

From George Washington's election in 1789 until 2011 forty three different men have served as President of the United States. Countless books have been published about the most prominent Presidents. There is a seemingly endless supply of accounts on the likes of Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson, to just name a few. Yet somewhat lost amidst the annals of history are the men who failed to achieve the nation's highest office. While some presidential losers such as: John Adams, Andrew Jackson, and Richard Nixon, were able to subsequently win election to the nation's highest office, others found their goal of becoming the nation's chief executive to be an elusive one.

What are we to make of the men who failed to become president? How are they remembered? This study will evaluate how Henry Clay and Winfield Scott, two prominent men of nineteenth century America who failed in their attempts to become president, are remembered by prominent Americans who lived during their lifetime. This study is not a political history of why Clay and Scott were not elected. Rather I will draw on newspaper accounts, memoirs, and eulogies to understand how Americans of prominence, including politicians, clergy, and newspaper editors, viewed Clay and Scott in light of their failures. I will also sparingly use biographies to offer a scholarly point of view of their lives. Though the main purpose of my study is to observe how the elite of American society remembered Clay and Scott, the opinions of historians will allow me to offer some context and to present a more objective account of their lives. While Clay and Scott have remarkably different professional backgrounds, Clay was a career politician while Scott was a career soldier, by studying the two together I will be able to see how the different life paths affects the way in which they are remembered.

*"Ambition is the last refuge of failure"-Oscar Wilde*

The purpose of this work is to study how Americans remembered Henry Clay and Winfield Scott. But why study Clay and Scott together? There are several elements which link the careers of Clay and Scott together making them open to being studying simultaneously. First and foremost, both Clay and Scott, desired to be President and both were unsuccessful in their attempts. They are linked together by their defeats. Clay attempted to become President five times: in 1824, as an independent, 1832, as a National-Republican, and 1844, as a Whig, Clay lost in the general election to become President. In 1840 and 1848 he ran for Whig nomination losing both times to war hero candidates, William Henry Harrison and Zachary Taylor respectively.

Scott two made attempts for the presidency, finishing second to Zachary Taylor for the Whig presidential nomination in 1848, and winning the Whig nomination in 1852 only to lose decisively to Franklin Pierce in the general election. While Scott had never been involved in politics when he attempted to become the nation's 14<sup>th</sup> President in 1852 he had reason to not be deterred by his lack of experience. Of the nation's previous thirteen Presidents: George Washington, Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, and Zachary Taylor all had followed military success as the road to national renown and the presidency.

In his 2005 book *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America*, Scott A. Sandage studies how Americans comprehended and evaluated failure in the nineteenth century. While Sandage's specific arguments deal primarily with failure in terms of economic failure his broader findings are applicable and useful to this study of Clay and Scott. Sandage writes that the "To a nation on the verge of anointing individualism as its creed, the loser was simultaneously intolerable and indispensable. Failure was the worst thing that could happen to a striving American."<sup>1</sup> According to Sandage, Americans were concerned about winning and winners during the nineteenth

---

<sup>1</sup> Scott Sandage, *Born Losers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 27.

century. To them there was no valor in defeat. But nineteenth century America was more than simply about the result, it was also about the process. Sandage points out that during the nineteenth century Clay coined the phrase “self-made manhood.”<sup>2</sup> This is the belief that a man can rise up from his status of birth and achieve prosperity and success. While it is indisputable that Clay and Scott both died in a place of higher status than that to which they were born, it is debatable to the degree that each was “self-made” as neither was born destitute. However the realities of how Clay and Scott reached their positions are inconsequential in how they are remembered. What is important is that the people who are perpetuating their memory believe, or at the very least publically state, that they were able to rise up from common beings to achieve a tremendous degree of success.

Then what can we make of how Scott and Clay were honored after their deaths? Perhaps their failure to become president made them seem more honorable to those remembering them. Sandage states that “Failure is not the dark side if the American Dream, it is the foundation of it.”<sup>3</sup> The populaces could identify with Clay and Scott because of their failures. They had experienced something similar to ordinary Americans, despite the fact that both had lives that were anything but ordinary. Sandage adds that the failure “personifies what really has happened to us or to people we know and love in spite of their flaws.”<sup>4</sup> Failure to become President allowed the many Americans who had experienced failure in their lives, be it financial or otherwise, to identify with Clay and Scott. As Sandage states in his conclusion, “We need the loser—the word and the person—to sort out our own defeats and dreams.”<sup>5</sup> Their defeats allowed Americans to make sense of their own lives and while many of those remembering Clay

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 277.

and Scott avoid or gloss over their presidential defeats it does not change what listener or reader already knew. Novelist Sir. J.M. Barrie said “We are all failures- at least, the best of are.”<sup>6</sup> The failures of Clay and Scott unite them in history and memory. Their failures allow them to be revered as men of the people, men worthy of praise because they know the sadness of defeat. The people remembering Clay and Scott can embrace it, regardless of whether or not they explicitly mention it.

There is a paradox in America in terms of winners and losers. American’s undoubtedly loves winners. Whether it is politicians, military figures, or athletes, Americans celebrate their winners. Men such as Thomas Jefferson, Ulysses S. Grant, George Patton, and Michael Jordan are celebrated for their victories. Yet, despite this emphasis placed on winning the “losers” of history are not shunned. Popular musicians such as Bob Dylan and Bruce Springsteen have risen to fame singing of those down on their luck. In the South the memory of the “lost cause” is still perpetuated and celebrated. Robert E. Lee, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson and other figures and memories of the Confederacy are remembered with tremendous reverence. While Americans idolize and apotheosize winners but they do not reject the losers. They identify with them, not necessarily for their defeats but for the path they followed. For that they will always have a place in American memory.

*“The Great Compromiser” and “Old Fuss and Feathers”*

Clay and Scott were both larger than life figures. Clay achieved his renown in the political arena while Scott garnered praise for his mastery on the battlefield. Clay was born in Virginia during the American Revolution in 1777, but his political career did not begin until he settled in Kentucky. Clay first entered the United States Senate in 1806 via appointment, though he only served for three months. Upon returning to Kentucky Clay enhanced his reputation as a

---

<sup>6</sup> *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*, ed. Justin Kaplan (Boston: Brown Little, 2002), 652.

brilliant legal mind by defending former Vice president Aaron Burr against charges of treason. According to historian Bernard Mayo, following his victory with his “well established reputation...crowned by his successful defense of a former Vice President” Clay set of for Washington to resume his career in Congress.<sup>7</sup> After serving slightly more than a year in the Senate Clay became a United States Congressman in 1811. During the years 1811-1825 he would serve three terms as Speaker of the House of Representatives. As a congressman Clay was a vocal supporter of the War of 1812 and was instrumental in signing the Treaty of Ghent which ended the war. During the election of 1824 Clay used his influence to push through the election of John Quincy Adams to the presidency over Andrew Jackson. In return for his support Clay was appointed Secretary of State. Clay’s actions in support of Adams, paired with his appointment as Secretary of State, would be termed the “corrupt bargain” by Jackson supporters. Following his term as Secretary of State Clay entered the United States Senate in 1831 where he would serve until 1842 and then again from 1849 until his death in 1852. In both houses of the Congress Clay earned a reputation as a power broker. During the Nullification Crisis<sup>8</sup> Clay was instrumental in brokering an agreement. However it was his work on the question of slavery and territorial expansion which would win Clay the name “the Great Compromiser.” In 1820, as Speaker of the House, Clay helped push through the Missouri Compromise. In 1850, in his last major act as a senator Clay was a key figure in passing the Compromise of 1850. While serving in Congress Clay, along with John C. Calhoun and Daniel Webster was part of the “Great Triumvirate,” a term used to identify three men who dominated the political landscape of

---

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Mayo, *Henry Clay: Spokesman for the New West* (New York: Archon Books, 1960), 260.

<sup>8</sup> In 1832 the South Carolina state convention passed the Ordinance of Nullification which declared the Tariff of 1828, also known as the Tariff of Abominations and the Tariff of 1832 null and void within the state of South Carolina because they believed that the tariff’s favored the north over the south. The crisis reached its peak when Congress authorized President Andrew Jackson to use force against South Carolina. To avoid hostilities Clay and South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun negotiated a compromise, the Tariff of 1833, and thus avoided a violent confrontation.

antebellum America. Clay's influence as a Senator was so great that in 1957 a Senate committee led by John F. Kennedy named Clay one of the five greatest senators in American politics.<sup>9</sup>

Winfield Scott was pronounced by newspapers across the country as America's greatest general. Scott was born in Virginia and trained as a lawyer before enlisting in the United States Army. He rose to prominence on the United States-Canadian border during the War of 1812. He further demonstrated his tremendous military ability in the Indian wars of the 1830s. In 1841 Scott was named Commanding General of the United States Army, a position he would hold until the beginning stages of the American Civil War in 1861. Scott truly became an American hero for his actions in the Mexican-American War. In Mexico Scott led an extremely ambitious and successful campaign, sailing to Vera Cruz and marching on Mexico City while completely cut off from his base of supply. Scott's capturing of Mexico City brought an end to the hostilities and led to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which added tremendous amounts of territory for the United States. Scott was chosen as the Whig Party nominee in 1852 for the same reasons that Harrison was chosen in 1840 and Taylor was chosen in 1848: his lack of political record. In 1852 the Whig Party wanted to run a campaign about the man not the issues, since in previous attempts to run career politicians based on the pertinent issues had failed, and Scott fit the bill, as reputation rested solely on his military accomplishments.<sup>10</sup> Scott was defeated in 1852 for several reasons, the main reason being that by 1852 the Whig Party was no longer a cohesive unit. Sectional strife had replaced partisan conflict as the issues of expansion and slavery were elevated to the national forefront, the result of which was a diminishing of the differences

---

<sup>9</sup> "Famous Five," United States Senate, [http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The\\_Famous\\_Five.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The_Famous_Five.htm) (accessed March 1, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party : Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 682-683.

between Whigs and Democrats.<sup>11</sup> Another reason for Scott's defeat is his inability to gain support from the South. Southerners were uneasy of Scott because, despite being a native of Virginia, he was not a slave holder. While this alone may not have been enough to lose southern support it served as an additional strike against Scott after he refused to endorse the Whig Party platform which among other things supported the Compromise of 1850 which included the Fugitive Slave Law.<sup>12</sup> Southerners also feared the Whig Politicians who supported Scott including Senator William H. Seward, Pennsylvania Governor William F. Johnston, and Senator Benjamin Wade.<sup>13</sup> According to historian Michael F. Holt Southerners feared Scott "would simply be putty in Seward's demonic hands."<sup>14</sup>

Another Aspect of Scott's life that would affect the way he was represented to the American public is his nickname. During his military career he earned the nickname "Old Fuss and Feathers," a named no one used in his presence, which alluded to how he always wore a formal military uniform that clearly displayed his rank, as opposed to the likes of Taylor or Ulysses S. Grant during the American Civil, both of whom did not place as much importance on appearance.<sup>15</sup> During the 1852 campaign opponents referred to Scott derogatorily as "Old Fuss and Feathers" while his supports choose to label him "Old Chippewa," in reference to his exploits in the War of 1812 or "Old Chapultepec," alluding to his great victory against Mexico four years prior.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 674.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), 275.

<sup>13</sup> Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 680.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 680.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy D. Johnson, *Winfield Scott : The Quest for Military Glory*, Modern War Studies (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 157.

<sup>16</sup> Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 682.

### *A Party of Opposition*

A crucial element to consider when discussing Clay and Scott is what exactly a Whig was. In his 1985 book *Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the American Whig Party* Thomas Brown writes that “Whigs were drawn together by an issue—opposition to Andrew Jackson’s enlargement of the presidential power.”<sup>17</sup> The Whig party was born out of the National Republican party which formed following the defeat of John Quincy Adams in the 1828 presidential election to the Democrat Andrew Jackson. After Clay’s crushing defeat in the 1832 presidential election as the National Republican party candidate, in which he won only six states to Jackson’s sixteen, the Whig party formed to serve as the defender of the liberties of the people against the usurpations of Jackson who undermined the separation of powers.<sup>18</sup> The Whigs wanted to attract both members of the now defunct National Republican party and members of the Anti-mason party.<sup>19</sup> In an effort to make gains on the national level the Whigs, a perpetual minority party, looked outside of its ideological statesmen and sought out candidates who they believed could win national support. In 1840 the Whigs passed over Clay for nomination and returned to William Henry Harrison, the Whig candidate of 1836 who was defeated by Martin Van Buren. Clay had clashed with Anti-masons, Democrats, and anti-slavery men, all of which were groups which the Whigs sought to court in the election.<sup>20</sup> The Whigs did not adopt a party platform in 1840 in an attempt to allow local party organizations and candidates the greatest amount of flexibility in their campaigns.<sup>21</sup> This concept of running presidential candidates with strong national appeal as opposed to candidates who were strong adherents to the Whig ideology would be repeated by the Whigs throughout their short tenure as the nation’s second political

---

<sup>17</sup> Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship*, 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



party. After Clay was defeated by James K. Polk in 1844 the Whigs would turn to two generals who rose to prominence during the Mexican-American War. Zachary Taylor and Winfield Scott would represent the Whig party in the 1848 and 1852 respectively, with the former winning and the later being soundly defeated.

### *How We Remember*

Before studying how Clay and Scott are remembered it is important to look at what is memory and what it means. One of the leading experts on the field of memory is Barry Schwartz. While the majority of his work focuses on Abraham Lincoln, the basis for his arguments helps create a frame work for studying Clay and Scott. In an article titled “Collective Memory and History: How Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial Equality,” Schwartz discussed the differences between history and memory. He writes, “History is objectively conceived, sustained by evidence, and unaffected by the social context in which its practitioners work. In contrast, collective memory, the way ordinary people conceive the past, reflects the concerns of the present.”<sup>22</sup> Geoff Cubitt reaches a similar conclusion in his book, *History and Memory*, in which he writes that “it is not the past that produces the present, but...the present that produces the past.”<sup>23</sup> Collective memory offers more than a mere glimpse into the past. It is affected by the current situation in which the writer is living in. This shows that memory is not static, but rather an ever changing notion which can be adapted to the circumstances. Time changes the way we look at historical figures. Schwartz writes that “Lincoln did not become a complete national idol until the period in the twentieth century that began with Theodore

---

<sup>22</sup> Barry Schwartz, “Collective Memory and History: How Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial Equality,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 40.

<sup>23</sup> Geoff Cubitt, *History and Memory* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007), 27.

Roosevelt's presidency and ended with Warren Harding's."<sup>24</sup> America's image of Lincoln formed as the country needed. His most favorable attributes were brought to the forefront to serve the people who were perpetuating Lincoln's memory. Schwartz demonstrates this by analyzing the way the image of Lincoln changed. In *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, Schwartz writes that:

"America's knowledge of Abraham Lincoln is preserved by the systematic recording and explaining of his experiences and accomplishments but the elements of Lincoln's life story are evaluated differently: some of his accomplishments, such as his work as a railroad lawyer, are ignored or treated indifferently; others, such as his decisions to wage war and abolish slavery, are commemorated, that is, invested with extraordinary moral significance and assigned a distinct place in society's conception of him."<sup>25</sup>

What people choose to remember, what attributes of a person they choose to perpetuate in favor of others, is extremely important because it demonstrates how people are attempting to remember someone in the present. Choosing to remember certain aspects of Lincoln does not change who Lincoln was, it only changes how people want others to evaluate him. Schwartz discusses how Lincoln became a symbol for racial equality, something for which he was not always a symbol. He finds that the African American commemorative networks which remember Lincoln do not distort history, but rather they evaluate history by identifying and magnifying the morally significant events from Lincoln's historical chronicle.<sup>26</sup> The deeds of Lincoln did not change from the time of his death until the time he became a symbol for racial equality. What did change was the United States. African Americans needed a symbol to rally support for their cause and they saw Lincoln as the man for that job. The people remembering Lincoln as a symbol for racial equality were speaking for the current needs of the country, not the country in

---

<sup>24</sup> Barry Schwartz, "Iconography and Collective Memory: Lincoln's Image and the American Mind," *The Sociological Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 301.

<sup>25</sup> Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 12.

<sup>26</sup> Schwartz, *Collective Memory and History*, 491.

which Lincoln lived. Keeping these theories in mind, I now turn to Clay and Scott and investigate how they are remembered.

*A Man of the Union and Master Politician*

Clay died on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1852 in Washington, D.C., the sight of his many triumph in Congress, and in the ensuing days, weeks, and months he would be publically remembered and eulogized in newspapers and sermons across the country. In the following days and months to follow Clay was eulogized in the press through formal eulogies, editorials, and sermons from the pulpit. Two themes are repeatedly stressed by Clay's admirers. The first theme is his ardent patriotism, meaning his ability to put the country as whole first above any other affiliation, be it his political affiliation as a member of the Whig Party or his regional affiliation as a Southerner represent Kentucky in the United States Congress. The second common theme is Clay's masterful ability as a politician. The two themes are often intertwined when people write or speak of the memory of Clay. For the purpose of this study I will discuss the two themes together since they treated as such by the authors of the literature remembering Clay.

On the day following Clay's death the *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel* wrote of Clay that "He who is proud to call himself an American, has, from his earliest childhood, regarded Henry Clay as one of the foremost men of the age—of whom any country might be proud—grand in his aspirations, great-hearted in his feelings, and thoroughly National in all of his sentiments, he loomed up like some giant among those around him."<sup>27</sup> Amidst the overall praise of Clay as the premier politicians was a specific emphasis on his ability to focus on national interests above sectional interests at a time where sectional issues, particularly the question of slavery and the new territories acquired after the Mexican-American War. The desire to admire Clay for his lack of sectionalism is further demonstrated in the July 23, 1852 edition of the *Natchez Courier* which

---

<sup>27</sup> "Death of Henry Clay," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, June 30, 1852.

wrote of Clay that “There were in his life a thousand deeds that should have called forth from them, as American citizens, admiration, reverence, applause and gratitude.”<sup>28</sup> Clay’s death came just over two years following the Compromise of 1850, a compromise which was drafted by Clay, which was seen as the time as saving the Union. The newspaper writers who wrote about his death in 1852 did not know that the compromise brokered by Clay would not in fact save the Union, but rather it would only delay its division for ten years. To them, Clay was seen as the savior of the Union. Thus they sought to highlight the fact that he rose above sectional lines and was able to bring the country together to find an amicable solution to issues of the day.

In their remembrance of Clay, newspapers also emphasized his ability to rise above party politics. In the 1850s party affiliation was an extreme divisive factor in American life. People identified themselves with their party affiliation. Newspapers were strongly biased based on party lines. Clay’s perceived ability to overcome party lines in favor of the welfare of the country was seen as akin to his ability to overcome sectional issues. In an editorial which made no reference to his membership in the Whig Party, the July 1, 1852 edition of the *Missouri Courier* wrote of Clay, that “his fame and greatness belong to the American people, and they will, without distinction of party, unite in doing honor to his memory.”<sup>29</sup>

In July, shortly following Clay’s death the Rev. Geo. A. Leakin of the Trinity Church in Baltimore, Maryland delivered a sermon titled *A Sermon on the Death of Henry Clay*. In his eulogy, Leakin touched on Clay’s stature as a great American politician, one who was able to rise above the bonds of party affiliation. Leakin remarked that “It would obviously be improper on this occasion to enter upon the political field, and praise Mr. Clay as a member of a party. No:

---

<sup>28</sup> Editorial, *Natchez Courier*, July 23, 1852.

<sup>29</sup> “Death of Henry Clay,” *Missouri Courier*, July 1, 1852.

it is as a great American Statesman that he should be remembered.”<sup>30</sup> Leakin saw Clay as being an American first and foremost, not as a Whig. Leakin continued in his sermon to praise Clay as the embodiment of a noble American politician, stating that Clay “was the embodiment of American character: and at the mention of his name, we see his tall form standing by the flag of his country and advocating its principles.”<sup>31</sup> Leakin portrays Clay as selfless in his actions in Congress, serving his country and not only a section of it. Leakin furthers his argument by commenting on Clay’s “devotion to his country; that his life was an inward struggle to advance its interests; and that such a life, exhorting the incessant labor of thought, was more illustrious than achievements which come merely from external actions.”<sup>32</sup> The image of Clay that was remembered and praised by Leakin was that of a selfless man who devoted his life to his country.

Leakin’s sermon honoring Clay is important because it shows that many believed that Clay had saved the country from war. Leakin was from Maryland, a northern state that still had slavery. In the event of a civil war Maryland would be placed in an incredibly tough decision and the state could be torn apart. Leakin praised Clay because, at the time, Clay’s actions had saved not only the Union but Maryland as well.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1852 The Rev. Joseph I. Elsegood of the Trinity Church in Easton, Pennsylvania delivered a sermon titled *Death of Henry Clay*, in which Elsegood mourns the loss of Clay by describing him as a man who was the ideal American statesman. Elsegood states that with Clay’s death “the mightiest of the mighty of our land has fallen...and we are solicited by a nation’s grief.”<sup>33</sup> Elsegood believes that the loss of Clay marks the loss of truly great man. He

---

<sup>30</sup> George Armistead Leakin, *A Sermon on the Death of Henry Clay* (Baltimore,: A. P. Burt, 1852), 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Isaac Elsegood, *Death of Henry Clay* (Easton, Pa., Davis,: printer, 1852), 5-6.

continues in his sermon to immortalize the memory of Clay as a virtuous and dedicated civil servant. Elsegood preaches:

“We, indeed, go not too far, when we say that at the name of Henry Clay everything interesting to virtue, to freedom, and also to humanity, rises at once, with a marked freshness, to our recollection. To illuminate the minds of his fellow citizens, to imbue them with the necessary fact of their own significance, to nurse them into real greatness among the nations of the earth, to show them the vast extent of happiness which lay truly within their reach, to teach them to dare, to acquire, and then, to rightly bear and improve success—these are the noble ends for which he lived, and after which he faithfully, diligently, unremittingly labored. And it is his singular success, in this vast accumulation of difficult services, that has woven a diadem of beauty for his brow such as scarcely adorned the brow of another, either ancient or modern.”<sup>34</sup>

To Elsegood, Clay embodied all of the good traits that an American could embody. He is remembering Clay as the master politician, unmatched by his contemporaries and rivaling the political masters of history. Elsegood continues his praise of Clay in his sermon remarking of Clay that “He was, emphatically, our country’s greatest, noblest, most admired son” who was “rivalled by few, and to be surpassed by none.”<sup>35</sup> Elsegood’s sermon goes beyond merely praising Clay and the accomplishments of his life. He apotheosizes Clay, preaching that he should be remembered as the foremost American politician who served as a god among men during his time in the public sphere.

One of the most praise filled eulogies for Clay, in which Clay is described as a patriot and a man above party, was delivered by Theodore Frelinghuysen on July 13, 1852 and subsequently was published in the *New York Times*. Frelinghuysen was the Whig Party’s vice presidential candidate during Clay’s failed attempt for the nation’s highest office in 1844. Frelinghuysen leaves little doubt in how he believes Clay’s life as a politician should be remembered. He boldly states that Clay “was the greatest statesman of his age. None held such sway over the American

---

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

mind; and no one better deserved the distinction.”<sup>36</sup> Frelinghuysen continued in his remembrance of Clay by highlighting his service for the country as a whole, stating that Clay “was animated by pure motives, to seek her best welfare and advance her true glory.”<sup>37</sup> Frelinghuysen is speaking of Clay as a patriot who lived to serve his country. He is remembering as a man who overcame the constraints of section and party. Frelinghuysen continues his eulogy of Clay by touching on how he believes Clay will and should be remembered. He states that “the popularity of Henry Clay could not die. My friends it will not die. It is written in our history and on our hearts. If we forget him, where shall we find another patriot among the departed to remember? It is long said American had but one Washington—and with like truth we may say, she has but one Clay.”<sup>38</sup> Frelinghuysen raises Clay to an exalted status. While not quite comparing him to George Washington Frelinghuysen attempts to have the country remember him in the same light, as a unique individual who sacrificed himself for the betterment of the country.

While the words which Frelinghuysen uses to eulogize Clay offer insight into how he chooses to remember Clay, the words he excludes from his eulogy are also worth noting. Frelinghuysen does not reference Clay’s repeated attempts to win the Presidency and thus his repeated failures. Instead he chooses to remember Clay’s achievements, including the American System, and the compromises he orchestrated while a member of Congress. In fact, the only mention of the Presidency is the often quoted line of Clay, “I had rather be right, than be President.”<sup>39</sup> By using this quote Frelinghuysen is able to portray Clay’s failure as a virtue. He allows Clay to be remembered as a man who would not sacrifice his ideals and beliefs in order to achieve personal glory.

---

<sup>36</sup> Eulogy Delivered by Hon. Theodore Frelinghuysen, at Newark, *New York Times*, July 14, 1852.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Another prominent Whig to deliver a eulogy of Clay was John Crittenden, who described Clay as a leader who saved the country through his work in Congress. Crittenden at the time was serving as Attorney General for President Fillmore, and who served with Clay in the United States Senate as fellow Senator from Kentucky. In his eulogy delivered in September, 1852 in Louisville, Kentucky, Crittenden followed the mold of Frelinghuysen. Crittenden commented on Clay's ability and service as a politician. He spoke of Clay's past actions and how they will continue to influence the nation, of how "For nearly half a century he was an informing spirit, a brilliant and heroic figure in our political sphere, marshaling our country in the way she ought to go. The 'bright track of his fiery car,' may be traced through the whose space over which, in his day, his country and his Government have passed in the way of his renown. It will still point the way to future greatness and renown."<sup>40</sup> Crittenden highlights Clay's ability as a politician as one of his foremost attributes. He portrays Clay as the guiding hand behind the government; helping led the country through peril and onto the right path. Crittenden continues his eulogy by placing Clay in a position of honor alongside the renowned ancient politicians, similar to the way Rev. Elsegood did in his sermon on Clay. Crittenden boasted of Clay's intellect and rhetoric, "I doubt whether the eloquence of Demosthenes or Cicero ever exercised a greater influence over the minds and passions of the people of Athens and Rome, than did Mr. Clay's over the minds and passions of the people of the United States."<sup>41</sup> Crittenden, in comparing Clay to Demosthenes and Cicero, is placing Clay in terms that the people can understand. By placing him in the company of these noted orators he is saying that Clay should be remembered as they are, and as they were the great orators of the Ancient world, Clay is there counterpart in modernity.

---

<sup>40</sup>Mr. Crittenden's Eulogy on Henry Clay, *New York Times*, October 5, 1852.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



Crittenden also spoke of Clay's immense patriotism and that his "object in desiring office was to serve his country" and to that he "made all other conditions subservient."<sup>42</sup> Here again Clay is seen as the upmost patriot and servant of his country. Crittenden further extols the depths of Clay's patriotism and devotion to his country later in his eulogy.

"The great objects of his public life were to preserve and strengthen the Union, to maintain the Constitution and laws of the United States, to cherish industry, to protect labor, and facilitate by all proper national improvements, the communication between all the parts of our widely extended country. This was his American System of policy. With inflexible patriotism he pursued and advocated it to his end. He was every inch an American. His heart and all that there was of him, were devoted to his country, to its liberty, and its free institutions. He inherited the spirit of the revolution, in the midst of which he was born; and the love of liberty and the pride of freedom were in him principles of action."<sup>43</sup>

The image portrayed by Crittenden is of a man who devoted every aspect of his life in serving his country. He is demonstrating that Clay should be remembered as the ideal politician, one who was willing to sacrifice for his country. Like Frelinghuysen, Crittenden does not mention Clay's ambitions to become President, nor does he mention his three failed attempts in national elections and the other attempts which were thwarted at the conventions. Instead, Crittenden is outlining a man who unmatched in the political arena. As it was with Frelinghuysen, the fact that he never achieved his goal of becoming President is inconsequential as it does not take away from Clay's prolific life and accomplishments.

In August, 1852 B.F. Moore delivered an address in Weldon, North Carolina titled *Life, Character and Public Services of Henry Clay* in which Moore discusses Clay in idealistic terms, beginning with Clay's rise into the public sphere despite emerging from modest beginnings. Moore writes of Clay's ascent that "No man has arisen, no man can, at anytime, arise by the force of his unaided exertions from so humble a origin to a destiny so exalted as those which

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

begun and finished the career of Mr. Clay without possessing more than an ordinary share of intensity of the passion of our species.”<sup>44</sup> Moore spends a great deal of time discussing Clay’s patriotism and the impact it played in his role as a politician, stating that “the deep sincerity of his convictions, the lucid order of their connection, and the fervor of his patriotism lie at the foundation of his eloquence.”<sup>45</sup> Moore uses the life of Clay to help explain why he was such an able politician. He portrays Clay as unique, in that he possessed qualities that other men do not which allowed him to rise to a place of such prominence in American society.

Moore saw Clay as a noble patriot and his crowning achievement was his ability to save the Union from dissolution. The patriot that Moore wishes to remember “Sacrificed his life for to avert that awful disaster.”<sup>46</sup> When discussing the compromise of 1820, which passed in part due to the influence of Clay, Moore writes that Clay “so skillfully extricated the nation from its danger. He came to the rescue and it was well understood at the time that he came to the rescue of the Union.”<sup>47</sup> In discussing the Compromise of 1850 Moore states that Clay:

“with the weight of near fourscore years in his head, again spread out his arms over his beloved land, to shield it from the dangers which came upon it from the North and from the South, and threatened it with violence and destruction. And it was with amazement and awe that we saw him standing by the altar of his country, and, as the perils increased, gathering strength and energy, till he seemed impassioned and inspired genius of the constitution of the Union, commissioned by the blood of the past and the hopes of the future, to defend them, or, dying by their side, and covered with their pall, to fill them with a common grave. Heaven favored his labors, and he saw the salvation of his country. He saw it and died.”<sup>48</sup>

The language used by Moore to describe Clay’s actions during the Compromise of 1850 goes beyond praise and admiration. Despite the fact that compromise bills passed through Congress as

---

<sup>44</sup> B.F. Moore, *Life, Character and Public Services of Henry Clay* (Raleigh, NC., Southern Weekley Post, printer, 1853), 35.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 33

separate bills and not as one bill, as intended and desired by Clay, Moore paints a picture where Clay single handedly acted as the savior of the Union, as though he went to war against the forces which sought to destroy the nation. Moore depicts a man who lived for his country and once his work was done, once he had served his country at its most perilous time, he died as a champion after defend the nation he so loved and cherished. In reality, Clay did not die until nearly two years after the Compromise of 1850. However the image of Clay which Moore chooses to remember and perpetuate is that of man favored by the heavens and selfless in his deeds. Moore, Leakin, and Elsegood all choose to remember Clay as “The Great Compromiser” and as a loyal American above all else. The highlight the belief that Clay had redirected a country that was on the path to destruction.

#### *Remembering Presidential Defeat*

One of the most notable aspects of Henry Clay’s life was his desire and repeated failures to become President of the United States. The way in which his defeats have been remembered and interpreted, both by contemporaries of Clay and those looking back at Clay’s life, offer insight into how the failures affect the overall memory of the man.

Horace Greeley, the famed editor of the New York Tribune discusses Clay and his Presidential defeats in his autobiography which was published in 1872. Greeley was a supporter of Clay despite the fact that Greeley was northerner opposed slavery and Clay was a southerner and a lifelong slave holder. Greeley stated in his autobiography “I profoundly loved Henry Clay.”<sup>49</sup> In addition to admiring and supporting Clay Greeley worked for him during the campaign in 1844, authoring daily and weekly campaign journals.<sup>50</sup> In discussing Clay’s defeat in 1844 Greeley remarked that “I think I do not err in stating that thousands supported Mr. Polk

---

<sup>49</sup> Horace Greeley, *The Autobiography of Horace Greeley or Recollections of a Busy Life to Which Are Added Miscellaneous Essays and Paper* (New York: E.B. Treat, 1872), 161.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

who intended only to maintain their standing in the Democratic Party, while they neither expected nor wished to defeat Mr. Clay's election."<sup>51</sup> Greeley wrote of how he mourned Clay's defeat in 1844 and expressed a deep love for Clay.<sup>52</sup> Greeley attempts to qualify Clay's defeat. His remarks in regards to the 1844 election results absolve Clay of blame and further states that he was the favored candidate. Greeley excuses Clay's defeat as a mistake. Greeley further defends Clay by writing that "Mr. Clay failed to be chosen President in 1844, in part because he tried to reconcile to his support those whose views on the Texas question conflicted with his."<sup>53</sup> Greeley argues that Clay's unwillingness to compromise his values and his desire to engage in political discourse with his opponents cost him the presidency. Thus, while Clay lost he retained his principles.

This sense of sadness towards Clay's defeat in 1844 is also evident in Calvin Colton's *The Life and Times of Henry Clay* which was published in 1846. Colton, who had been summoned by Clay to come to his Ashland estate to serve as his official biographer, writes that "[most] of those who voted for Mr. Polk, were not only disappointed, but vast multitudes of them were sincerely sorry, as they expected and desired the success of Mr. Clay."<sup>54</sup> As with Greeley Colton is of the opinion that Clay lost the 1844 election because he was a Whig candidate, forced to go against the larger Democratic Party, and not because the country did not desire Clay as President. Colton is of the opinion that the country truly mourned the Clay's defeat as an unexpected result.

Others looking back at Clay's presidential bids demonstrate a degree of sorrow at Clay's defeat. Frederick W. Seward, son of the Whig politician and Secretary of State under Lincoln

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>54</sup> Calvin Colton, *The Life and Times of Henry Clay*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (New York: A.S. Barnes Co., 1846), 425.

William H. Seward, describes his demeanor towards the 1844 election. He writes that his “boyish enthusiasm was all fiery for Henry Clay, ‘Harry of the West’ as the Whig Presidential Candidate” and then following the election Seward notes his “disappointment at his failure to receive the nomination.”<sup>55</sup> Another account of disappointment towards Clay’s defeat comes from the diary of President Rutherford B. Hayes. Hayes wrote on November 9, 1844 that “The result of the Presidential election has disappointed me greatly. I would start in the world without a penny if by my sacrifice Clay could be chosen President. Not that the difference to the country is likely to be great, in my opinion, but then to think so good and great a man should be defeated.”<sup>56</sup> Neither of these sources attempts to place any blame for the defeat on Clay, and neither Seward nor Hayes seemed to have experienced a change in opinion of the character and greatness of Clay after his defeats.

Clay’s death came at a time when the country was split between north and south over the issue of slavery. Many believed that the country was headed toward civil war until the Compromise of 1850. Clay was seen as the savior of the Union for orchestrating the compromise. That is why those memorializing Clay placed a heavy emphasis on his ability to overcome sectionalism and to serve the nation as a whole. Many clergymen delivered eulogies after Clay’s death in which they praised his rejection of sectionalism because his rejection of sectionalism had averted the country from war. Clay also preserved slavery with the Compromise of 1850. Those in the south would praise Clay because he preserved their way of life. While many on the north despised the Compromise of 1850 for increasing the power of the Fugitive Slave Law, northerners could still praise the man who devoted his life to public service.

---

<sup>55</sup> Frederick W. Seward, *Reminiscences of A War-Time Statesman and Diplomat, 1830-1915*, (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 44.

<sup>56</sup> *Diary and Letters of Rutherford B. Hayes*, ed. Charles Richard Williams (Columbus: Ohio State Archeological and Historical Society, 1922), 1:161.

Clay's presidential defeats were defended because he was seen as a virtuous man. As a defender of the Union he was praised before 1861 for saving the Union. After the Civil War, as sectional conflict subsided, Clay's unionism was again seen as a great quality.

### *Winfield Scott*

Winfield Scott's death on May 29, 1866 was a cause for national mourning. John T. Hoffman, mayor of New York City requested to the councilmen that they take "action as may be deemed appropriate" while the New York City Board of Aldermen encouraged the business owners of the city to close their establishments on the day of Scott's funeral.<sup>57</sup> Initial commentaries on Scott's death, such as the published letter by Mayor Hoffman refer to Scott as "so distinguished a soldier, and so noble a patriot."<sup>58</sup> Statements such as these are expected in short responses to Scott's death considering the fact that Scott served in the United States Army for over fifty years, twenty of which were spent as the commanding General. But to truly understand how Scott was remembered one must turn to more thorough accounts of his life.

One aspect of Scott's nomination for the Whig Party nomination that is prevalent in the literature on him is that he was chosen for his fame as a soldier. Scott would not be the first man nominated by the Whig Party who was chosen for possessing ability in a venue outside of politics. As I noted previously, both Harrison and Taylor were selected to run for President because it was believed that their military fame would allow them to gain votes from non Whigs. Senator Truman Smith captured the mindset of many Whigs when he stated in May, 1852 before the Whig national convention that "We are a minority party and can not succeed unless we have a candidate who can command more votes than the party can give him. Every consideration

---

<sup>57</sup> "Winfield Scott," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1866

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

which justified us in going for Taylor in 48 requires that we should go for Scott now.”<sup>59</sup> Smith was the not the only one who held these beliefs. In the lead up to the Whig national convention the *North American and United States Gazette* in Philadelphia published an editorial about Scott. The editorial does not mention Scott’s political views, nor does it mention why Scott should be selected in favor of any of the other candidates for the nomination. Instead the article appeals to Scott’s military record. The editorial states that Scott’s “fame as a General...rests upon a broader basis, and has more claim upon the gratitude and admiration of his countrymen than that of any American soldier, living or dead, whose brilliant deeds of arms have adorned our military annals during the present century.”<sup>60</sup> This editorial believes Scott’s earned the nomination through his deeds in battle in Canada and Mexico.

In the months and days leading up to the presidential election Whig supporters looked to further associate Scott with his military achievement. An editorial in *The Cleveland Herald* starts with stating that “Gen. Winfield Scott is in the Field as the Peoples’ Candidate for President.”<sup>61</sup> By using military terminology, stating that Scott is “in the Field,” Scott’s supporters were hoping to convince people that Scott would be successful as President just as he had been successful as a General. The editorial continued by stating that he is “devoted to his country...whose blood has flowed in its battle fields; and whose skill and bravery has led its armies to victory and glory.”<sup>62</sup> Statements such as these were intended to illicit feelings of victory when the name Winfield Scott was mentioned. In addition, an editorial in the *Hartford Daily Courant* titled “Why Do You Vote For Winfield Scott” the first sentence is, “Because, he has performed many great services

---

<sup>59</sup> Qtd. in Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, 673.

<sup>60</sup> “Gen. Winfield Scott,” *North American and United States Gazette*, March 31, 1852.

<sup>61</sup> “Our Banner Still Floats,” *Cleveland Herald*, June 25, 1852.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

for his country.”<sup>63</sup> In another article the published the day before the presidential election Scott is described as being “devoted to his country’s service; in the face of obstacles the most powerful and often of dangers the most appalling—General Scott has been uniformly successful.”<sup>64</sup> The article continues by denouncing Scott’s opponents who attack his lack of political experience, stating that “It is, therefore, idle to speak of his want of statesmanship, when he possesses all those traits that constitute the statesman, and needs but the opportunity for their development.”<sup>65</sup>

The article “The Presidency,” which appeared in the May, 1852 issue of *The American Whig Review* offers a particular opinion of Scott and how he was viewed as a potential presidential candidate in the upcoming election. While this article does reflect on the memory of Scott it does reflect the way he in which his contemporaries assessed his political ability. This critique of Scott will be useful when analyzing the way Scott eulogizers and remembers reconcile his political career with his accomplishments on the battlefield. At the time the article was published there were three main competitors for the Whig nomination: Scott, Daniel Webster, and President Millard Fillmore. The author, who was not listed with the article, questions Scott’s ability to lead the country’s highest civilian office writing, “there is no military man in the world whom we would rather see President than General Scott; but we entertain no doubt the gallant General himself would agree in the opinion, that the training and experience of the statesman form the proper preparatory discipline for high civil service.”<sup>66</sup> The author cites Scott’s lack of civil service experience as a reason to withhold support. The fact that the author does not completely attack Scott’s credentials has more to do with the fact that the journal is a

---

<sup>63</sup> “Why Do You Vote For Winfield Scott,” *Hartford Daily Courant*, August 25, 1852.

<sup>64</sup> “Winfield Scott,” *Hartford Daily Courant*, November 1, 1852.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> “The Presidency,” *The American Whig Review (1850-1852)* 9, no. 5 (1852): 385.



pro-Whig journal, and it does not want to alienate from party members a man who could still be chosen to represent the party the following November.

When the author discusses Scott's candidacy he makes several references to Andrew Jackson, the man whose actions as President led to the formation of the Whig party. The author innocuously references Jackson when discussing Scott's military ability, stating that Scott was a superior military strategist.<sup>67</sup> The author then goes on to mention Jackson when discussing the negative effects of military Presidents. The author writes that "with the exception of Washington, it cannot be said that the experience of the country is favorable to the selection of military Presidents. We appeal to the intelligent and patriotic Democrats, whether; they regard the administration of General Jackson as a model for a constitutional Democratic Presidency."<sup>68</sup> The author could have mentioned Harrison or Taylor when discussing the adverse effects of military Presidents, but they were Whigs. Instead the author chose Jackson, the nemesis of the Whigs. But invoking the name of Jackson he attempted to frighten potential Scott supporters by equating Scott with Jackson.

It is clear that Scott was not a masterful politician. His career as an officer in the United States Army precluded him from having a strong political voice. While it is true that Scott had some experience with politics and statesmanship while a soldier, including negotiating treaties and serving briefly as the military Governor of Mexico City after the Mexican-American war, these experiences are not on par with handling the responsibilities of the nation's chief executive. However, to many Whigs this was considered a positive. The Whigs needed to attract non-Whigs during the election and by choosing a military hero many believed that they could secure the necessary votes as they had done in previous elections. Thus, the supporters of Scott ignore his

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 386.

lack of experience and focused on his military records. They used military terminology to focus people on that aspect of Scott life, to force people to believe that Scott's success on the battlefields would naturally translate to success in the White House. To Scott supporters, his military record was a tool to make the election about the man, not about politics or political experience.

As Scott's military record provided an opportunity for his supporters to turn the focus of the election away from politics, it also provided an opportunity for his opponents to attack him. While it is natural that Democrats would attack Scott's experience, Whigs also did so. As I outline in "The Presidency" article, Whigs who preferred Webster or Fillmore turned Scott's military experience into a reason he should not receive the party's nomination. Scott's military record was never questioned nor was his accomplishments in battle ever minimized. However, the merit of such accomplishment in relation to the presidency was debated. Proponents of Scott saw his military record as a rallying point to win the support of the country at large. To them it was considered a strength that could be fully exploited. While his opponents, using the same facts, saw it as a weakness that also needed to be exploit, albeit for different reasons.

As it was with Clay, a common theme in accounts of Scott's life is to dismiss his political endeavors as inconsequential. In an article commemorating Scott's life published on June 2, 1866, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* of San Francisco makes scant reference to the election of 1852, stating only that "the triumphant General was an unsuccessful candidate against Gen. Pierce for the Presidency."<sup>69</sup> In a 1910 address titled *Winfield Scott-A Great Soldier with a Great Heart* delivered by General H.B. Carrington, Scott's presidential candidacy is only slightly touched on. Carrington goes slightly beyond merely acknowledging that Scott ran, adding that he "could

---

<sup>69</sup> "Death of Winfield Scott," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, June 2, 1866.

have prevented the Civil War if supported.”<sup>70</sup> Besides this bold and unfounded statement the remainder of the address is devoted to Scott’s military achievements.

Similar to what happened with Clay, many of the publications that chose to discuss Scott’s political career deflect the blame for the defeat away from Scott, choosing instead to place the onus for defeat in the Whig Party or on other members of it. In an article published in *The New York Times* the day after Scott’s death, the presidential election was seen as a doomed venture from the beginning. The author writes that “The failure to elect Scott to the Presidency under the circumstances which attended the Whig Convention was to the discerning eye a foregone conclusion.”<sup>71</sup> The author continues his analysis, offering the explanation that “the officious and over-zealous declaration of the convention in favor of the pro-slavery measures, known as the Compromise of 1850, disintegrated the Whig Party; and it went into the contest disabled and undisciplined, having no rallying point other than the single name of Scott.”<sup>72</sup> This article shows Scott as being abandoned by his party, a man who could not hope for victory when the party which supported him was beginning to crumble. “The Whig Party was demoralized by the want of moral courage in its leaders, and even the splendid achievements and solid popularity of Scott could not make up for the disorder, confusion and desertion which attended the mal-administration of the party. To those who look deeper than the surface of things it is apparent that the political strength of Scott was far greater than it was represented to be by the electoral vote.” According to the article, in 1852 Scott the man was not defeated, but rather it was the Whig party as a whole that lost.

---

<sup>70</sup> H.B. Carrington, *Winfield Scott: A Great Soldier with a Great Heart* (Boston, 1910), 1.

<sup>71</sup> “Death of Lieut-Gen. Scott,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 1866.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

Horace Greeley shared the opinion that the Whig Party was in disarray heading into the 1852 election and that Scott had little chance of success. In his autobiography Greeley describes the political situation the Whig Party faced. Greeley writes:

“The friends of Fillmore and Webster, though differing as to candidates, were a unit as to platform, and they framed one which pledged the party unequivocally to the support and maintenance of the Compromise of 1850. General Scott made haste to plant himself squarely on this platform, which was in undoubted accordance with his own prepossessions. He thus alienated thousands of Anti-Slavery Whigs whose detestation of the new and stringent Fugitive Slave Law was uncontrollable; while Conservative or “Silver Gray” Whig, would not support him because the great body of Anti-Slavery Whigs did, and because they foresaw that counselors must necessarily be chosen in good part from among them.”<sup>73</sup>

Greeley helped to explain the volatile political situation facing Scott in the 1852 election. This assessment carries extra weight because while he did support Scott in 1852 he did so reluctantly. Writing in February, 1851, after concluding that Scott was the only viable candidate if the Whigs hoped to retain the White House, Greeley stated, “I suppose we must run Scott for President, and I hate it.”<sup>74</sup> Greeley’s statements demonstrated that even people whom were not die hard supports of Scott believed that the state of the Whig Party in 1852 played a major role in determining the outcome.

Another method used to minimize the effect presidential defeat would have on Scott’s memory was to present facts that do not fully represent the results of the election of 1852. In *Death of Lieut.-Gen. Scott*, the author publishes the popular vote results from the general election.<sup>75</sup> The results of the popular votes show Scott receiving approximately forty four percent of the vote, falling short to Pierce by slightly more than 200,000 votes. While these results are accurate they do not truly demonstrate the degree to which Scott was defeated in the election. To do this the article would have to carry the results of the Electoral College, which it does not. The

---

<sup>73</sup> Horace Greeley, *The Autobiography of Horace Greeley*, 279.

<sup>74</sup> Qtd from Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 661.

<sup>75</sup> “Death of Lieut-Gen. Scott,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 1866.

article does not mention that Scott received only 42 electoral votes to Pierce's 254. It does not state that Scott carried only four of the thirty one states in 1852. The article ignores the fact that Scott lost his home state of Virginia and his adopted state, New Jersey. Scott even lost Scott County, VA which in 1814 was named in his honor.<sup>76</sup> The article also notes that Scott received more popular votes than any other Whig candidate including the two previous Whig presidential candidates, Clay and Taylor. For obvious reasons this statement, while true, is misleading as does not factor in the growing size of the country's population. It ignore the fact that based on percentage of popular votes received, Scott fell behind both Clay and Taylor who received 48.1% and 47.3% of the popular vote respectively. Nevertheless the article concludes that "Scott received all the support that the Whig Party was then able to give, and undoubtedly much on his own account which would not have been rendered to another candidate."<sup>77</sup> These statements which portray Scott as a man who far exceeded any reasonable expectations runs counter to what historians have observed. When discussing the election of 1852 in his 1937 book *Winfield Scott, The Soldier and the Man*, Charles Winslow Elliot writes that "It was the worst defeat ever sustained by the party."<sup>78</sup> This assessment contrasts with the significantly with the newspaper accounts of Scott's political career.

Other reactions to Scott's defeat attempted to place the blame for defeat on other Whigs. *The Baltimore Sun* wrote on the day following the election that "The great misfortune of Scott was, that he was brought out and petted by the Seward clique. The people feared that, if elected, he would be too much under the influence of that dangerous faction."<sup>79</sup> This article blames Seward for the defeat, stating that the people withheld votes from Scott not because they did not

---

<sup>76</sup> Allan Peskin, *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003), 214.

<sup>77</sup> "Death of Lieut-Gen. Scott," *The New York Times*, May 30, 1866.

<sup>78</sup> Charles Winslow Elliot, *Winfield Scott, the Soldier and the Man* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), 645.

<sup>79</sup> "Result of the Presidential Election," *Baltimore Sun*, November 5, 1852.

like him or because they desired to Pierce as President, but rather because they feared the ramifications of having a man supported by Seward as president. This article was not the only one to insinuate that the people loved Scott and that other causes played a role in the election. The article after his death in *The New York Times* stated that “When the political contest of 1852 was over, there was an unsatisfied feeling in the nation toward Gen. Scott. Political opponents felt it as well as friends. A great party had triumphed. Another had been defeated. But the nation felt that the merits and services of Scott ought not to depend for their reward on the success or defeat of either.”<sup>80</sup> This statement attempts to show that the country voted against the Whig party, not against their beloved general. This same sentiment was used by supporters of Clay, notably Horace Greeley, when discussing his defeat to Polk in 1844.

In addition to shielding Scott from any blame for defeat some publications attempted to soften the blow of his defeat. *The New York Times* added a positive spin to the election stating that after the election, “Congress undertook to carry out the national wishes in regard to the conqueror of Mexico. It was proposed and adopted in Congress to prefer upon Scott the brevet rank of Lieutenant- General.”<sup>81</sup> This statement came directly after the discussion of his defeat in the presidential election. By writing this, the author is demonstrating that even though he was defeated, Scott was so greatly respected that he was elevated to the highest military rank possibly.

Despite the favorable portrayal in newspapers, contemporary observers did not all view Scott’s political career in the same bright light. Future President Rutherford B. Hayes supported Scott, though not with quite the same enthusiasm with which he supported Clay, writes in his

---

<sup>80</sup> “Death of Lieut-Gen. Scott,” *The New York Times*, May 30, 1866.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

diary on April 9, 1851 of Scott, “He’ll do for President.”<sup>82</sup> Despite his support, which was in large part due to his affiliation with the Whig Party, Hayes was extremely critical of Scott after the election. On November 3, 1852 Hayes recorded in his diary, “My candidate, General Scott, is defeated by the most overwhelming vote ever recorded in this country. A good man, a kind man, a brave man, a true patriot, but an exceedingly vain, weak man in many points. General Scott no doubt deserves defeat if weakness and undue anxiety to be elected can be said to serve such treatment.”<sup>83</sup> Hayes’s account of the election of 1852 is delivered in quite a different tone than newspapers. He does not attempt to reconcile the defeat in a better light. Nor does he attempt to pass the blame on to the Whig Party for creating a situation in which failure was inevitable. However, his remarks are similar to remarks made about Clay in that they appeal to Scott as a person and not only as a presidential candidate. While these remarks are only the remarks of one man, they do offer insight into the attitude of Whigs after Scott’s defeat. Hayes’ remarks were not written for the public to view.

The remarks written by Hayes are closer to what historians would write of Scott’s presidential attempt. In a biographical account *Leading American Soldiers*, which is otherwise filled with praise, R.M. Johnston vilifies Scott as a politician. He writes, “Not without some heart burning and unseemly exhibitions of petty vanity he secured the Whig nomination for the presidency...but in the ensuing election, largely owing to his own blunders, he was overwhelmingly defeated by Franklin Pierce.”<sup>84</sup> Johnston’s evaluation of Scott as a presidential candidate is highly critical. He does not attempt to shield Scott from any blame by condemning the floundering Whig party or Scott’s most prominent supporters. Nor does he try to praise Scott for being as successful as the circumstances allowed. Written in 1937, Arthur Douglas Howden

---

<sup>82</sup> Hayes, *Diary and Letters of Rutherford B. Hayes*, 1:355.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

<sup>84</sup> Robert Matteson Johnston, *Leading American Soldiers* (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1907), 130.

Smith's biography offers another critical account of Scott as a politician. The title itself offers insight into Smith's opinion: *Old Fuss and Feathers; the life and exploits of Lt.-General Winfield Scott, the only American commander who never lost a battle, the one victorious general to lose a presidential election, patron of Lee, protector of Lincoln, most inept of politicians, strategist, statesman, humanitarian*. The title alone criticizes Scott as being "inept" and singles him out as the only victorious general to lose an election. The title also refers to Scott as "Old Fuss and Feathers," a name which Scott did not appreciate and a name that was used by his opponents in a derogatory manner. Beneath the cover of the book the critique is no less forceful. Smith questions Scott's decision to even run for President, believing him to be extremely unqualified. Smith writes that "it seems a shame that anyone so intrinsically honest, simple and sincere, so much the soldier, so little the civilian, so ignorant of the complex difficulties of industry and economics, should ever have been tempted into the quagmire of politics."<sup>85</sup> Smith further questions Scott's ability to serve as President when he describes the defeat as allowing Scott to avoid "a responsibility for which he was technically unfitted by training and temperament."<sup>86</sup> The reactions of these historians echo the sentiment of *The Presidency* article which questions Scott's ability to serve effectively as President. Johnston and Smith are examples of historians offering their perspective of Scott. Their knowledge of Scott's life do not qualify them as being part of the popular collective memory, however their assessment of Scott gives a perspective that is less influenced by the circumstances of the present in which they are writing.

Statues are another valuable resource for understanding how a person is remembered.

The Winfield Scott statue in Washington, D.C., which was erected in 1874, stands in the

---

<sup>85</sup> Arthur D. Howden Smith, *Old Fuss and Feathers; the Life and Exploits of Lt.-General Winfield Scott, the Only American Commander Who Never Lost a Battle, the One Victorious General to Lose a Presidential Election, Patron of Lee, Protector of Lincoln, Most Inept of Politicians, Strategist, Statesman, Humanitarian* (New York: The Greystone Press, 1937), 233.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.



appropriately named Scott circle. The monument itself is typical of that which would honor a nineteenth century war hero. He is seated high upon a horse in full dress uniform, looking every bit as much like “Old Fuss and Feathers.” The statue is dedicated to the man who the Duke of Wellington referred to “the greatest living soldier.”<sup>87</sup> However the statue does hint to Scott’s political ambitions. The statue is facing towards the White House. The statue is directed towards the building which Scott so desperately wanted to work in. It is almost if the old general is gazing down the street towards his goal, strategizing, trying to find a way to achieve one last great victory.



---

<sup>87</sup> Johnson, *Winfield Scott : The Quest for Military Glory*, 7.



Articles written about Scott after his defeat in the Presidential election tend to withhold criticism of Scott. Why is this, especially when considering the degree to which he was defeated? One possible explanation is that despite his foray into politics and his large defeat, Scott was still the Commanding General of the United States Army and the public press did not want to openly criticize an active General who was also a war hero. Keeping this in mind, publications which supported Scott undertook efforts to soften the blow of his defeat by blaming other. Other publications largely ignored the defeat. As time passed, Scott's presidential campaign was diminished in favor of his illustrious military career. It is likely that some remembering Scott directly after his death did not want to speak ill towards the recently deceased. But there is also a larger reason why his presidential bid was not demonized: national unity. Scott's death came just over one year after the end of the Civil War. Though Scott remained with Union, his previous military accomplishments were events that the entire country could rally behind. If you add the fact that Scott was a southerner by birth, the memory of Scott became something that could be used to help unite the country. By ignoring Scott's deficiencies as a politician or by largely

ignoring the election of 1852 altogether, those memorializing Scott were able to avoid a lengthy discussion about an election that was infused with the issues of sectional conflict and slavery. Scott 1866 the country did not need Winfield Scott, the man who whose attempt to be president was largely undone by his stance on the failed compromise of 1850. They need General Winfield Scott, defeater of the British and the conqueror of Mexico.

The memoirs and diaries that remember Scott offer a different perspective. One reason for this is that these diaries were written in private and were not meant to be ready by the general public. This means that many of the statements are based on how they felt at the time of Scott's defeat, and not on a carefully constructed opinion of Scott that was designed to elicit feelings of national unity. The memoirs were written after Scott's death, further removed from the aftermath of the Civil War when the need to reunite the country was less prevalent. This is why the memoirs and diaries are closer in content to the more objective biographical accounts delivered by historians. As time elapsed the memoirs and speeches focused less on Scott's presidential bid because it had become seemingly less relevant. Those remembering Scott decades after his death did not want to remember his tremendous failure.

### *Conclusion*

Henry Clay and Winfield Scott lived very different lives yet they shared the same ambition. Both men desired to be President of the United States and both failed. In the years following their death's, neither was largely publically criticized for this failure. Perhaps those eulogizing Clay, the great orator and statesman whom many believed had saved the union in 1850, did not see him as a failure at all despite his repeated and unsuccessful attempts to become the nation's executive. Perhaps, too many, Scott's failed presidential bid in 1852 did not detract any from the many who bravely faced the British in 1812 and who boldly stormed the Halls of

Montezuma in 1848. Or perhaps those remembering Clay and Scott saw a greater purpose for their memory. Yes, Clay and Scott were both losers in terms of becoming the President. But both stood for something that went beyond the outcome of presidential elections. Schwartz proposes that “collective memory refers simultaneously to what is in the in the minds of individuals and to emergent conceptions of the past crystallized into symbolic structures.”<sup>88</sup> Following this proposal, Clay and Scott came to symbolize more than just what their careers totaled. They came to symbolize national unity. Clay was praised and apotheosized for his ability to overcome sectional conflict at a time when sectional issues, especially slavery, dominated the American political landscape. As the “Great Compromiser” he was seen as the force that was binding the nation together when politics and social structures threatened to divide it and lead it to war. After the war Clay was able to serve as an example. The fact that the Civil War did break out after his death only demonstrated further the patriotism and devotion embodied by Clay while he served his country.

Scott also fits the mold of a figure of national unity. His presidential defeat came in the midst of sectional conflict and sectional issues, including the Compromise of 1850, played a major role in his defeat. His death came a year after the Civil War had ended. By ignoring the presidential defeat in the popular media Scott was able to be seen predominantly as the great warrior he was. Scott did not play a major role in the Civil War and thus, he was not the enemy of the South. Scott’s victories were American victories. His life could be celebrated as serving his country, not just a part of it. The middle of the nineteenth century was one of the most tumultuous times in American history. As people remembered those years and the people who were instrumental in what occurred they looked for people who could help heal the wounds that formed on the floor of the House of Representatives and Senate, in newspaper editorials and

---

<sup>88</sup> Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln*, 7.

speeches, and on the battlefields stained with blood. The memories of Henry Clay and Winfield Scott were invoked to help reunite a country divided.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

Carrington, Henry Beebee. *Winfield Scott. Address*. Boston, 1910.

Douglas, Stephen. *The Letters of Stephen Douglas*. Edited by Robert W. Johannsen. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1961.

Elsegood, Joseph Isaac. *Death of Henry Clay*. Easton, Pa., Davis,: printer, 1852.

Greeley, Horace. *The Autobiography of Horace Greeley or Recollections of a Busy Life to Which Are Added Miscellaneous Essays and Paper*. New York: E.B. Treat, 1872.

Hayes, Rutherford Birchard, and Charles Richard Williams. *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes*. 5 vols. Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio state archæological and historical society, 1922.

Hunt, Carleton. *Life and Services of Henry Clay. Address of Carleton Hunt, January 12, 1901, on the Occasion of Laying the Corner Stone of the Monument of Henry Clay, Lafayette Square, New Orleans, Louisiana*. New Orleans,: L. Graham & Son, ltd., Printers, 1901.

Leakin, George Armistead. *A Sermon on the Death of Henry Clay*. Baltimore,: A. P. Burt, 1852.

Moore,B.F. *Life, Character and Public Services of Henry Clay*. Raleigh, NC: Southern Weekley Post,: printer, 1853.

"The Presidency." *The American Whig Review (1850-1852)* 9, no. 5 (1852): 379.

Seward Frederick W. *Reminiscences of A War-Time Statesman and Diplomat, 1830-1915*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916.

*Baltimore Sun*. 1852-1866. American Periodical Series

*Cleveland Herald*. 1852. American Periodical Series.

*Daily Evening Bulletin*. 1852. American Periodical Series.

*Hartford Daily Courant*. 1852. American Periodical Series.

*Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*. 1852. American Periodical Series.

*Missouri Courier*. 1852. American Periodical Series.

*New Orleans Bee*. 1844-1853. Jefferson parish Library Online.

*Natchez Courier*. 1852. American Periodical Series.

*North American and United States Gazette*. 1852. American Periodical Series.

*Semi Weekly Eagle*. 1852. American Periodical Series.

*The New York Times*. 1851-1866. The New York Times Historical

## Secondary Sources

Barnes, James. *The Giant of Three Wars; a Life of General Winfield Scott*. New York,: D. Appleton and Company, 1903.

Bradford, Gamaliel. *As God Made Them; Portraits of Some Nineteenth-Century Americans*, Essay and General Literature Index Reprint Series. Boston and New York,: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929.

Brown, Thomas. *Politics and Statesmanship : Essays on the American Whig Party*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.

Clay, Thomas Hart, and Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer. *Henry Clay American Crisis Biographies*. Philadelphia,: G.W. Jacobs & Company, 1910.

Colton, Calvin. *The Life and Times of Henry Clay*. Vol. 2. 2 vols. New York: A.S. Barnes Co., 1846.

Geoff Cubitt, *History and Memory*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007.

Elliott, Charles Winslow. *Winfield Scott, the Soldier and the Man*. New York,: The Macmillan Company, 1937.

“Famous Five,” United States Senate, [http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The\\_Famous\\_Five.htm](http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/The_Famous_Five.htm) (accessed March 1, 2011).

Holt, Michael F. *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party : Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Howe, Daniel Walker. *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Johnson, Timothy D. *Winfield Scott : The Quest for Military Glory* Modern War Studies. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998.

Johnston, Robert Matteson. *Leading American Soldiers*. New York: H. Holt and Company, 1907.

- Mansfield, Edward Deering. *The Life and Military Services of Lieut.-General Winfield Scott : Including His Brilliant Achievements in the War of 1812, in the Mexican War, and the Pending War for the Union*. New York: N. C. Miller, 1862.
- Mansfield, Edward Deering. *Personal Memories, Social, Political, and Literary, 1803-1843*, The American Journalists. New York: Arno, 1970.
- Mayo, Bernard. *Henry Clay, Spokesman of the New West*. [Unaltered and unabridged ed. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966.
- Peskin, Allan. *Winfield Scott and the Profession of Arms*. Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003.
- Pierce, Edward L. *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*. Vol. 3. 4 vols. Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1894.
- Prentice, George D. *Biography of Henry Clay*. Hartford: S. Hanmer, Jr. and J.J. Phelps, 1831.
- Rogers, Joseph M. *The True Henry Clay*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1905.
- Sandage, Scott A. *Born Losers : A History of Failure in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005.
- Schwartz, Barry. *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Schwartz, Barry. "Collective Memory and History: How Abraham Lincoln Became a Symbol of Racial Equality." *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 469-496.
- Schwartz, Barry. "Iconography and Collective Memory: Lincoln's Image in the American Mind." *The Sociological Quarterly*. 32, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 301-319.
- Silbey, Joel H. *Party over Section : The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848* American Presidential Elections. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2009.
- Smith, Arthur D. Howden. *Old Fuss and Feathers; the Life and Exploits of Lt.-General Winfield Scott, the Only American Commander Who Never Lost a Battle, the One Victorious General to Lose a Presidential Election, Patron of Lee, Protector of Lincoln, Most Inept of Politicians, Strategist, Statesman, Humanitarian*. New York,: The Greystone press, 1937.
- Wilentz, Sean. *The Rise of American Democracy : Jefferson to Lincoln*. Abridged college ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009.