themselves in image building with coonskin caps, facsimile log cabins, popular tunes, slogans, and badges that added a theatrical dimension to the emerging two-party system.
William Henry Harrison and 1840 “Hard Cider” Campaign
In 1840 the word “booze” became part of the language

- During the 1840 campaign, Philadelphia distiller, E.C. Booz, began putting whiskey into bottles shaped like log cabins, calling it “Old Cabin Whiskey”

- “Booze” became a shorthand for distilled liquor
John Quincy Adams
Campaign Song, 1828

Little know ye who’s comin
If John Quincy not be comin!

Fire’s comin, swords are comin
Pistols, guns and knives are comin
Famine’s comin, banning’s comin
If John Quincy not be comin!
John Quincy Adams
Campaign Song, 1828

Slavery’s comin, knavery’s comin
Plunder’s comin, wonder’s comin
Jobbin’s comin, robbin’s comin
If John Quincy not be comin!

Fears are comin, tears are comin
Plague and pestilence is comin
Hatin’s comin, Satan’s comin
If John Quincy not be comin!
TIPPECANOE AND TYLER TOO!
A Comic Glee.
Arranged
Expressly For This Work
As Sang
With Thundering Applause
At The
SYRACUSE CONVENTION.

Some of the Loco Fice party have prepared and paraded a Log Cabin Trap, representing a Log Cabin set on a figure 5° and baited with a barrel of hard Cider. By the above it will be seen that the Trap has been sprung, and a sly nibbler from Hook is looking out through the gratings. An elderly gentleman with an ikory pole is intent on prying him out; but it is manifestly no go.' The legs are too heavy and growing more so daily.

Log Cabin.

Philadelphia, G.E.Blake, 13 So Fifth Street.
“Tippecanoe And Tyler Too”
Oh who has heard the great commotion, motion motion
All the country through?
It is the ball a-rolling on
For Tippecanoe and Tyler too
And with him we'll beat Little Van, Van
Van is a used up man
And with him we'll beat Little Van
Sure, let 'em talk about hard cider (cider cider)
And log cabins too
't'll only help to speed the ball
For Tippecanoe and Tyler too
And with him we'll beat Little Van, Van
Van is a used up man
And with him we'll beat Little Van
Like the rush of mighty waters (waters waters)
Onward it will go
And of course we'll bring you through
For Tippecanoe and Tyler too
And with him we'll beat Little Van, Van
Van is a used up man
And with him we'll beat Little Van
Candidate vs. President

- The very qualities that would make Harrison a problematic president made him a magnificent presidential candidate.

- He was a blank slate upon which each faction of the Whig Party could project its objectives and aspirations.
Yet, had he survived, his very opacity might have ill-served him in the hurly-burly of Whig factional politics.
Satire of the image-building and manipulation of candidate William Henry Harrison. Two influential Whigs, Henry Clay (left) and Congressman Henry Wise, operate the strings of a “dancing-jack” toy figure of Harrison in military uniform.
The Election of 1840
The Whigs Get it Right
1836 and 1840

1840: Democrat Electoral Collapse
Consequences of the First Great Depression, 1837-
Presidency
Low Expectations

- Harrison never considered himself a great political leader
- The Whig party were under no illusion that he was one
- Nominated because he gave the Whigs the best chance of winning
- But also because they believed he would be pliable, follow directions and not assert executive power
Ever gracious in defeat, Van Buren observed of Harrison:

“He talks and thinks with much ease and vivacity. He is as tickled with the presidency as is a young woman with a new bonnet.”
Is there an alternative Whig history of America?

- This was the one moment, starting March 1841, when Whigs had the opportunity to implement the American System.

- To demonstrate to the American people the value and importance of their policies.

- To develop the nation and heal sectional differences.
Harrison and Clay

- Advised by Clay to call Congress into a special session, Harrison told Clay that the Kentuckian’s advice must take a back seat to the Cabinet, and that he should not visit the White House.

- “You are too impetuous. … Mr. Clay, you forget that I am the president.”
Stunned at this rebuke, Clay resolved to lead from his seat in the Senate, setting the stage for his later clash with Tyler.

Harrison did call Congress into special session to enact Clay’s American System.
PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION OF W. H. HARRISON
IN WASHINGTON CITY, D.C. ON THE 4TH OF MARCH, 1841.

For sale at M. E. Dodge, Bookseller, Washington.