

# **“Petticoat Government”:**

## **The Eaton Affair and Jacksonian Political Cultures**

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## **Abstract**

Though typically trivialised by historians, the Eaton Affair preoccupied Andrew Jackson throughout his first presidency and lived on in nineteenth-century popular memory. This thesis sets aside dismissive, partisan and elitist scholarship, revisiting the contemporary evidence to demonstrate the Eaton Affair comprised two distinct scandals. In doing so, a heretofore unexamined dissonance between the place of women in mass and elite Jacksonian political cultures is also revealed. The clash of these cultures in the Eaton Affair would shape both for years to come: stigmatising “petticoat government” among the masses while severely curtailing its practice within the informal politicking of Washington.

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## Introduction

On the evening of September 10<sup>th</sup> 1829, President Andrew Jackson summoned his Cabinet for what would be one of the most extraordinary meetings that the White House would ever witness. It would also prove to be their final meeting.<sup>1</sup> The usual attendees were there: Secretary of State Martin Van Buren, Postmaster-General William Barry, Secretary of the Treasury Samuel Ingham, Secretary of the Navy John Branch and Attorney-General John Berrien. Also present were Andrew Donelson, the President's private secretary and nephew, and Major William Lewis, filling in for the absent Secretary of War John Eaton. Vice-President John C. Calhoun was also missing, but this was not uncommon. Like most of the political class, Calhoun returned to his home state when Congress was out of session.

At Jackson's invitation two Presbyterian clergymen were also in attendance: Reverend John N. Campbell, the pastor of Jackson's own church, as well as his old acquaintance Reverend Ezra Stiles Ely, who had trekked from Philadelphia at the President's insistence. These were unusual guests for a Cabinet meeting – but then they had been convened to discuss an unusual topic. The subject was not any of the policy issues usually associated with the Jackson Administration – Indian Removal, the Bank War or the Nullification Crisis – but rather the reputation of Margaret Eaton, who had married the Secretary of War earlier that year.<sup>2</sup> Throughout 1829,

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, Politics* (Homewood, Illinois: Dorsey Press, 1969), p. 308

<sup>2</sup> Information regarding the Cabinet meeting drawn from: John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams: Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848, Vol. VIII*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co, 1876), pp. 177-8, 206-7; Andrew Jackson to John Nicholson Campbell, September 10<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Daniel Feller (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Vol. VII, 1829* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007), pp. 423-4; James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson: Volume III* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885[1860]), pp. 203-5; Martin Van

malicious gossip had circulated among Washington's political elite that cast Margaret as a "fallen woman" by alleging she had engaged in a long-term extra-marital affair with John Eaton during her previous marriage to John B. Timberlake.<sup>3</sup>

Such rumours were legion: that while Timberlake (a naval officer) was at sea Margaret had travelled with Eaton to New York masquerading as husband and wife; that Margaret had miscarried when Timberlake was more than a year absent and confessed to the attending physician that Eaton was the father; and that Timberlake's mysterious demise in April 1828 off the Spanish coast had been suicide, caused by knowledge of his wife's infidelity. For many of Washington's political elite, these individual incidents merely corroborated their prior suspicions. Margaret, a tavern-keeper's daughter, had long possessed a questionable reputation – and the Eatons had not helped their case by marrying upon New Year's Day 1829, long before the customary mourning period for a widow came to a close.<sup>4</sup>

While such alleged episodes of immorality were deplorable enough for a tavern-keeper's daughter, they were positively scandalous in the case of a Cabinet wife. By virtue of her marriage to John Eaton and his appointment to Jackson's Cabinet, Margaret had joined the Cabinet ladies at the forefront of Washington's high society. However, key elements of the elite female community (the wives and mothers of the political class) refused to risk the 'contamination' of 'the morals of

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Buren to James A. Hamilton, September 24<sup>th</sup> 1829, in James A. Hamilton, *Reminiscences of James A. Hamilton* (New York: Charles Scribner & Co, 1869), pp. 146-8.

<sup>3</sup> Barbara Welter, 'The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860', *American Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer, 1966), pp. 152-4. A 'fallen woman' described the converse of nineteenth-century ideal womanhood, the 'true woman' depicted in the prescriptive literature of the period.

<sup>4</sup> Ezra Stiles Ely to Andrew Jackson, March 18<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller, *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, pp. 101-104; Andrew Jackson to Richard K. Call, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1829, in John Spencer Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson: Volume IV 1829-1832* (Washington DC: Carnegie Institution, 1929), p. 51; Adams, *Memoirs*, pp. 159, 178.

the country' that could ensue from admitting a "fallen woman" to their ranks.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, most of the elite of Washington society snubbed her: Margaret was shunned at parties and balls, while visits made by the Eatons went unreturned. Her exclusion transcended partisan groupings – members of Jackson's Cabinet and even his family participated in the boycott of the Eatons. Not only did Ingham, Branch and Berrien refuse to socialise with the Eatons, so too did Andrew and Emily Donelson, his niece and nephew who resided with him in the White House. Yet as the majority of Washington's elite closed their doors to the Eatons, Jackson defied community opinion. Not only were the Eatons close friends and political allies, but the gossip surrounding Margaret echoed the slanders directed at Jackson's late wife by his political opponents during the 1828 presidential campaign.

With the scandal surrounding the Eatons only intensifying over time, Jackson hoped this Cabinet meeting would prove a turning point in his campaign in their support. Only a week earlier, Jackson had discovered that the chief purveyor of these rumours was Campbell, pastor to his own family and the Eatons. Jackson's object was to bring Campbell and Ely, another scandalmonger, before the Cabinet and disprove each rumour in detail with evidence he had painstakingly gathered over the past months. By doing so, he hoped to force the clergymen to recant and thereby convince the recalcitrant members of his family and Cabinet of Margaret's innocence, thus ending their ostracism of the Eatons. Unfortunately for the President, the Cabinet meeting did not proceed as planned. It quickly degenerated into dysfunction: despite Jackson's evidence, the clergymen refused to concede that Margaret Eaton was 'a virtuous and persecuted woman.'<sup>6</sup> Frustrated, Jackson flew

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<sup>5</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, p. 204.

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, *Reminiscences*, p. 148.

into a rage, exclaiming to the assembled company that 'She is as chaste as a virgin!' – but to no avail.<sup>7</sup>

Instead, the tensions over the Eaton controversy continued to smoulder, crippling Jackson's Administration. The better part of the President's attention was occupied with fruitless efforts to win Margaret's social acceptance. Indeed, according to J. Franklin Jameson, editor of the multi-volume *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (1926-1935), the contents of Jackson's correspondence suggested that the 'question of... Mrs. Eaton's position in [Washington] held a larger place in the President's thoughts, during at least the first two years of his presidency, than all the public interests of the nation combined.'<sup>8</sup> In a telling comparison, the documentary evidence Jackson gathered to prove her innocence exceeded the combined length of all the foreign treaties signed during his entire presidency.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, working relationships in the Cabinet suffered as members polarised into pro- and anti-Eaton camps. For a time, Eaton and Branch refused to even speak to each other.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Jackson refused to convene the Cabinet formally after the abortive September meeting, instead relying upon a cadre of unofficial advisers including Major Lewis, Amos Kendall and Francis Blair who shared his support for the Eatons.<sup>11</sup>

As the Jacksonian coalition splintered under the stresses of the scandal, his political opposition looked on in delight. The former president John Quincy Adams, who remained resident in Washington after his ousting by Jackson, revelled in the 'volcanic state of the Administration' and keenly recorded its 'internal

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<sup>7</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Parton, *Jackson*, p. 204.

<sup>8</sup> J. Franklin Jameson, 'Preface' in Bassett, *Correspondence*, p. iii.

<sup>9</sup> Queena Pollack, *Peggy Eaton: Democracy's Mistress* (New York: Milton, Balch & Company, 1931), p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 184.

<sup>11</sup> Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, pp. 308, 340.

commotions.<sup>12</sup> Senator Josiah Johnston and his wife, both confidants of Henry Clay, followed the goings-on with 'some Amusement' and rejoiced that the 'party in power are in a most desirable state of confusion.'<sup>13</sup> Only in April 1831 would Jackson finally cut the Gordian knot through his wholesale dissolution and replacement of the Cabinet. Even then, Margaret's role in precipitating the dismissal would become the subject of a heated newspaper dispute. For the rest of 1831, the nation would be transfixed by the 'editorial war' between the two chief Jacksonian newspapers in Washington; the *United States Telegraph* (edited by Duff Green) and the *Washington Globe* (edited by Francis Blair).<sup>14</sup>

However distracting and detrimental the scandal was to the Administration, the unusual situation also presented uniquely advantageous opportunities. Siding with the Eatons in the social dispute was a reliable path to presidential favour, and none understood this better than Martin Van Buren.<sup>15</sup> Adams observed that Van Buren was 'notoriously engaged in canvassing for the Presidency by paying his court to Mrs. Eaton.'<sup>16</sup> Though Jackson's presidency had barely begun, his prospective successors – Van Buren and Vice-President Calhoun – had already begun manoeuvring for position. In accord with his advocacy for term limits upon the presidency, Jackson originally planned to retire after a single term – and his poor health placed even that tenure in question.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the Eaton

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Josiah S. Johnston to Henry Clay, September 9<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Robert Seager II (ed.), *The Papers of Henry Clay Vol. 8: Candidate, Compromiser, Whig 1829-1836* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1984), p. 98; Eliza Johnston to Henry Clay, December 12<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Seager (ed.), *Papers of Henry Clay*, p. 135.

<sup>14</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 17 1831.

<sup>15</sup> John F. Marszalek, *The Petticoat Affair: Manners, Mutiny, and Sex in Andrew Jackson's White House* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), pp. 181, 198.

<sup>16</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 185.

<sup>17</sup> Draft of First Annual Message to Congress, in Feller, *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 604; Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 125, 127; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (New York: Book Find Club, 1945), p. 39.

controversy became entangled with the question of the presidential succession. This was readily apparent to contemporaries. According to Daniel Webster, 'this dispute in the social and fashionable world, is producing great political effects, and *may very probably determine who shall be successor to the present chief magistrate.*'<sup>18</sup> While Calhoun became identified with the anti-Eaton faction through his wife's refusal to visit Margaret, Van Buren 'availed himself of the Case of the Lady... to obtain the confidence of the President' and thus 'prepared himself to succeed to the Jackson party to the exclusion of Calhoun.'<sup>19</sup>

Though contemporaries considered these events of vital importance, the Eaton Affair has been ill-served by historians. During the twentieth century, the historiography of the scandal has been dominated by two strands of scholarship – the dismissive and the partisan. In the first strand, historians have either judged the scandal inconsequential, or conceded it significance only inasmuch as it contributed to Van Buren's presidential succession by causing a breach between Calhoun and Jackson. Consequently, this strand has been characterised by a moribund historiographical debate over the relative roles of the Eaton Affair, the Seminole Controversy and various policy disagreements in producing the Jackson-Calhoun split. In the second strand, authors have approached the scandal from a biographical perspective, if not format; prioritising the experiences of particular protagonists. Accordingly, such scholarship tends to produce partisan defences of the course adopted by the chosen character throughout the scandal. Moreover, both strands suffer from a blinkered focus upon the experiences of elites. This paper seeks to transcend these failed approaches by taking advantage of historiographical

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<sup>18</sup> Daniel Webster, quoted in Parton, *Jackson*, p. 296.

<sup>19</sup> Josiah S. Johnston to Henry Clay, December 12 1829, in Seager (ed.), *Papers of Henry Clay*, p. 136.

developments in the fields of political and cultural history in order to enhance scholarly understanding of the Eaton Affair.

The role of the Eaton Affair in determining the presidential succession of Van Buren over Calhoun underpinned the importance placed upon these events in nineteenth-century popular memory. In 1860, Jackson biographer James Parton asserted that ‘the political history of the United States, for the last thirty years, dates from the moment when the soft hand of Mr. Van Buren touched Mrs. Eaton’s knocker.’<sup>20</sup> Writing for the *Southern Review* in 1873, Louis Wigfall (an unreconstructed Confederate and adherent of the Lost Cause) argued the scandal was more ‘important in its consequences’ than simply the presidential succession. In fact, he labelled Margaret Eaton the ‘Doom of the Republic.’<sup>21</sup> According to Wigfall’s tortured logic, the Jackson-Calhoun breach triggered by the Eaton controversy led the Administration to adopt a pro-tariff policy, provoking South Carolina into nullifying the tariff law. This set in motion an irrevocable chain of events that would culminate in the Civil War; hence Margaret Eaton would indirectly ‘work a revolution in the Constitution of the country... consolidate the Government, abolish slavery, and cause a war more terrible in its results than that which her prototype originated between the Greeks and the Trojans.’<sup>22</sup> Though few shared Wigfall’s extreme estimation of its significance, it was a widely held belief through the nineteenth century that, as the *Milwaukee Sentinel* noted in 1898, the Eaton Affair ‘had altered the current of the country’s history.’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, p. 287.

<sup>21</sup> Anonymous, ‘Peggy O’Neal; or the Doom of the Republic’, *Southern Review*, XII (January 1873), p. 214. David Barbee identifies the unnamed author as onetime US Senator Louis Wigfall; David Rankin Barbee, ‘Andrew Jackson and Peggy O’Neale’, *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 15 (1956), p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, ‘Doom of the Republic’, p. 221.

<sup>23</sup> *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 7 1898.

This belief, however, did not long survive the advent of the twentieth century. As the scandal drifted beyond the reach of popular memory, the emerging historical profession failed to accord it a similar pride of place. Baffled by its preponderance in Jackson's correspondence, Jameson spoke for the mainstream historical community in 1929 when he deemed the Eaton Affair a 'matter of little consequence to history.'<sup>24</sup> His dismissal reflected contemporary academic appraisals of scandal as trivial, and thus an unsuitable subject for serious scholarly investigation. Typically, such historians relegated scandal to the role of anecdote; interspersed throughout matter-of-fact accounts of more consequential events to 'enliven' otherwise dry narratives.<sup>25</sup> This low regard for scandals derived from the brand of traditional political history that dominated the academy for much of the twentieth century, the concerns of which lay elsewhere. The primary preoccupations of traditional political historians were the 'official politics' of policy, and the operations of the 'formal, institutionalised political system.'<sup>26</sup>

Consequently, the traditional political histories of the Jacksonian period have tended to concur with Van Buren's assessment of the Eaton Affair as 'in no proper sense political' and remarkable primarily due to the 'injurious influence' it exerted 'upon the management of public affairs.'<sup>27</sup> Jacksonian historians such as Edward Pessen, Harry Watson and Daniel Feller have characterised the scandal as a distraction to Jackson then and historians now. According to Pessen, this 'personal squabble' lacked any 'larger significance' and had 'not the remotest connection to

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<sup>24</sup> Jameson, 'Preface', p. iii.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Latner, 'The Eaton Affair Reconsidered', *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 36 (Fall, 1977), p. 330.

<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson & David Waldstreicher (eds.), *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (USA: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 9.

<sup>27</sup> Martin Van Buren, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren, Vols. 1 & 2*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920[1854]), p. 339.

the real issues confronting the nation.<sup>28</sup> Watson agreed, relegating it to the status of a 'symbolic issue' notable only insofar as it 'hamstrung Jackson's government' by obstructing harmony in the Cabinet.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Feller mentioned the affair simply to note the 'paralysing' impact it exerted upon the Administration.<sup>30</sup>

Yet these historians could not dismiss the Eaton Affair entirely. They were unable to deny that it was the 'issue that most occupied Andrew Jackson during his first Administration' given its preponderance in his correspondence.<sup>31</sup> To traditional political historians, with their focus upon the formal political system and conventional political issues, Jackson's preoccupation seemed irrational – a conundrum. The failure of Jackson's priorities in government to harmonise with what they deemed more properly political concerns required an explanation. Accordingly, his preoccupation with the Eaton Affair was constructed as an idiosyncratic 'obsession' peculiar to Jackson's personality, and thus more the province of 'psycho-analysts' than historians.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of the dismissive attitudes to scandal dominant in the academy, popular interest in the Eaton Affair flourished. By the centenary of Jackson's presidency (1829-1837) the divergence between scholarly estimations of the scandal and the level of popular interest had become clear. Writing her popular biography of Margaret Eaton, Queena Pollack drew upon the manuscript material assembled for publication in the *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* even as the project's editor

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<sup>28</sup> Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, pp. 309-10.

<sup>29</sup> Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (United States: Hill and Wang, 1990), pp. 100, 104.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 162.

<sup>31</sup> Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, p. 309.

<sup>32</sup> Feller, *Jacksonian Promise*, p. 161; Tim Alan Garrison, 'Review: The Papers of Andrew Jackson, Volumes 7 (1829) and 8 (1830)', *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Summer, 2012), p. 293.

dismissed the scandal as inconsequential to history.<sup>33</sup> Simultaneously, the son of Margaret's pastor decided that 'renewed interest' warranted the publication of her autobiographical manuscript, held by his family for half-a-century.<sup>34</sup>

Given this divergence, it is unsurprising that writers confined to the margins of academia came to dominate the historiography of the Eaton Affair.

Unfortunately, these often less-than-scholarly studies tended towards partisanship.

In this respect, they followed in the footsteps of nineteenth-century authors who primarily sought to vindicate the legacies of their favoured protagonists. Wigfall,

whose regard for Calhoun verged on the hagiographic, won a devoted disciple in

Southern historian David Barbee. In the 1956 *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* Barbee

cast Calhoun as the victim of the 'Van Buren clique' who 'hid behind the dirty skirts

of an unchaste woman' to prevent the Vice-President rightfully succeeding

Jackson.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, Van Buren authored his own version of events in an 1854

autobiographical manuscript. In this portrayal, Calhoun and his cohorts had

'directed' the Eaton controversy 'to the accomplishment of political objects' –

namely the Vice-President's 'presidential aspirations.'<sup>36</sup> Arthur Schlesinger Jr.,

briefly addressing the Eaton Affair in his monumental *Age of Jackson*, took Van

Buren's narrative at face value: 'the partisans of Calhoun took advantage of the

ambiguous social position of Peggy Eaton to set in motion a complicated intrigue

with the eventual aim of driving her husband from the cabinet.'<sup>37</sup>

The more popular treatments of the Eaton Affair typically took the form of biography. Pollack's 1931 book was followed by another biography of Margaret

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<sup>33</sup> Jameson, 'Preface', p. iii; Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, p. 283.

<sup>34</sup> Virginia Price Deems, in Margaret Eaton, *The Autobiography of Peggy Eaton*, ed. Charles F. Deems, (New York: Arno Press, 1980[1932]), p. vi.

<sup>35</sup> Barbee, 'Peggy O'Neale', pp. 47, 52.

<sup>36</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, pp. 339, 341.

<sup>37</sup> Schlesinger, *Jackson*, p. 54.

Eaton by Leon Philips in 1974, while biographies of Emily Donelson were published by Paula Wilcox Burke in 1941 and Perpetua Pigott in 1948. Incensed by the 'cruel misrepresentations' of Wigfall and Parton, Margaret had produced her own 'defence before posterity' in collaboration with her pastor in 1873, though it remained unpublished until 1932.<sup>38</sup> In what may have been a reaction to the neglect of women in history by male-dominated academia, these biographies were predominantly written by and about women. The biographers were driven by a diverse set of motivations. Some, like Burke (the great-granddaughter of Emily Donelson), were inspired by familial connections. Other authors were more politically purposed. For Philips, the saga of Margaret Eaton – who 'had a greater influence on the course of American history than any other member of her sex... prior to the modern era' – was a case in point for the inclusion of women in historical writing.<sup>39</sup> To Pollack, writing only a decade after female suffrage had been achieved in the United States, Margaret's saga demonstrated that 'a woman could function and must be recognised as an individual political unit' long 'before votes for women entered the country's consciousness.'<sup>40</sup>

The biographical format as well as the authors' purposes favoured a partisan rendering of events. Given the exclusion of these biographers from the academy, their work lacked scholarly rigour, which further fostered partisanship.<sup>41</sup> Typically, these biographers crafted their narratives from the primary evidence most

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<sup>38</sup> Margaret Eaton, *Autobiography*, pp. vii, 35.

<sup>39</sup> Leon Philips, *That Eaton Woman: In Defense of Peggy O'Neale Eaton* (Massachusetts: Barre Publishing, 1974), p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>41</sup> Frequent factual errors testify to this lack of scholarly rigour. Wigfall and Pollack emphasised Margaret's Irish ancestry to exploit stereotypes of Irish domestic servants, though she herself asserted her 'father was not an Irishman.' Likewise, Philips inserted Calhoun into the September 10 Cabinet meeting for dramatic effect, despite his absence in South Carolina; Margaret Eaton, *Autobiography*, p. 32; Pollack, *Peggy Eaton*, p. 3; Philips, *That Eaton Woman*, p. 82; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (USA: Verso, 1999), p. 145.

sympathetic to their chosen protagonist while downplaying conflicting accounts. Their partisanship was not subtle: Pigott stated her intention 'to show... that the policy she and her husband [Emily and Andrew Donelson] adopted towards the Eatons was based on the honest dictates of conscience... uninfluenced by political considerations.'<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Philips subtitled his book 'In Defense of Peggy O'Neale Eaton.'

Though similarly motivated by partisan purposes, Major Lewis and Thomas Hart Benton adopted an entirely different strategy to defend the legacy of Andrew Jackson. These Jacksonian veterans were not protagonists in the affair, but both were privy to the scandal due to their close relationships with Jackson and political offices in Washington. When it came time to share their memories of Jackson's presidency with posterity, the role of Margaret in precipitating the Cabinet dissolution remained as scandalous in the 1850s as it was two decades prior. To shield Jackson's legacy, they anticipated the approach of traditional political historians by largely denying the significance of the Eaton Affair. Benton remained silent on the subject throughout his voluminous memoirs.<sup>43</sup> Instead, he disingenuously attributed the estrangement of Jackson and Calhoun to the Seminole Controversy. Though Lewis acknowledged the scandal, he also depicted the Seminole Controversy as 'undoubtedly the main cause of the quarrel.'<sup>44</sup> In doing so, they rewrote history to cast effect as cause.

Indeed, a close reading of the available evidence reveals the Seminole Controversy was tangential to Jackson's animosity towards Calhoun. In 1818, then-

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<sup>42</sup> M. Perpetua Pigott, "Emily Donelson and the Eaton Affair" (M. A. dissertation, Catholic University of America, 1948), p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Hart Benton, *Thirty Years in the U.S. Senate: Vol. 1* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1854), pp. 167, 180.

<sup>44</sup> William B. Lewis, 'Narrative by Major William B. Lewis, in Parton, *Jackson*, pp. 310, 327.

General Jackson invaded Spanish Florida on his own initiative, sparking controversy in the confidential discussions of the Cabinet. As then-Secretary of War, Calhoun unsuccessfully recommended censure. While Jackson later admitted knowledge of Calhoun's position as early as 1823, he only confronted Calhoun over the incident in May 1830, accusing him of secret sabotage.<sup>45</sup> Evidently, Jackson's revival of the issue was a political calculation. His hostility towards Calhoun over the Eaton Affair was apparent from late 1829, and the Seminole Controversy served as a convenient 'pretext for breaking with him.'<sup>46</sup> Contemporaries were in no doubt that the Eaton Affair caused their rupture. Van Buren concluded their antagonism 'would... have [n]ever arisen... but for the Eaton *imbroglio*.'<sup>47</sup> Duff Green also 'traced... [their] difficulties... to that unfortunate circumstance.'<sup>48</sup>

The ploy pioneered by Benton was mimicked by subsequent historians who felt it necessary to rationalise their dismissal of the Eaton Affair. According to Richard H. Brown, 'that Van Buren won out over Calhoun... had nothing to do fundamentally with Mrs. Eaton.'<sup>49</sup> To ascribe the question of the presidential succession to 'personal intrigue' was to interpret Jacksonian politics 'in Victorian terms.' In the 'simple view of history' of the Victorians, 'most of history could ultimately be attributed either to whores or to the unbridled pursuit of ambition.'<sup>50</sup> Instead, Brown reduced the outcome to a straightforward matter of electoral logic: Calhoun brought only South Carolina into the Jacksonian coalition, while Van

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<sup>45</sup> Andrew Jackson, 'Exposition Against Calhoun', in Benton, *Thirty Years*, p. 174-5; Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun, May 13<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Daniel Feller (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Vol VIII, 1830* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2010), p. 256.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Overton, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1829, in Feller, *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 656; Parton, *Jackson*, pp. 310, 333.

<sup>47</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, p. 395.

<sup>48</sup> Duff Green, quoted in Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 156.

<sup>49</sup> Richard H. Brown, 'The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 65 (Winter, 1966), p. 71.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

Buren 'brought all the rest of the South and New York.'<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Richard Latner argued that the significance of the Eaton controversy had been much exaggerated, as 'considerations of political expediency and principle dictated Jackson's rejection of Calhoun in favour of Van Buren.'<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Latner sought to demonstrate that the Eaton Affair itself primarily represented a contest over policy differences. To at least 'some degree' the affair was an 'expression of southern anti-tariff resentment [and] a vehicle for furthering the South's anti-tariff campaign' by assailing Eaton and Van Buren, who were both widely associated with the passage of the "Tariff of Abominations" in 1828.<sup>53</sup> This contention reflected one of the basic tenets of traditional political history: the primacy of 'principles and issues' over 'ambition and rivalry' in politics.<sup>54</sup>

This school of traditional political history has proved enduring. Even in the twenty-first century elements of the academy continue to trivialise the Eaton Affair. In his recently published biography of Jackson, Sean Wilentz dismisses the scandal as 'a bit of cultural politics.' Jackson's 'obsession' with Margaret Eaton's reputation 'distracted him from the nation's business' and undermined his 'reform agenda.'<sup>55</sup> Following in this vein is historian Tim Alan Garrison's review of the most recently published editions of *The Papers of Andrew Jackson*, which contain Jackson's correspondence through 1829-1830. Garrison evinces the same mix of incredulity and disdain that Jameson expressed eighty years earlier for Jackson's 'obsessive correspondence with, and about, the Eatons.' Echoing Wilentz, he concludes the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> Latner, 'Eaton Affair Reconsidered', p. 331.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, pp. 351, 346. Latner argued that the pro- and anti-Eaton groupings within Jackson's Cabinet reflected their positions on the tariff.

<sup>54</sup> Latner, p. 350.

<sup>55</sup> Sean Wilentz, *Andrew Jackson* (Canada: Times Books, 2005), pp. 60, 62, 153. Wilentz's repetition of the basic factual error regarding Margaret Eaton's Irish ancestry illustrates his cavalier attitude towards the Eaton Affair.

Eaton controversy did little more than ‘distract [Jackson] from the business of the nation.’<sup>56</sup>

Both the dismissive and partisan approaches share a preoccupation with elite experiences of the scandal. This blinkered focus has resulted in the neglect of the second phase of the Eaton Affair; the ‘newspaper war’ between Duff Green’s *Telegraph* and Francis Blair’s *Globe* over the role of Margaret Eaton in precipitating the Cabinet dissolution. Indeed, historian Kirsten Wood notes that historical treatments of the scandal ‘often skim over the extensive newspaper war that exploded in the summer of 1831.’<sup>57</sup> Such scholarship omits the newspaper war entirely or addresses it only cursorily – treating it as an epilogue to the Eaton controversy, which presumably climaxed with the Cabinet dissolution. As such, authors have mentioned it chiefly as testament to the significance of the dissolution. For instance, Parton observed the ‘dissolution, its causes, and its consequences, were the newspaper topic of the whole summer’ but failed to examine it further, while Pigott and Pollack appended chapters detailing an arbitrary selection of press responses.<sup>58</sup> Van Buren studied the dispute more methodically, but regarded it as simply another arena of elite politicking, wholly ignoring the mass audience to which this medium was addressed.<sup>59</sup>

Though press historians have approached the newspaper war with an appreciation of its distinctive format and intended audience, they have studied it in isolation from the Eaton controversy. Pasley invoked the dispute as a representative example of intraparty factional disputes: ‘when political alliances fell apart, the sure

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<sup>56</sup> Garrison, ‘Review’, p. 293.

<sup>57</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, “‘One Woman so Dangerous to Public Morals’: Gender and Power in the Eaton Affair”, *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (Summer, 1997), p. 240.

<sup>58</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, p. 368; Pigott, “Emily Donelson”, pp. 34-46; Pollack, *Democracy’s Mistress*, pp. 129-182.

<sup>59</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, pp. 356-61.

sequel was the founding of a new newspaper.<sup>60</sup> In general press histories, the dispute has exemplified the partisan nature of the Jacksonian press. As such, it has been the foil against which historical meta-narratives of journalism were charted. Simon Sheppard and Michael Schudson tracked the emergence of journalistic objectivity, while Gerald Baldasty argued the ‘commercialisation of news’ was the chief characteristic differentiating modern (and presumably normative) newspapers from their Jacksonian predecessors.<sup>61</sup> Instead of being studied as a phenomenon in its own right, the newspaper war has been primarily drawn upon to evidence other phenomena: whether the import of the Cabinet dismissal or the partisan nature of Jacksonian newspapers.

This paper seeks to move beyond outdated scholarship characterised by partisanship, dismissiveness and a narrow-minded focus upon elite experiences. By drawing upon the advances of cultural historians and “new” political historians in conjunction with a re-evaluation of the primary evidence, it becomes evident that the Eaton Affair comprised two distinct, though overlapping, scandals. This study has reconstructed the competing narratives disseminated by protagonists during both scandals to reveal that women stood in vastly different relation to politics within the elite political subculture of Washington as opposed to the perception of their role held by the political culture of the masses. After briefly exploring the development of elite and mass political cultures along these divergent lines, the bulk of this paper shall concentrate upon examining how these two alternatively gendered political cultures clashed twice during the Eaton Affair.

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<sup>60</sup> Pasley, *Newspaper Politics*, p. 9.

<sup>61</sup> Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (United States: Basic Books, Inc., 1978), p. 4; Simon Sheppard, “America Media, American Bias: The Partisan Press from Broadsheet to Blog”, (Ph.D. dissertation, John Hopkins University, 2008), p. 3; Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), p. 6.

Challenging the narrow focus of traditional political histories, the approach of “new” political historians is characterised by an expanded notion of the political and a consciousness of the significance of gender (as well as race and class).<sup>62</sup> Such scholars recognise that politics ‘encompassed a much more capacious realm’ than just the formal institutions of government.<sup>63</sup> By identifying the ‘political aspects... of social phenomena’ these historians place emphasis on unofficial arenas and informal settings as ‘locations of politics’ of equal importance as official channels of governance.<sup>64</sup> Consequently, a range of political actors have been recognised beyond simply office-holders and those situated in the state apparatus. Moreover, if politics extends beyond policy and institutions then the concept of political culture – the informal norms, practices and ideas of various groups – becomes central. The study of the gendering of politics has proved a fertile subfield in such political histories, as historians like Joan Scott identify gender as a ‘recurrent reference’ by which power is ‘legitimated, conceived and criticised.’ Indeed, she concludes that, in a sense, ‘political history has... been enacted on the field of gender.’<sup>65</sup>

The emergence of cultural history since the 1980s saw scandal re-appraised as a social phenomenon worthy of study and of value to the historian. Dispelling vague understandings, historical sociologist Ari Adut postulates an academically rigorous definition of scandal: a phenomenon in which a perceived transgression of social norms or cultural expectations is exposed to an ‘interested public.’<sup>66</sup> Not only are scandals deserving of study when, like the Eaton Affair, they demonstrably

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<sup>62</sup> Pasley, Robertson & Waldstreicher, *Beyond the Founders*, p. 9. Historians such as Jeffrey Pasley, Joanne Freeman, Kirsten Wood, Catherine Allgor and Rosemarie Zagarri have pioneered the application of this approach to the early republic.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 9; Rosemarie Zagarri, ‘Women and Party Conflict in the Early Republic’, in Pasley, Robertson & Waldstreicher, *Beyond the Founders*, p. 108.

<sup>64</sup> Pasley, Robertson & Waldstreicher, *Beyond the Founders*, p. 16.

<sup>65</sup> Joan Scott, ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, *American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5 (1986), pp. 1073, 1074.

<sup>66</sup> Adut, *Scandal*, pp. 12-16.

impact the course of events and act as engines of change, but they are also of considerable utility as tools of enquiry. Scandals, by exposing private behaviour to public opprobrium, are disruptive social phenomena that provoke debate and examination of embedded cultural practices and social norms usually accepted implicitly. Consequently, the study of scandal can reveal conflicts and tensions in societies otherwise hidden, as well as producing valuable primary material for the historian's use. Indeed, Adut describes scandals as 'the royal road... to understanding the social organisation and cultural code' of a particular historical context.<sup>67</sup> Kirsten Wood was the first to suggest such an application for the Eaton Affair – as 'an exceptional lens for viewing the workings of gender and power at the start of the Jacksonian era.'<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, these approaches bore fruit in the late 1990s, as historians John F. Marszalek and Catherine Allgor followed in Wood's footsteps and began to study the Eaton Affair, albeit tentatively. Nor was it coincidental that this sudden surge of interest overlapped with another presidential sex scandal.<sup>69</sup> While Marszalek undertook a systematic study of the minutiae of the scandal, Allgor incorporated it within her historical narrative of elite female politicking in the early republic. Likewise, Daniel Walker Howe incorporated their research into his period history in 2007.<sup>70</sup> Their studies, however, have hardly exhausted the subject and only hint at the untapped potential for further research into the Eaton Affair. Nonetheless, the new century has been bereft of fresh scholarship on the subject. Moreover, their response to the diversity of contradictory accounts of the scandal has hindered

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<sup>67</sup> Ari Adut, *On Scandal: Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics, and Art* (United States: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 5.

<sup>68</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, 'Gender and Power', p. 238.

<sup>69</sup> John F. Marszalek, interview by Brian Lamb, *Booknotes*, C-SPAN, March 8 1998, accessed at <<http://www.booknotes.org/Watch/99247-1/John+Marszalek.aspx>> on August 18, 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 335-342.

scholarly understanding of the Eaton Affair. Their purpose – producing cohesive, explanatory narratives of the scandal – has led historians to elide the conflicts among these sources by synthesising them into an organic whole.

This paper avoids such pitfalls by recalibrating its approach to scrutinise the stories told by various protagonists during the Eaton Affair. It also prioritises contemporary evidence over narratives written in retrospect, which impose an artificial coherence upon events that reflect the concerns of an entirely different context. An examination of contemporary sources suggests that these accounts themselves constituted a second (and underexamined) dimension of the dispute, in which protagonists deployed gendered narratives to persuade particular audiences to endorse their positions. Instead of mining them as source material, this paper reassembles the available evidence to reconstruct these narratives. In light of their original context – embedded in a political arena and circulated in competition with other narratives – they have been presented in parallel. Based on the varying mediums, intended audiences and concerns of authors, it is apparent that the Eaton Affair produced two distinct sets of narratives: those circulated via letters among an elite audience from the January 1829 Eaton marriage until the April 1831 Cabinet dissolution, and those published to a mass audience via the press after the dissolution and throughout 1831. The Eaton Affair, in fact, constituted two distinct, yet overlapping scandals: a furore among the political elite over Margaret Eaton's place in Washington society, followed by a bitter newspaper dispute over her role in precipitating the Cabinet dissolution.

The first and second scandals stemmed from violations of the gender norms and expectations of elite and mass political cultures respectively, each of which held distinctive conceptions of the relationship of women to politics. The elite political

subculture of the ruling classes at Washington tacitly accepted the covert political power wielded by high-ranking women, while in the incipient democratic culture of the masses political activity increasingly possessed masculine overtones. Andrew Jackson, a product of mass political culture and outsider to the 'parlor politics' of Washington, defied the traditional prerogatives of elite women to regulate social intercourse when he sought the acceptance of the allegedly immoral interloper Margaret Eaton into their society.<sup>71</sup> Caught in an impasse, the elite women cast their ostracism of Margaret as an act of disinterested moral censorship, while Jackson portrayed it as a male-motivated political conspiracy. Two years later, Duff Green publicised the role of Margaret – a woman – in causing the unprecedented Cabinet dissolution in order to discredit the Jackson Administration and thus further the presidential ambitions of his patron, Vice-President Calhoun. Her defenders ineffectively rebutted Green's narrative of malign female influence by alternatively depicting Margaret as the incarnation of injured female innocence.

The reinterpretation of the Eaton Affair outlined in this study both reiterates the centrality of gender to Jacksonian political culture and throws the heretofore unexplored dissonance between elite and mass political culture into stark relief. Though prior historians such as Norma Basch, Kirsten Wood and Michael Pierson have recognised the significance of gender in Jacksonian political culture, the disjuncture between the gender paradigms of the political leadership and their constituents remains uncharted.<sup>72</sup> Instead, they have focused upon identifying and charting a divergence between the 'gender culture[s]' of the antebellum political

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<sup>71</sup> Wilentz, *Jackson*, pp. 8, 14, 54; Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (USA: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

<sup>72</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, 'Gender and Power', p. 241; Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts, Free Homes: Gender and Antislavery Politics* (USA: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 189-90.

parties.<sup>73</sup> In fact, Wood has even highlighted the contribution of the Eaton Affair, occurring as political alignments were solidifying into the Second Party System of Whigs versus Democrats, to this partisan divergence.<sup>74</sup> Yet even as this “horizontal” divergence between political parties has been thoroughly explored, little attention has been paid thus far to the concomitant “vertical” divide between the gender roles, norms and expectations of the nation’s political elites and the electorate to which they were accountable. This divergence became particularly pronounced into the 1820s, as democratic currents of thought came to dominate mass political culture even as the elite political culture of Washington adhered to notions of republicanism that were becoming increasingly antique within the wider nation.

Though the political arrangements and governmental structures of European monarchies had been resoundingly rejected by the Revolution, it had not resolved the question of what form of government would replace them. According to the ‘theories of pure republicanism’ upon which the Founding Fathers modelled the government created by the Constitution, the citizenry had delegated their collective power to representatives who would maximise the public welfare.<sup>75</sup> These representatives were drawn from the nation’s elite who, rather than seeking power for its own sake, had been reluctantly raised to public office by their fellow citizens who recognised their exemplary civic virtue and patriotism.<sup>76</sup> They came together in a deliberative body to determine policy through debate, reason and compromise in full view of their constituents. While popular consent was acknowledged as the source of governmental authority, the role of the people was limited to guarding

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<sup>73</sup> Pierson, *Free Hearts*, pp. 3, 116, 146; Norma Basch, ‘Marriage, Morals, and Politics in the Election of 1828’, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 80, No. 3 (Dec., 1993), p. 894.

<sup>74</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, p. 244.

<sup>75</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 34.

<sup>76</sup> Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (USA: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 5, 9.

their liberties by holding their representatives accountable for any abuses at periodic elections.<sup>77</sup> Though the 'doctrine of popular sovereignty' had been established beyond dispute by the Revolution, far more radical interpretations of this doctrine simmered beneath the surface of the founders' ideal republic.<sup>78</sup>

The revolutionary victory did not herald the dawn of popular rule in the United States. The path to democracy would be winding, with many pitfalls and dead-ends, before the concept was realised in the early nineteenth century, if only in a limited sense. Democratic currents of thought remained marginal within political culture through the 1780s and 1790s; during this period "democrat" was an epithet. Yet by the first decade of the nineteenth century it became a compliment.<sup>79</sup> Broader acceptance within the political mainstream, however, had only been achieved by stripping democratic thought of its more radical connotations (i.e. cosmopolitanism, abolitionism, racial egalitarianism).<sup>80</sup> Instead, the consensus meaning of democracy became a polity of white men who participated through the act of voting. Once this shift occurred, democratic thought came to dominate mass political culture into the 1810s and 1820s. This democratic impulse from below achieved tangible gains at an institutional level. Suffrage for white males became virtually universal as state constitutional conventions convened during these decades to expand the franchise to 'every white male citizen.'<sup>81</sup> Moreover, popular voting for presidential electors became the norm as state legislatures gradually surrendered this role to the

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<sup>77</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (USA: First Vintage Books, 1991), p. 187; Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (USA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), p. 178.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 122

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, pp. 50, 51, 57, 60.

<sup>81</sup> Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, p. 57-59; Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early Republic* (USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 150, 154.

people.<sup>82</sup> The opening of such avenues spurred the highest levels of political engagement in American history; with historian Jean Baker arguing that ‘public affairs replaced spiritual matters at the center of many a white male’s universe.’<sup>83</sup>

This democratisation of mass political culture was accompanied by its “masculinisation.” In the post-revolutionary republic, the franchise was restricted by property qualifications – regarded as a privilege of class rather than right of manhood.<sup>84</sup> For instance, for thirty years after the Revolution women in New Jersey could vote if they met the requisite property requirements.<sup>85</sup> According to the classical republican rationale, the vote could only be entrusted to those citizens who possessed economic independence, and thus possessed a stake in society and were less susceptible to corruption or demagoguery.<sup>86</sup> However, voting was not yet regarded as the ‘sine qua non of political participation’ but rather as ‘one of many vehicles’ for political expression.<sup>87</sup> Those not considered independent, such as poorer whites, women and blacks, could participate in the ‘capacious realm’ of a

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<sup>82</sup> Wilentz, *Jackson*, pp. 53, 157. By 1828 all states but South Carolina had adopted popular voting to select presidential electors.

<sup>83</sup> Scholars like Altschuler, Blumin and Pierson contest this scholarly paradigm of the antebellum period as the ‘Golden Age of American Democracy’ by questioning the extent and sincerity of political participation, suggesting partisan loyalty may have been ‘an easy alternative to a thoughtful and time-consuming engagement in public affairs, rather than a vehicle for commitment.’ Though such scholarship ably illustrates the limits of Jacksonian democracy, skyrocketing voter turnout levels reveal that a process of democratisation, however restricted by race and gender, was underway; Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (UK: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp. 23, 269; Pierson, *Free Hearts*, pp. 116, 189-90; Glenn C. Altschuler & Stuart M. Blumin, ‘Limits of Political Engagement in Antebellum America: A New Look at the Golden Age of Participatory Democracy’, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (Dec., 1997), p. 858.

<sup>84</sup> Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, p. 150.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, p. 57; Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, p. 27; Gordon S. Wood, *American Revolution*, pp. 104, 106.

<sup>87</sup> Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, pp. 157, 163-4.

‘politics of out of doors and in the streets’ i.e. symbolic activities such as public festivals, demonstrations, parades, commemorations, etc.<sup>88</sup>

The republican rationale was increasingly replaced by an alternate reasoning that justified the extension of suffrage to all white men regardless of class. The prevailing notion of manhood in the antebellum period increasingly defined masculinity through ‘self-discipline... and self-control’ via the mastery of ‘bodily desires and passions.’<sup>89</sup> Those capable of such ‘personal self-government were held responsible enough to vote.’<sup>90</sup> This rationale simultaneously barred those who supposedly lacked such self-mastery – i.e. women, blacks – from membership in the polity. Meanwhile, as the ranks of voters swelled to include almost all white men, alternative avenues of political expression became moribund.<sup>91</sup> Accordingly, the bounds of the political community were increasingly demarcated by gender and race, rather than class, heralding the shift towards the reconceptualisation of political work as an exclusively masculine concern.<sup>92</sup>

This masculinisation of politics transpired in parallel with the emergence of the immensely influential doctrine of the separate spheres. Premised upon the notion of natural difference, this ideal constructed reality as a series of ‘gendered dichotomies’ – such as politics versus society, public versus private and masculine versus feminine.<sup>93</sup> According to Alexis de Tocqueville, who toured the United States in 1831, democratic America recognised the natural differences between ‘physical and moral constitution of man and woman’ and, as a result, ‘carefully divid[ed] the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, pp. 68, 81, 156.

<sup>89</sup> Frances M. Clarke, *War Stories: Suffering and Sacrifice in the Civil War North* (USA: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 160.

<sup>90</sup> Baker, *Affairs of Party*, p. 268.

<sup>91</sup> Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, p. 182.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, p. 155.

<sup>93</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 27.

duties of man from those of woman.<sup>94</sup> Through their association with gender, the political (public) and social (private) spheres were understood as diametrically opposite, and defined against each other.<sup>95</sup> In turn, this opposition informed gender roles, defining the public realm of politics and commerce as masculine and relegating women to the privacy of their domestic domain. Though, as many historians have observed, this popular discourse did not necessarily describe the reality of existence, it did exert a strong influence on perceptions of legitimate behaviour.<sup>96</sup>

Insulated from the democratic currents overtaking mass political culture, the elite political culture of Washington developed along distinctive and divergent lines through the 1820s. The politics of the capital centred upon networks of personal relationships managed through socialising.<sup>97</sup> Despite republican ideals which situated politics firmly within the public sphere, political necessity drove the adoption of an “informal politicking” in which essential political work was accomplished in ostensibly social venues. Tasks that later became functions of institutionalised political parties – such as winning support for legislative initiatives, seeking and dispensing patronage, formulating alliances and devising compromises – were performed through the informal politicking that took place in the private realm of social events. Unofficial social gatherings – such as public levées, dinner parties, drawing rooms, exchanges of visits and the like – became indispensable political spaces in which the ruling class could mingle in a relaxed

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<sup>94</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Great Britain[France]: Wordsworth Editions, 1998[1840]), pp. 296-7.

<sup>95</sup> Scott, ‘Gender’, p. 1074.

<sup>96</sup> Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, p. 135.

Linda K. Kerber, ‘Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History’, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Jun., 1988), pp. 17, 21, 28, 39.

<sup>97</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, ‘Gender and Power’, p. 248.

atmosphere away from the public eye, in a process described by historian Joanne Freeman as the 'politicisation of socialising.'<sup>98</sup>

By virtue of their familial or marital ties to male politicians, elite women were present at such occasions. In fact, female attendance was crucial as the presence of these 'social beings' defined an event as non-political.<sup>99</sup> Simultaneously, their presence granted high-ranking women access to the 'pathways of political power.'<sup>100</sup> In such settings, elite females became political actors; privy to networks of information, patronage and alliances that could be strategically employed to advance the political agendas of their male relations.

In the privacy of letters, such women acknowledged and even celebrated the political sway they possessed. Washington socialite Margaret Bayard Smith revelled in the fact that 'among the rulers of the people... women are gaining more than their share of power.'<sup>101</sup> Likewise, Philadelphia socialite Rebecca Gratz, writing to her sister-in-law Maria Gratz, praised her upon the 'influence at court' she wielded through politicians such as Henry Clay and Francis Blair. Erroneously expecting Clay's victory in the 1832 presidential election, Gratz predicted her sister-in-law would sit 'at the right hand of the next president.'<sup>102</sup> Touring British actress Fanny Kemble observed their proclivity for politics, describing the 'wives and daughters... of all the leading political men of the Union' as 'lady-politicians' in their own

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<sup>98</sup> Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, p. 53.

<sup>99</sup> Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, ed. Gaillard Hunt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), p. 154.

<sup>100</sup> Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, p. 57.

<sup>101</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 310.

<sup>102</sup> Rebecca Gratz to Maria Gist Gratz, July 31<sup>st</sup> 1831, in David Philipson (ed.), *Letters of Rebecca Gratz* (Pennsylvania: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1929), p. 126; Rebecca Gratz to Maria Gist Gratz, July 8<sup>th</sup> 1832, in Philipson (ed.), *Letters*, p. 151.

right.<sup>103</sup> Their political influence, however, could not be openly acknowledged, existing in what Catherine Allgor describes as an 'atmosphere of denial.'<sup>104</sup>

To openly acknowledge the political power of elite women would be an admission of the existence of Washington's informal politicking and its corresponding failure to live up to republican ideals. The mingling of public and private spheres implicit in such politicking was dangerously reminiscent of the 'court politics' of Europe.<sup>105</sup> In fact, the chief characteristic of monarchies, which distinguished them from republics, was the lack of 'distinction between public and private spheres of activity.'<sup>106</sup> Only in such scenarios could female influence flourish through the medium of familial, marital or sexual relationships.<sup>107</sup> As such, the spectre of female influence served as a 'rhetorical lightning rod' for anxieties surrounding the practices of aristocratic politicking. The contradiction between republican ideals and the realities of elite politicking generated a latent antipathy towards female influence among male elites.<sup>108</sup> This antipathy, though tempered by necessity and familiarity with the status quo, underpinned the covert nature of female influence.

The 'studied silence' surrounding elite female power, coupled with their lack of first-hand experience of Washington's political culture, meant that the divergent gender paradigms of elite and mass political culture remained invisible to most Americans.<sup>109</sup> By 1828, three key factors – expanded suffrage, popular

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<sup>103</sup> Frances Anne Kemble, *Journal of Frances Anne Butler Vol. 2* (Philadelphia: Carey, Lea & Blanchard, 1835), p. 108, [January 1833].

<sup>104</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 23.

<sup>105</sup> Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, pp. 48-9.

<sup>106</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *American Revolution*, p. 252.

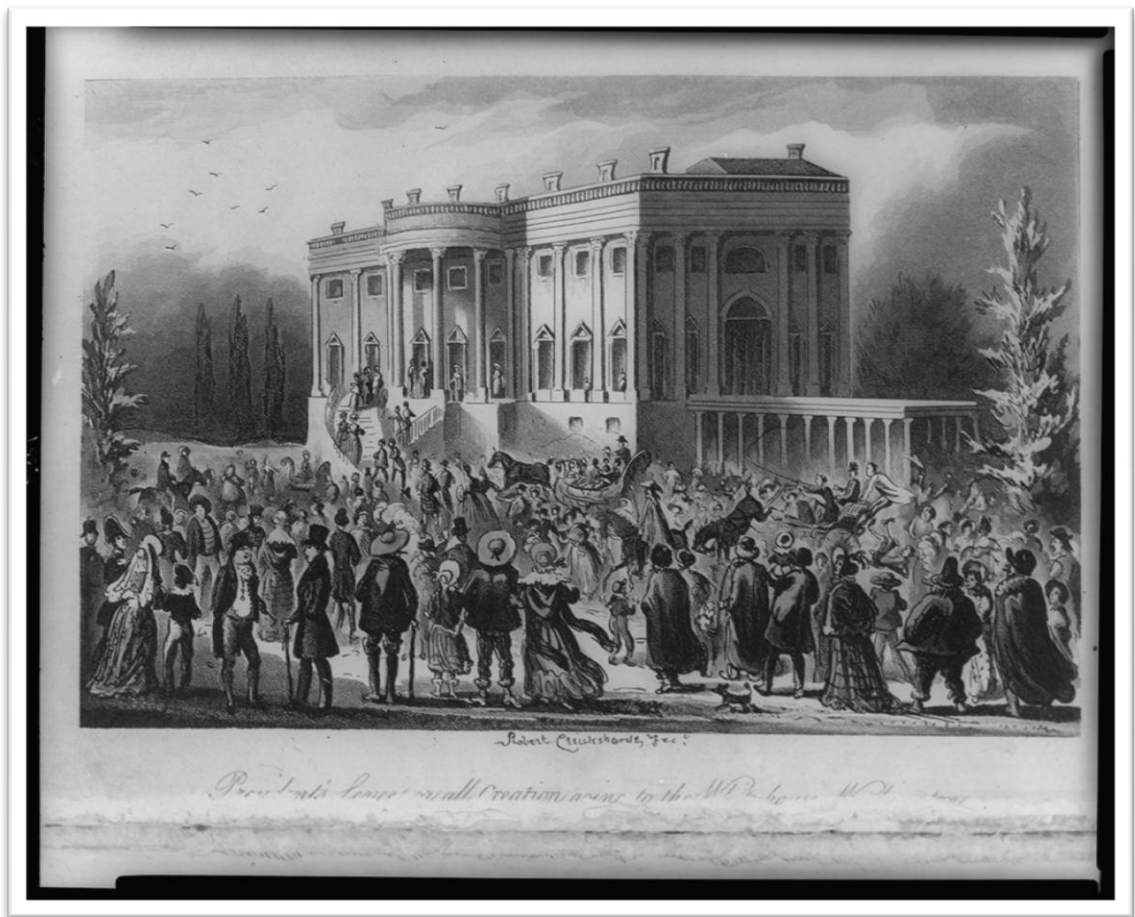
<sup>107</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 129.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 55, 129-30.

<sup>109</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol 1: An Introduction* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 5.

presidential voting and a viable partisan opposition – came into alignment, enabling the democratic impulse to make itself felt on the national stage through the election of Andrew Jackson. His election marked the end of the era in which elite and mass political cultures could operate in seamless parallel with their contradictions concealed from the electorate.

The clash of these cultures in the Eaton Affair would shape the dynamic between women and politics for decades to come. Though not all the gendered narratives deployed during the Eaton Affair shared the visceral hostility to female power demonstrated and disseminated by Duff Green's narrative of malign influence, they all shared a bedrock assumption: that politics was a masculine realm, in which women had no place. This masculine model of politics was articulated by these narratives in the elite arena and the public sphere; contributing to the curtailment of elite female power and the excision of ordinary women from the body politic.



*Fig. 1: Immense crowds descended upon Washington for Andrew Jackson's inauguration on March 4<sup>th</sup> 1829, seen here in this depiction of the post-inaugural public reception held at the White House.*

## Chapter 1: Moral Censorship or Political Conspiracy?

The inauguration of Andrew Jackson on the fourth of March, 1829, saw democracy in the ascendant. Scenes of Jackson's inauguration are a staple of historians' accounts; encapsulating the triumph of the democratic revolution which Jackson embodied and the beginning of the age to which he lent his name.<sup>110</sup> This sentiment was shared by contemporaries. According to Margaret Bayard Smith, a long-time resident of Washington, it had been 'the People's day, and the People's President, and the People would rule.'<sup>111</sup> Certainly the event was considered momentous by average Americans.<sup>112</sup> Crowds drawn from every region and every class in the Union converged upon the Capitol - 'Country men, farmers, gentlemen... boys, women and children, black and white' of 'the North... the West and the South.'<sup>113</sup> After he gave his inaugural address and took the oath of office from the Chief Justice, Jackson made a telling gesture. After kissing the Bible upon which he had sworn his oath, the President turned towards the crowd and bowed 'to the people... in all their majesty.'<sup>114</sup> Francis Scott Key, an eyewitness, pronounced the spectacle sublime.<sup>115</sup>

If Jackson's background was the gauge, then his elevation to the presidency was certainly revolutionary. He epitomised the ideal of the self-made man; orphaned during the Revolutionary War, Jackson achieved prominence as a lawyer on the Tennessee frontier before winning national fame through his lopsided

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<sup>110</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, pp. 169-170; Lynn Hudson Parsons, *The Birth of Modern Politics: Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams and the Election of 1828* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. xi-xiv; Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, pp. 4-6; Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 68-73.

<sup>111</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 296.

<sup>112</sup> Parsons, *Modern Politics*, p. xiii.

<sup>113</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 294; Arthur J. Stansbury, quoted in Parton, p. 169.

<sup>114</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 291.

<sup>115</sup> Francis Scott Key, quoted in Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 293-4.

victory over the British at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815.<sup>116</sup> Jackson's democratic *bona fides* were all the more convincing when compared to that of his opponent, the presidential incumbent John Quincy Adams. Born into privilege, Adams was the son of former president John Adams, and had accomplished a distinguished diplomatic career before his eight-year tenure as Secretary of State.<sup>117</sup> The contrast between Jackson, the man of the people, and Adams, who was successfully depicted as aristocratic, was central to the election outcome.<sup>118</sup> Indeed, Jackson's chief newspaper editor Duff Green labelled Adams 'King John II.'<sup>119</sup> In comparison to previous holders of the office, Jackson was an outsider to the presidency and to Washington.<sup>120</sup> Typically, prior Presidents had served in the Cabinets of their predecessors and often had much legislative or executive experience besides, leading Parton to label them the 'Secretary Dynasty.'<sup>121</sup> Meanwhile, Jackson's only Washington experience was a partial Senate term (1823-5) during his unsuccessful 1824 tilt at the presidency.

Though Jackson's inauguration may have been sublime and his election revolutionary, the political culture of Washington could not be rebuilt in a day. Nonetheless, Washington's established elites met both with trepidation. After the scenes upon the Capitol, Jackson returned to the White House for further celebrations. Crowds of twenty-thousand people, over half again the usual population of Washington, followed him there.<sup>122</sup> Only 'Ladies and gentlemen' had been expected 'at this Levee, not the people en masse.'<sup>123</sup> Smith was shocked by the

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<sup>116</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 1-4; Parsons, *Modern Politics*, p. 34.

<sup>117</sup> Parsons, *Modern Politics*, p. xv.

<sup>118</sup> Feller, *Jacksonian Promise*, p. 69

<sup>119</sup> Duff Green, quoted in Sheppard, "Partisan Press", p. 136.

<sup>120</sup> Wilentz, *Jackson*, pp. 8, 14, 54.

<sup>121</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, p. 95.

<sup>122</sup> Jameson, 'Preface', p. iii.

<sup>123</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 296.

resultant scenes: 'The *Majesty of the People* had disappeared, and a rabble, a mob, of boys, negros, women, children, scrambling fighting, romping... The President [was] nearly pressed to death and almost suffocated and torn to pieces by the people in their eagerness to shake hands with Old Hickory.'<sup>124</sup> To long-time residents of the capital entrenched in its elite political culture, such scenes embodied the democratic currents overtaking American society; a fearful prospect to these elites. To Smith, the 'rabble in the Presidents House' evoked 'the mobs in the Tuileries and at Versailles' and aroused fears that 'the People... the most ferocious, cruel and despotic... of all tyrants' could 'put down all rule and rulers.'<sup>125</sup> Likewise, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story was appalled: 'The reign of KING MOB seemed triumphant.'<sup>126</sup>

Far more consequential for the clash between the democratic political culture embodied by Andrew Jackson and the republican culture of Washington's established elites were the scenes that marred the Inaugural Ball that evening.<sup>127</sup> During the ball, many of Washington's elite ladies avoided one woman in particular - Margaret Eaton, wife of newly appointed Secretary of War John Eaton. Even sitting by them at the supper-table, Margaret was pointedly snubbed by Smith, Floride Calhoun (wife of Vice-President Calhoun) and Deborah Ingham (wife of Treasury Secretary Samuel Ingham).<sup>128</sup> This ostracism was not new; it dated back to Margaret's marriage to Eaton a full two months earlier. At the time, the 'ladies declare[d] they will not go to the wedding, and if they can help it will not let their

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p. 295.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, p. 296.

<sup>126</sup> Joseph Story, quoted in Parsons, *Modern Politics*, p. xiv.

<sup>127</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 73.

<sup>128</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 288-9.

husbands go.<sup>129</sup> As one eyewitness later observed, the controversy surrounding Margaret would 'cost the President and his sage counscles more trouble than all the other subjects brought before them during the present administration.'<sup>130</sup>

This controversy caused such trouble because it extended far beyond social snubs and unreturned visits. This chapter focuses upon a more important (and underexamined) dimension of the conflict; how Jackson and elite women promulgated competing narratives to define the meaning and motivation of Margaret's ostracism. The reception of these narratives among political elites would prove crucial in determining whether elite female power (however covert) would remain a fixture of the capital, or whether Jackson's hostility towards informal politicking would expunge their influence from Washington's political culture. To conclude, this chapter will trace how various figures altered and appropriated these narratives of moral censorship and political conspiracy to advance their own agendas.

Even before his marriage to Margaret, John Eaton feared a backlash from the Washington establishment. For most of the 1820s, Margaret lived in her father's boarding house in Washington as her husband was so often at sea. Staying at the same boarding house during his Senate tenure from 1818-1829, Eaton and Margaret became well acquainted. The resultant rumours of an extra-marital affair earned Margaret 'the censure... of a gossiping world.'<sup>131</sup> According to Smith, Margaret's reputation had been 'totally destroyed' by 'her previous connection with him both before and after her husband's death.'<sup>132</sup> After her husband died in 1828, Eaton

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid, pp. 252-3, 255.

<sup>130</sup> John Vance to Henry Clay, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Seager (ed.), *Papers of Henry Clay*, p. 164.

<sup>131</sup> John H. Eaton to Andrew Jackson, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1828, in Harold D. Moser (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Vol VI, 1825-1828* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2002), p. 541.

<sup>132</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 252.

hoped to wed the newly widowed Margaret. Uncertain of the proprieties and fearful of the reaction of the 'City gossippers' he turned to Jackson for advice.<sup>133</sup> Jackson was a natural port of call: Eaton had been one of his protégés since their military service together in the 1810s, and Jackson had also come to know Margaret during his brief Senate term.<sup>134</sup> Jackson's response was characteristically firm: 'Marry her and then you will be a position to defend her.'<sup>135</sup> To Jackson, 'the very act of his marrying her was proof' of Eaton's belief in her virtue, which would 'put down... the gossips of the city.'<sup>136</sup> His resolve to appoint Eaton to the Cabinet was only strengthened by the warnings of supporters that controversy over Margaret could become a 'source of annoyance' (a severe understatement) to the Administration.<sup>137</sup>

These responses were also characteristic of Jackson's incomprehension of the elite political culture of the capital. As an outsider to this culture, Jackson had reacted with distaste and disillusionment when he was first exposed to the informal politicking practices of Washington during his brief Senate term. Writing to his wife Rachel, Jackson complained that there 'is nothing done here but vissitting and *carding each other... scenes*' which 'disgusted' him.<sup>138</sup> The exchange of regular, ceremonial visits (which came to involve elaborate calling cards) between families maintained the social networks that underpinned Washington's informal politicking.<sup>139</sup> It also served as a disguised political space. For instance, the French

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<sup>133</sup> John H. Eaton to Andrew Jackson, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1828, in Moser (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1825-1828*, p. 542.

<sup>134</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 14, 22-3.

<sup>135</sup> Margaret Eaton, *Autobiography*, p. 70.

<sup>136</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 708.

<sup>137</sup> Nathan Towson, quoted in Parton, *Jackson*, p. 329.

<sup>138</sup> Andrew Jackson to Rachel Jackson, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1823, in Moser (ed.), *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Vol V, 1821-1824* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), p. 323.

<sup>139</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 121.

ambassador once remarked to Smith that he often desired to visit her but they 'had so many politics at [her] house, he was afraid a Frenchman might be a restraint.'<sup>140</sup> Already distrustful of such politicking as a departure from republican ideals and dangerously reminiscent of court politics, Jackson's sentiments were only strengthened by his narrow loss in the 1824 presidential election.

As none of the candidates had secured an electoral vote majority, the task of selecting the sixth President fell to the House of Representatives in accordance with the Twelfth Amendment. As all claimed membership in the Jeffersonian-Republican party, their prospects rested upon the success of their informal politicking.<sup>141</sup> Confident that his plurality of popular and electoral votes signified he was the choice of 'the free and unsolicited voice of the people,' Jackson disdained such 'intrigue' and held himself aloof from that 'unclean procedure.'<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, the House gave John Quincy Adams the presidency. Outraged, Jackson alleged the 'voice of the people' was 'disregarded' through a "corrupt bargain" between Adams and then-House Speaker Henry Clay.<sup>143</sup> Adams had repaid Clay's congressional support by appointing him Secretary of State, the traditional stepping-stone to the presidency.<sup>144</sup>

Jackson's refusal to adapt to Washington's signature political culture was not a personal failing. Rather, it stemmed from the wider dissonance between the realities of elite politicking and the norms and expectations of the mass political

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<sup>140</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 57.

<sup>141</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, pp. 203, 208; Parsons, *Modern Politics*, p. 102.

<sup>142</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Parsons, *Modern Politics*, p. 102-3; Andrew Jackson to William Berkeley Lewis, January 21<sup>st</sup> 1825, in Moser (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1825-1828*, p. 17; Andrew Jackson to Rachel Jackson, December 21<sup>st</sup> 1823, in Moser (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1821-1824*, p. 330.

<sup>143</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Parsons, *Modern Politics*, p. 104; Parsons, *Modern Politics*, pp. 106, 145-6; Feller, *Jacksonian Promise*, p. 69.

<sup>144</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, pp. 210-11.

culture into which Jackson had been socialised. John Coffee, a neighbouring Tennessee planter and close friend, shared Jackson's reaction towards elite politicking. In a letter to his wife written on a visit to Washington during Jackson's presidency, he seemed perplexed by the 'constant stream of visits and revisits,' and remarked disapprovingly, 'the ladies perform a considerable part in the drama here.'<sup>145</sup>

This divergence was evident even in the language of these distinct political cultures – for instance, the differing meanings of the term “court” in the 1820s and 1830s. Among the political elite, court described the unofficial social-political arena of Washington in a matter-of-fact sense. Rebecca Gratz, discussing Francis Blair's wife, described her as 'one of the most popular Ladys at Court.' Likewise, she also praised her sister-in-law's 'influence at court.'<sup>146</sup> One congressman, apprising Clay of Van Buren's presidential prospects, labelled him 'the first favorite at Court.'<sup>147</sup> Smith, lamenting her lack of intimacy with the Jackson Administration, described herself and her husband as 'not in favour at court.'<sup>148</sup>

Conversely, in wider usage court referred to European-style aristocratic governance, from which derived its negative connotations and rhetorical value within mass political culture. John Brown, an otherwise unremarkable Revolutionary veteran and Jackson voter, wrote to the newly inaugurated President with congratulations and advice. Brown lambasted Jackson's predecessors for the practice of presidential levées, which smacked of 'Court Ettiquestt' and was thus

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<sup>145</sup> John Coffee to Mary Donelson Coffee, February 12<sup>th</sup> 1833, in Paula Wilcox Burke, *Emily Donelson of Tennessee: Vol. 2* (Richmond, Virginia: Garrett & Massie, Inc., 1941), p. 37.

<sup>146</sup> Rebecca Gratz to Maria Gist Gratz, July 31<sup>st</sup> 1831, in Philipson (ed.), *Letters*, p. 126; Rebecca Gratz to Maria Gist Gratz, December 18<sup>th</sup> 1832, in Philipson (ed.), *Letters*, p. 165.

<sup>147</sup> Robert P. Letcher to Henry Clay, December 21<sup>st</sup> 1829, in Seager (ed.), *Papers of Henry Clay*, pp. 159-60.

<sup>148</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 306.

‘antirepublican in its nature.’ The ‘genious of Republican goverment’ was at odds ‘with the court at Washington City... the most pompous court on Earth’ and so Brown concluded that there was ‘much need of reform’ on Jackson’s part.<sup>149</sup> In the 1832 campaign, such language was even deployed as a line of attack against Jackson himself. One incendiary political cartoon depicted Jackson as a monarchic figure: trampling the Constitution underfoot as he presided in kingly attire over the ‘Court of King Andrew the First.’<sup>150</sup> Indeed, in 1834 Jackson’s political opponents would term themselves the Whigs, after the revolutionaries who had opposed King George III.<sup>151</sup>

The impasse over Margaret Eaton’s admission into Washington society again demonstrated that Jackson’s outlook was firmly rooted in the masculine and democratic political culture of the masses. Instead of deferring to the elite female prerogative to regulate social intercourse, Jackson embarked upon a crusade to win Margaret’s acceptance into society. However, once the Washington ladies ostracised Margaret, they could not set a precedent by acceding to the ‘despotism of the President’s will.’<sup>152</sup> Moreover, their presumed moral supremacy grounded elite female claims to authority – so accepting a woman they had already branded “fallen” would undermine this foundation and diminish their influence. Somewhat inadvertently, then, the question of Margaret’s place in society assumed a far deeper significance; transmuting into a contest over who would command the social spaces of Washington: whether female elites would retain their social

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<sup>149</sup> John Brown to Andrew Jackson, March 10<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller, *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>150</sup> See Appendix 1 for political cartoon; Margaret Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 22; Pollack, *Democracy’s Mistress*, p. 87; Burke, *Emily Donelson Vol. 2*, p. 109;

Gordon S. Wood, *American Revolution*, p. 303.

<sup>151</sup> Watson, *Liberty and Power*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>152</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 319.

prerogatives under the new regime, or Jackson assert control over the capital's informal politicking as he had over the formal apparatus of the state.

This contest, personified in Margaret's struggle for social acceptance, would be decided by the success of each party in rallying the political elite behind their position. To win support, both Jacksonians and the Washington ladies crafted narratives that legitimated their positions while delegitimizing those of their opponents. The majority of surviving accounts of the Eaton Affair were produced for precisely this purpose. Given the nature of gossip and scandal, many Washingtonians were too circumspect to produce documentary records except from necessity. Accordingly, these narratives have been largely reconstructed from letters written to recipients far from the capital. Such letters simultaneously captured the narratives circulated by word of mouth in Washington, even as they were vehicles for their dissemination to distant audiences of political elites.

It was a common nineteenth-century practice to circulate letters beyond their addressed recipients. For instance, one Jacksonian shared a letter from the President-elect with Smith simply to satisfy her curiosity over his handwriting.<sup>153</sup> Letters intended solely for the eyes of their addressee were the exception, illustrated by the custom whereby such missives were marked 'private' or 'confidential.'<sup>154</sup> For politicians, the 'public-minded personal letter' intended for circulation 'among small numbers of elite readers' was an effective political tool.<sup>155</sup> Indeed, Andrew Donelson highlighted the influence letters could have 'on the public mind.'<sup>156</sup> This medium imparted the impressions of sincerity and candour expected of a private

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<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, p. 253.

<sup>154</sup> Philips, *Defense*, p. 119; Henry Lee to Andrew Jackson, August 20<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller, *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 389; Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, pp. 114, 154-5.

<sup>155</sup> Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, p. 114.

<sup>156</sup> Andrew Donelson to John Branch, May 21<sup>st</sup> 1831, in Pigott, "Emily Donelson", p. 49.

missive to a trusted intimate to what was, in fact, a carefully crafted political communication. Nor was this stratagem exclusively employed by male politicians. As Catherine Allgor observes, elite women also disguised political communications as private correspondence in anticipation of its dissemination among 'wider circles of friends and family.'<sup>157</sup> This was certainly true of Margaret Bayard Smith, whose letters constitute most of the surviving source material for the Washington ladies' narrative.

In order to legitimate and garner support for their boycott of the Eatons, the Washington ladies situated their act within the framework of female moral supremacy and domestic duty. They exploited a key tenet of the separate spheres discourse: women's moral superiority over men. This grounded claims that women had a 'moral and social duty' to regulate social intercourse on behalf of their family.<sup>158</sup> Even Jackson accepted that morality was the particular province of women. In 1817, he advised the adolescent Donelson to 'alone intermix' with 'virtuous females' as 'the society of the virtuous female enobles the mind, cultivates your manners, & prepares the mind for the achievement of every thing great, virtuous, & honourable.' Conversely, Donelson should 'shun the intercourse of the others [immoral women]' which 'engenders corruption, & contaminates the morals.'<sup>159</sup>

In her letters, Smith adopted a similar rationale to justify the refusal of the 'virtuous and distinguished women' of Washington to grant Margaret Eaton

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<sup>157</sup> Catherine Allgor, 'Margaret Bayard Smith's 1809 Journey to Monticello and Montpelier: The Politics of Performance in the Early Republic', *Early American Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Winter 2012), pp. 31, 35-6.

<sup>158</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, p. 250.

<sup>159</sup> Andrew Jackson to Andrew Donelson, February 24<sup>th</sup> 1817, in Moser (ed.) *The Papers of Andrew Jackson Vol IV, 1816-1820* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), pp. 91-2.

'admission into society.'<sup>160</sup> The issue in question was 'not so much about Mrs. E' but rather turned upon 'the principle, whether vice shall be countenanced.'<sup>161</sup> Cabinet ladies stood at the forefront of Washington society, and in such a position the capacity of an immoral or "fallen" woman to 'contaminate the morals' would be magnified commensurately.<sup>162</sup> According to community opinion, Margaret was such a woman – one 'who has left her strait and narrow path' – and consequently, had 'never been admitted into good society.' Neither her marriage to Eaton nor the 'President's wishes' altered these facts, and consequently, 'a noble stand... [was] made by the Ladies of Washington' who neither acknowledged her at 'public occasions' nor visited her privately.<sup>163</sup>

Nor did such boycotts lack for precedent. Smith recorded an earlier incident where an inappropriately dressed woman was frozen out by the 'ladies... [who] sent... word, if she wished to meet them... she must promise to have more clothes on.'<sup>164</sup> Moreover, women practised similar roles in contemporary society more generally.<sup>165</sup> The 'peculiar nation of Washington society' as a town devoted entirely to government meant that in the capital such boycotts could take on political ramifications.<sup>166</sup> This meant that, as in the case of Margaret Eaton, they could also be staged for political purposes.

The narrative of disinterested moral policing elegantly concealed the deeper political motives for the ostracism. Second only to the burgeoning Eaton Affair,

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<sup>160</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 305, 319.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, p. 321.

<sup>162</sup> Andrew Jackson to Andrew Donelson, February 24<sup>th</sup> 1817, in Moser (ed.) *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1816-1820*, p. 92.

<sup>163</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 252, 287, 305, 319.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

<sup>165</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 139-40.

<sup>166</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 165.

Smith's correspondence of early 1829 was dominated by grief and resentment over the impending upheaval to Washington society that would occur once Jackson took office.<sup>167</sup> Jackson's election signified a regime change on a scale unmatched since Thomas Jefferson took power from the Federalists in 1801.<sup>168</sup> Since then, the presidency had stayed in the hands of the Jeffersonian-Republican party, which absorbed the opposing Federalists (and their policies) after the War of 1812.<sup>169</sup> This "Era of Good Feelings" was abruptly cut short by the partisan warfare waged by Jacksonians after their champion was deprived of the presidency by Adams and Clay in 1825.<sup>170</sup> Consequently, a 'general gloom' existed over what 'change[s] will take place in our society.'<sup>171</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> Congress would adjourn and their families and those of Adams' Cabinet – 'those of the first distinction... who gave a tone to society' – would depart.<sup>172</sup> Moreover, Jackson instituted a policy of 'rotation in office' for executive appointments, forcing many long-established Washington families, lacking other financial support, to emigrate.<sup>173</sup> Smith predicted she would 'cry all day long on the 4<sup>th</sup> of March' because of the 'many excellent families we shall lose.'<sup>174</sup> Nor was this resentment restricted to Smith. Mary Chase, daughter of a Supreme Court Justice, overcame the 'natural timidity of her sex' to author a savage critique of what became popularly known as the "spoils system" after her husband, an Adams supporter, was dismissed.<sup>175</sup> In part, then, the boycott was likely actuated

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<sup>167</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 240, 246, 249, 257, 272-3, 277, 279, 285, 289, 298.

<sup>168</sup> Benjamin Pierce to Andrew Jackson, January 12<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 11.

<sup>169</sup> Schlesinger, *Age of Jackson*, p. 19; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, p. 59.

<sup>170</sup> Basch, 'Marriage, Morals, and Politics', p. 896.

<sup>171</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 253, 299.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid*, p. 198.

<sup>173</sup> Memorandum on Appointments: Outline of Principles submitted to the Heads of Department, February 23<sup>rd</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 60-61; Rebecca Gratz to Maria Gist Gratz, July 8<sup>th</sup> 1832, in Philipson (ed.), *Letters*, p. 151.

<sup>174</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 253

<sup>175</sup> Mary Chase Barney to Andrew Jackson, June 13<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, pp. 281-6.

by 'displaced aggression' vented upon 'the women closest to Andrew Jackson and... representative of his regime.'<sup>176</sup>

The boycott was not simply an attack upon Jackson borne of fear and resentment, but simultaneously served to consolidate the authority of the elite female community in the face of further changes. Ostracising Margaret communicated the norms and expectations of elite political culture to the influx of newcomers associated with the Jackson Administration, and acted as an avenue whereby they could ingratiate themselves into established Washington society. For example, Donelson told John Eaton that 'the circle in which Mrs D had been... thrown when she arrived in the city had embarrassed... her disposition to be social and free with your lady.' As such, the Donelsons would defer to the 'sentiments of others' who possessed 'a longer acquaintance with society here' to avoid 'endless disputes.'<sup>177</sup> Initially, Smith even anticipated similar success with Jackson himself; believing 'even Genl. Jackson's firmness cannot resist' public opinion and he '*must yield* to council.'<sup>178</sup>

In casting the boycott as an act of moral censorship by the elite female community, the appearance of unanimity was central. Not only did it diminish individual culpability, but if only ladies aligned with Jackson's political opponents participated, they risked perceptions of partisanship. The ostracism could then easily be construed as a political act, which would arouse latent fears of women wielding political power. To avoid such an outcome, Smith littered her letters with examples of participants outside the 'ladies of the opposition' – such as the wives of 'two distinguished Jacksonian Senators, Hayne and Livingston... the Vice-

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<sup>176</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 218.

<sup>177</sup> Andrew Donelson to John H. Eaton, April 10<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 30.

<sup>178</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 282.

President's lady, the lady of the Secretary of the Treasury' and the 'females of the [President's] family' as well as 'the Dutch minister's family.'<sup>179</sup> Moreover, Smith downplayed defections – only 'two or three timid and rather insignificant personages, who trembled for their husband's offices' had visited Margaret – in order to portray the boycott as the 'just and impartial' resolution of 'public opinion.'<sup>180</sup>

To create such solidarity, elite women brought a variety of enforcement mechanisms to bear upon their peers. Of these, perhaps the least subtle was the anonymous letter sent to Susan Decatur, widow of a war hero, warning her against 'associating with Mrs. E.'<sup>181</sup> Others were swayed by more indirect methods. The appearance of solidarity itself exerted significant pressure upon elite women to conform to the boycott. For instance, Eliza Johnston (a Senator's wife) left Margaret's visit unreturned – but not from any moral scruples. In fact, Johnston sympathised with her situation and wished to 'spare the feelings of [Margaret] as long as possible.' She criticised the boycott itself, lamenting that 'women are the greatest persecutors of their own sex.' Nevertheless, Johnston was 'compelled' by the 'arbitrary dictates of the society here' to join the ostracism, or risk her own social standing.<sup>182</sup>

If Johnston had defied the decree of society, she could have suffered a similar fate to the McLane family. Prior to her husband's appointment to the British ambassadorship, Catherine McLane made 'violent asseverations' against Margaret Eaton. The prospects of her husband's political advancement, however, soon

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<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 287, 305, 344.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 282, 287.

<sup>181</sup> Susan Wheeler Decatur to Andrew Jackson, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 659.

<sup>182</sup> Eliza Johnston to Henry Clay, December 12<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Seager (ed.), *Papers of Henry Clay*, p. 135.

changed her mind. On a return trip to Washington, Catherine 'visited this lady, and instantly became a great favorite with the Pres'd.' Though she stood to 'gain great influence with [Jackson]' from such a course, Smith predicted she would 'lose proportionately in society.'<sup>183</sup> Indeed, Calhoun scornfully remarked that her husband's appointment as Treasury Secretary after the Cabinet dissolution had been 'disgracefully purchased' by this 'subserviency to Mrs. Eaton.'<sup>184</sup> The price was high; the McLanes were ostracised alongside Margaret Eaton. Sympathetic at first – 'poor woman... her new honors are not without thorns' – Catherine's 'capricious ways' led Smith to end her social intercourse with the McLanes, despite a close friendship of ten years.<sup>185</sup>

To Jackson, morality had nothing to do with the boycott – it was a political act. Though he accurately discerned its political nature, the gendered lenses of the mass political culture which grounded his outlook produced an interpretation otherwise far from the mark. Apparently incapable of imagining women undertaking a political act of their own accord, Jackson perceived women as 'either victims or ciphers of male manipulators' throughout the scandal.<sup>186</sup> Correspondingly, he assumed that, as only men were political actors, both the ultimate perpetrator and target of the boycott were male. According to Jackson, the 'character of Mrs Eaton' was slandered 'so that a deep and lasting wrong might be inflicted on her husband.'<sup>187</sup> Likewise, though Jackson oscillated between blaming Clay and Calhoun, the architect of the scandal was always assumed to be a (male) political adversary. Moreover, Jackson linked the behaviours of the target and the

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<sup>183</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 320-21.

<sup>184</sup> John C. Calhoun to Samuel D. Ingham, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Clyde N. Wilson (ed.), *The Papers of John C. Calhoun Vol XI, 1829-1832* (USA: University of South Carolina, 1978), p. 379.

<sup>185</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 190, 323, 344.

<sup>186</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, p. 271.

<sup>187</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Parton, *Jackson*, p. 187.

perpetrator with his conceptions of ideal manhood and its converse: 'the great contrast between virtue & vice, between the high Minded honourable man, & the base treacherous deceiver.'<sup>188</sup>

Jackson's response was also framed in terms of the honour code, which prescribed normative masculine behaviour. He was bound by two obligations to support the Eatons: aiding a friend in need and defending female character. In fact, Jackson's bond with Eaton went beyond friendship and bordered upon quasi-familial ties. An associate of almost two decades, Eaton was previously married to Jackson's ward before her premature death.<sup>189</sup> When they served together in the mid-1820s as Tennessee's Senators, Jackson described him as 'more than a son.'<sup>190</sup> Indeed, Van Buren remarked that no man 'placed a higher value upon... the family circle' than Jackson.<sup>191</sup> Marszalek links Jackson's reliance upon 'devoted permanent friends' to the loss of his family early in life and his lack of biological offspring.<sup>192</sup> If Jackson did not support the Eatons, it was tantamount to adding 'the weight and influence of [his] name' to the rumours.<sup>193</sup> To thus 'abandon an old & tried friend' would 'disgrace' Jackson's honour.<sup>194</sup> Even Smith conceded the rectitude of this rationale: 'no one can deny the P.'s weakness originates in an amiable cause, – his devoted and ardent friendship for Genl. Eton.'<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Mark R. Cheatham, *Old Hickory's Nephew: The Political and Private Struggles of Andrew Jackson Donelson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), p. 31.

<sup>189</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 267.

<sup>190</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, pp. 62-3.

<sup>191</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, p. 403.

<sup>192</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p 3.

<sup>193</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Parton, *Jackson*, p. 188.

<sup>194</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, pp. 108-9;

Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 708.

<sup>195</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 319.

The honour code also prescribed the 'protection of the weak' – meaning, in this case, the duty to 'guard virtuous female character with vestal vigilance.'<sup>196</sup> Indeed, Jackson advised the adolescent Donelson years before that: 'it is your duty to aid injured innocence when & wheresoever you meet with it' having ensured 'that the subject of abuse is innocent, and the treatment unjust.'<sup>197</sup> Margaret Eaton also recalled that 'he seemed to feel... that every woman needed a defender.'<sup>198</sup>

During the scandal Jackson believed he was not simply defending one female's character, but defending female character in general. He interpreted the boycott as a recurrence of the 'conspiracy against female character' which had seen his late wife slandered during the 1828 presidential campaign.<sup>199</sup> The successful ostracism of Margaret would sanction a system in which 'the most innocent female, can be destroyed – on *rumour*' alone.<sup>200</sup> By late 1829, it is apparent that Jackson saw a wider significance to his stance. By disputing the boycott, Jackson challenged the 'divine right' and 'authority' of the elite female community to 'say who shall, & who shall not be permitted into society.' Margaret's acceptance had become the means to an end; a way to 'put down' the 'system of gossiping & slander' – a system through which, incidentally, his opponents maintained control of the social sphere of the capital.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, p. 180; Andrew Jackson to Ezra Stiles Ely, March 23<sup>rd</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 118.

<sup>197</sup> Andrew Jackson to Andrew Donelson, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1818, in Moser (ed.) *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1816-1820*, p. 262.

<sup>198</sup> Margaret Eaton, *Autobiography*, p. 70.

<sup>199</sup> Andrew Jackson to Mary Ann Eastin, October 24<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 579.

<sup>200</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 711.

<sup>201</sup> Andrew Jackson to [Samuel Swartwout], September 27<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 453; Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, September 28<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 455.

To accomplish this, Jackson embarked upon a multi-pronged strategy designed to rally the political elite behind his position and win Margaret social acceptance. He crafted and disseminated a competing narrative that subverted that of moral censorship, compiled evidence to disprove the rumours of Margaret's immorality, and wielded threats of dismissal to bring his Cabinet and family into line. Concurrently, John Eaton traced these rumours in order to hold the gentlemen responsible to account through duelling.

For Jackson's crusade for Margaret's social acceptance to appear legitimate he had to persuade the political elite that the boycott was, as he believed, a political act. This reconceptualisation transposed the boycott from the domestic to the political arena, which clearly fell within the scope of presidential authority. Jackson's narrative, then, hinged upon revealing the 'political purposes' underlying Margaret's ostracism in two ways.<sup>202</sup> In early 1829, as he was repeatedly cautioned against Eaton's inclusion in the Cabinet, Jackson framed the boycott as an improper female attempt to influence the selection of his Cabinet. He declared that he had not been elected 'to consult the ladies of Washington as to the proper persons to compose my Cabinet' or 'to make a Cabinet for the fashionable ladies.'<sup>203</sup> As the issue lingered long after the Cabinet had been determined Jackson changed tack. Instead of depicting the boycott as a female intrusion upon the masculine political domain, he interpreted it as a disguised conspiracy ultimately motivated by 'masculine malice.'<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 709.

<sup>203</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, p. 329; Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, April [26<sup>th</sup>] 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 184; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Donelson, September [3<sup>rd</sup>] 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 415.

<sup>204</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, p. 271.

As the scandal dragged on, Jackson elaborated upon this conspiracy narrative and substituted Clay for Calhoun as the villain of the piece. At the outset, the boycott was allegedly engineered by ‘Clay and his minions’ as well as ‘some of [Jackson’s political] friends from Tennessee’ who were ‘made the dupes to [these] designing enemies.’<sup>205</sup> According to Jackson, this ‘wicked combination’ sought to ‘intimidate me & to destroy... Eaton, & with him myself’ by circulating ‘the most unblushing, & unfounded slanders... against [Eaton’s] wife.’<sup>206</sup> By 1830, Jackson had instead fixated upon Calhoun, whose wife was the first to refuse to return Margaret’s visit, as the ‘Great magician’ behind the ‘artifice.’<sup>207</sup> In this version, Calhoun ‘dreaded the popularity of Eaton’ as an obstacle to his presidential aspirations, thus seeking ‘to put Major Eaton out of the Cabinet.’<sup>208</sup> Moreover, this was only Calhoun’s latest ‘stab... in the dark’ directed at Jackson under the ‘hypocritical garb of friendship.’<sup>209</sup> Establishing a pattern of such behaviour on Calhoun’s part lent credibility to his narrative. Therefore, Jackson provoked the Seminole Controversy with Calhoun: contending that the then-Secretary of War had secretly sabotaged Jackson by his opposition to Jackson’s 1818 invasion of Florida.<sup>210</sup>

To further subvert the narrative of moral censorship, Jackson undermined the ostensible moral basis of the boycott by gathering and disseminating ‘evidence

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<sup>205</sup> Andrew Jackson to Ralph Eleazar Whitesides Earl, March 16<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 98; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, March 19<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 104; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, March 22<sup>nd</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 109.

<sup>206</sup> Andrew Jackson to [John C. McLemore], September [14<sup>th</sup>] 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 429; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, May 30<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 249.

<sup>207</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, March 19<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, pp. 104-5; Andrew Jackson to William Berkeley Lewis, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 455.

<sup>208</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 711.

<sup>209</sup> Andrew Jackson to Mary Ann Eastin, October 24<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 579.

<sup>210</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 719.

of [Margaret's] innocence.'<sup>211</sup> His investigations produced a 93-page manuscript which constituted an 'account of the refutation of the various slanders.' It contained testimonials 'certifying [her] virtuous conduct' and 'attest[ing] to Mrs. Eaton's purity' as well as statements disproving particular rumours and records of relevant correspondence.<sup>212</sup> Copies were circulated in (at least) Washington, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Tennessee by Jackson via political supporters.<sup>213</sup> Jackson imposed no 'injunction of secrecy on its contents' and told one recipient 'they may be shewn to any one' he deemed proper, while emphasising they were 'not intended for the press.'<sup>214</sup> Evidently, they were targeted to an audience of political elites rather than the wider public. This inference is lent credence by the letters accompanying the copies, many of which openly addressed such an audience. One letter to John McLemore specifically addressed 'my friends in Tennessee.'<sup>215</sup> As his political base, Tennessee was a particular priority for Jackson. Moreover, Tennessee's congressmen had been among the first to speak against Eaton's appointment.<sup>216</sup> Jackson's concern only increased when, upon an 1830 visit to the state, Margaret was excluded from Nashville society – 'the combination of Washington [has] extended itself here... in Nashville.'<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 711.

<sup>212</sup> Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, pp. 756-7; Parton, *Jackson*, p. 196.

<sup>213</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 200; James Gwin to Andrew Jackson, October 10<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 551; William Hume to Andrew Jackson, August 24<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 499; Moses Dawson to Andrew Jackson, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 411; Andrew Jackson, quoted in Parton, pp. 192-3.

<sup>214</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, November 24<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 568; Andrew Jackson to Francis Preston, March 9<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 125.

<sup>215</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, April [26<sup>th</sup>] 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 183.

<sup>216</sup> Hamilton, *Reminiscences*, p. 102.

<sup>217</sup> Andrew Jackson to William B. Lewis, August 7<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 469.

Jackson's efforts did not rest solely upon persuasion; he also exerted his executive authority to wield threats of dismissal against refractory Cabinet Secretaries, the Donelsons (in their roles as White House hostess and private secretary) and even the Dutch ambassador, Chevalier Huygens. Emphasising the importance of 'harmony' between members of his Cabinet, on more than one occasion Jackson intimated his willingness to 'retire... the Gentlemen of my cabinet who cannot harmonise with Major Eaton.'<sup>218</sup> He made this explicit in January 1830, dispatching an intermediary (Congressman Richard M. Johnson) to pressure Ingham, Branch and Berrien into abandoning the boycott through threats of dismissal.<sup>219</sup> Likewise, Jackson threatened to have Huygens recalled after word spread of his wife's plans to head a 'combination... to put Major Eaton and his family out of society' after a perceived slight.<sup>220</sup> Though he failed to follow through on these threats, he acted in the case of the Donelsons. After their 1830 visit to Tennessee, Emily was left behind, and in 1831 Andrew was replaced as private secretary by Nicolas P. Trist and joined her in exile.<sup>221</sup>

Sharing Jackson's outlook, John Eaton's response to his wife's ostracism was similarly shaped by a conception of the political arena as masculine and the precepts of honour. Throughout the scandal, Eaton sought to 'trace... the slander[s] to a responsible source' and deliver a suitable 'chastisement' for their 'base

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<sup>218</sup> Andrew Jackson to Richard Keith Call, July 5<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 328; Andrew Jackson to John Overton, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 655; Memorandum by Andrew Donelson, November 10<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 620; Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, pp. 710, 713; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 719.

<sup>219</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 116-8; Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 51.

<sup>220</sup> Andrew Jackson to Martin Van Buren, January 24<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 49.

<sup>221</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 136, 145, 184.

conduct.<sup>222</sup> Such “chastisement” was a euphemism for a duel; the final recourse of the honour code by which fellow gentlemen could be held accountable. Though none of his challenges ever reached the duelling grounds, they served to silence gossips. Perceiving women as dupes or victims, Eaton ‘took the stand to make husbands answerable for the sayings of their wives.’<sup>223</sup> Likewise, Eaton and Jackson excluded Margaret from strategy sessions over the scandal: Eaton insisted that she ‘leave the whole matter to me... I can fight your battles and my own’ as it was ‘his business to defend’ her.<sup>224</sup> When Margaret once broached the topic with Jackson, he instructed her to return to her domestic role: ‘go home and cook your bacon and greens and eat your dinner in peace.’<sup>225</sup> So effective was this sidelining that she only learned of the worst slanders when interviewed decades afterwards.<sup>226</sup>

As these narratives of moral censorship versus political conspiracy clashed, various figures had to navigate this treacherous political terrain. Jacksonians were placed in a particularly precarious position; forced to balance the competing demands made upon them by Washington society and the President. The unusual political landscape thus created opportunities and dangers for all involved; some careers and ambitions would be advanced while others would be stymied by the scandal. Figures such as Postmaster-General Barry, the Donelsons, Calhoun and Van Buren exploited the narratives of moral censorship and political conspiracy to legitimate their own positions towards Margaret Eaton as well as further their own agendas.

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<sup>222</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, April [26<sup>th</sup>] 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 183; Andrew Jackson to [John C. McLemore], September [14<sup>th</sup>] 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, pp. 429-30.

<sup>223</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 200.

<sup>224</sup> Margaret Eaton, *Autobiography*, pp. 91, 106.

<sup>225</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 92.

<sup>226</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 11 1874.

Barry took the opportunity to sharpen a familiar line of attack against Jackson's opponents by casting the boycott as the social snobbery of would-be aristocrats. According to Barry, the 'truth is, there is an aristocracy here... claiming preference for birth or wealth.' The social elevation of Margaret, a tavern-keeper's daughter, into the 'fashionable world... [had] touched the pride of the self-constituted great.'<sup>227</sup> This narrative proved popular among many pro-Eaton Jacksonians. For those who agreed with Jackson that the 'moralistic language' of the Washington ladies masked ulterior motives, but disagreed these motives were political, 'simple elitism' was an apt explanation.<sup>228</sup>

For the Donelsons, the boycott proved an intractable dilemma. Their presence and positions in Washington were due entirely to Jackson, but these were meaningless if they sacrificed their social standing by socialising with the Eatons 'to please Uncle.'<sup>229</sup> Attempting to adapt to the elite political culture without alienating Jackson, the Donelsons sought to stake out a neutral position in the social dispute by engaging in 'partial intercourse' with the Eatons.<sup>230</sup> Emily paid Margaret an initial visit, but thereafter limited their social intercourse to official occasions.<sup>231</sup> Meanwhile, Andrew took 'special pains' to inform the 'respectable Gentlemen of the city' that they 'had nothing to do with the question of Mrs. Eaton's character.'<sup>232</sup>

Framing their lack of intimacy with the Eatons in the most positive light, the Donelsons maintained their position was neither an endorsement of the rumours nor a judgement upon Margaret's character. Emily assured John Eaton that she did

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<sup>227</sup> William T. Barry, quoted in Pollack, *Democracy's Queen*, p. 105.

<sup>228</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, p. 256.

<sup>229</sup> Emily Donelson to Polly Coffee, quoted in Burke, *Emily Donelson Vol. 1*, p. 178.

<sup>230</sup> Andrew Donelson to Andrew Jackson, October 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 583.

<sup>231</sup> Emily Donelson to Polly Coffee, quoted in Burke, *Emily Donelson Vol. 1*, p. 178.

<sup>232</sup> Drafts by Andrew Donelson, [October 1830], in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 600.

'not wish to decide upon any person's character here' and Andrew held that, as a newcomer, the justice of the boycott was 'not a question for me to decide.'<sup>233</sup> Rather, they simply deferred to the 'public mind' which was 'reluctant to accord to Mrs Eaton that respect which is usually paid to virtue.'<sup>234</sup> This was a frequent refrain of Jacksonians caught in the same bind. Berrien, for instance, concluded it was unnecessary 'to decide upon the truth or falsehood' of the rumours. It was 'sufficient to ascertain the general sense of the community [and]... conform to it.'<sup>235</sup> Likewise, Floride Calhoun deferred to 'the ladies who resided in this place, and who had the best means of forming a correct opinion of her conduct.'<sup>236</sup> This rationale rendered futile Jackson's efforts to gather evidence 'by which truth or falsehood could be tested.'<sup>237</sup> Like Caesar's wife, Margaret Eaton should be above suspicion.

This position was untenable for the Donelsons, as Jackson's interpretation of the boycott left no room for equivocation. To Jackson, it was more than a mere difference of opinion. It represented a rejection of the paternal role that Jackson had stood in relation to Andrew since childhood. By failing to heed Jackson's advice over the counsel of strangers, Andrew rejected Jackson's role as 'head of the family... [and] House hold.'<sup>238</sup> Moreover, their stance undermined his efforts. If Jackson was unable to 'govern [his own] Houshold' how could he expect to succeed

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<sup>233</sup> Emily Donelson to John H. Eaton, in Burke, *Emily Donelson Vol. 1*, p. 187.

<sup>233</sup> Drafts by Andrew Donelson, [October 1830], in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 599.

<sup>234</sup> Drafts by Andrew Donelson, [October 1830], in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 600.

<sup>235</sup> John M. Berrien, quoted in Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 170.

<sup>236</sup> John C. Calhoun, 'Reply to John H. Eaton's Address', October 19<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, p. 476.

<sup>237</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Parton, *Jackson*, p. 201.

<sup>238</sup> Andrew Jackson to Andrew Donelson, October [25<sup>th</sup>] 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 584; Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, pp. 76-77.

with Washington society.<sup>239</sup> Weaving the Donelsons into his narrative of conspiracy, Jackson came to believe them the 'unwitting instruments, & tools' of Calhoun's intrigue.<sup>240</sup> As such, he ultimately banished them to Tennessee. Until the Cabinet dissolution, however, the Donelsons remained subject to the conflicting imperatives of Washington society and Jackson's will. While Jackson issued ultimatums for their return to the capital - 'unless you and yours can harmonize with Major Eaton and his family I do not wish you here' - the Washington ladies praised their 'stand' and advised them not to 'yield one inch of ground.'<sup>241</sup>

Just as the Eaton Affair divided Jackson from his family, it resulted in a rupture with his Vice-President, Calhoun, which would prove ruinous to the presidential hopes of the latter. At the outset of the Jackson Administration, Calhoun's eventual accession seemed assured. He was widely viewed as the heir-apparent given Jackson's ill health and plans for a one-term presidency.<sup>242</sup> As a long-time insider to Washington politics, beginning with a congressional stint in the 1810s before serving as Secretary of War under Monroe and Vice-President under Adams and then Jackson, Calhoun was well versed in the usages of elite society. As such, when his wife 'made up her mind not to return [Margaret's] visit' Calhoun naturally deferred to the 'censorship which the [female] sex exercises over itself.'<sup>243</sup> Shortly after the inauguration, he departed for South Carolina with his wife,

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<sup>239</sup> Andrew Jackson to William B. Lewis, July 21<sup>st</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 436.

<sup>240</sup> Andrew Jackson to William B. Lewis, July 28<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 455.

<sup>241</sup> Andrew Jackson to Andrew Donelson, March 24<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 252; Rebecca Branch to Emily Donelson, October 8<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Burke, *Emily Donelson Vol. 1*, pp. 244-5; Deborah Ingham to Emily Donelson, November 28<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Burke, *Emily Donelson Vol. 1*, pp. 261-2.

<sup>242</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 125, 127.

<sup>243</sup> Calhoun, 'Reply to John H. Eaton's Address', in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, pp. 476-7.

returning only during the congressional sessions.<sup>244</sup> In fact, Calhoun was absent from Washington during most of the scandal.

His absence and inaction, however, did not prevent his alienation from Jackson, upon whom his presidential ambitions rested. Given Floride's role as a society leader and the highest-ranked woman associated with the Jackson Administration, the Calhouns 'unfairly came to be seen as the leaders of society's opposition to Margaret.'<sup>245</sup> When Floride failed to return to the capital with her husband, her absence was construed as a further snub: rather than 'endure the contamination of Mrs. Eaton's company she would not come to Washington.'<sup>246</sup> Meanwhile, Calhoun remained 'mystified' as to how this 'purely social event' had become a 'political imbroglio' into which he was entangled.<sup>247</sup> According to Adams, 'Calhoun appeared to be exceedingly at a loss [over] what to do' while Green castigated him for his 'inaction.'<sup>248</sup> The only decisive action he undertook was in response to the Seminole Controversy, which Jackson had provoked in order to cast Calhoun as a chronic conspirator.

In February 1831, Calhoun published a dossier of correspondence on the subject intended to 'prove he was not hostile to the President' by exposing 'the plot to destroy my political standing' to the public.<sup>249</sup> Green also printed it in the *Telegraph* in the hopes that the 'eyes of the President would be opened.'<sup>250</sup> However, this backfired spectacularly. In order to ensure that their manoeuvre mollified

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<sup>244</sup> Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, p. 3; Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 290.

<sup>245</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 122; Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 195.

<sup>246</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 159.

<sup>247</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 239.

<sup>248</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 195; Duff Green to John C. Calhoun, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1830, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, pp. 217-18.

<sup>249</sup> Sheppard, "Partisan Press", p. 164; John C. Calhoun to Duff Green, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1831, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, pp. 342-3.

<sup>250</sup> Duff Green, quoted in Parton, *Jackson*, p. 334.

Jackson, Green had submitted the manuscript to Eaton prior to publication to obtain Jackson's approval.<sup>251</sup> Eaton, who had nursed 'a grudge against Calhoun ever since Mrs. Calhoun's refusal to associate with Mrs. Eaton,' betrayed them by withholding it from the President.<sup>252</sup> Jackson reacted furiously to the unauthorised publication: 'They have cut their own throats.'<sup>253</sup> The Calhoun-Jackson breach was publicised rather than mended, triggering 'daily hostilities' between the pro-Calhoun *Telegraph* and pro-Jackson *Globe* which were echoed by their ancillary presses nationwide.<sup>254</sup>

The greatest beneficiary of the Calhoun-Jackson split was Martin Van Buren, Jackson's Secretary of State. As a member of Jackson's Cabinet, Van Buren was caught between the conflicting demands made upon him by Jackson and Washington society in regards to the Eaton controversy. The Secretary of State was no outsider to the ways of Washington; he had served in the Senate through the 1820s and was renowned for his social graces. Nevertheless, Van Buren took the part of the Eatons with zeal: commiserating with Jackson, inviting Margaret to parties, and even encouraging Emily Donelson (in vain) to abandon the boycott.<sup>255</sup> So fervent were his efforts that Smith and her cohorts considered including Van Buren in the ostracism.<sup>256</sup> Despite hazarding his own social standing, Van Buren received ample recompense for his pains. His strong support for Margaret Eaton won him Jackson's gratitude and confidence. By the end of 1829, Van Buren was Jackson's preferred successor.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, p. 313.

<sup>252</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, pp. 320, 350.

<sup>253</sup> Andrew Jackson, quoted in Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, p. 313.

<sup>254</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 325; Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 152-3.

<sup>255</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, pp. 110-11; Van Buren, *Autobiography*, pp. 344-45; John Vance to Henry Clay, December 28<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Seager (ed.), *Papers of Henry Clay*, p. 164.

<sup>256</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 306.

<sup>257</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Overton, December 31<sup>st</sup> 1829, in Feller, *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 656.

Throughout the scandal, the anti-Eaton faction interpreted Jackson's course in light of the expectations and perceptions of the capital's elite political culture. Accustomed to the covert power elite women could wield in Washington, many came to believe the hidden hand of Margaret Eaton lay behind the President's unwavering support for the Eatons. Ironically, this inverted Jackson's similarly erroneous belief that a male politician lay behind the boycott. Latent fears of female power were roused as early as April 1829, when Green feared 'much mischief from the furious passions of his revengeful wife operating on Eaton.' Virgil Maxcy, a Calhoun partisan appointed Solicitor of the Treasury, concurred. Evoking Themistocles, Maxcy expressed the 'melancholy conviction' that 'the U.S. are governed by the Pres[iden]t - the Pres[iden]t by the Sec[retar]y of War - & the latter by his W[ife].'<sup>258</sup> One correspondent of Henry Clay detailed her methods: 'Mrs Eaton I am told flatters up the old General in great stile and it runs down even to the hem of his garment like oil.'<sup>259</sup>

Suspensions of Margaret's malign influence were confirmed by the pattern of winners and losers in the Cabinet dissolution. Van Buren was appointed to the British ambassadorship, Eaton was expected to retake his former Senate seat, and Barry (ostensibly not part of the Cabinet proper) remained Postmaster-General.<sup>260</sup> No such executive favour was forthcoming for Ingham, Branch and Berrien who had all participated in the boycott. After the dismissal, Smith concluded that the President was 'completely under the government of Mrs. Eaton.'<sup>261</sup> Jackson angrily

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<sup>258</sup> Virgil Maxcy to John C. Calhoun, April 6<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, p. 17.

<sup>259</sup> Thomas Patterson to Henry Clay, December 13<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Seager (ed.), *Papers of Henry Clay*, p. 138.

<sup>260</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 339.

<sup>261</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 318.

reported that Calhoun was 'secretely saying *that mrs. Eaton is the President.*'<sup>262</sup> Margaret herself acknowledged the common belief that she 'had the ear of the President and could influence appointments as I chose.'<sup>263</sup> Even Barry's son believed 'she did possess too much influence on the Sec[retar]y.'<sup>264</sup> Smith then captured the sentiments of the Washington community when she spoke of the 'dissolution of the cabinet' as the 'triumph' of Margaret Eaton.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Andrew Jackson to Andrew Donelson, July 10<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Burke, *Emily Donelson Vol. 1*, p. 295.

<sup>263</sup> Margaret Eaton, *Autobiography*, p. 146.

<sup>264</sup> John W. Barry, quoted in Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 166.

<sup>265</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 320. Reports of Margaret Eaton's influence were greatly exaggerated. She was precluded from any real power by the attitude of Jackson and her husband towards women and politics. According to her own account, her much-feared influence extended to only two minor patronage appointments, and she 'abstained from all interference with political movements.' *Boston Daily Advertiser*, August 11 1874; Margaret Eaton, *Autobiography*, pp. 67, 146.

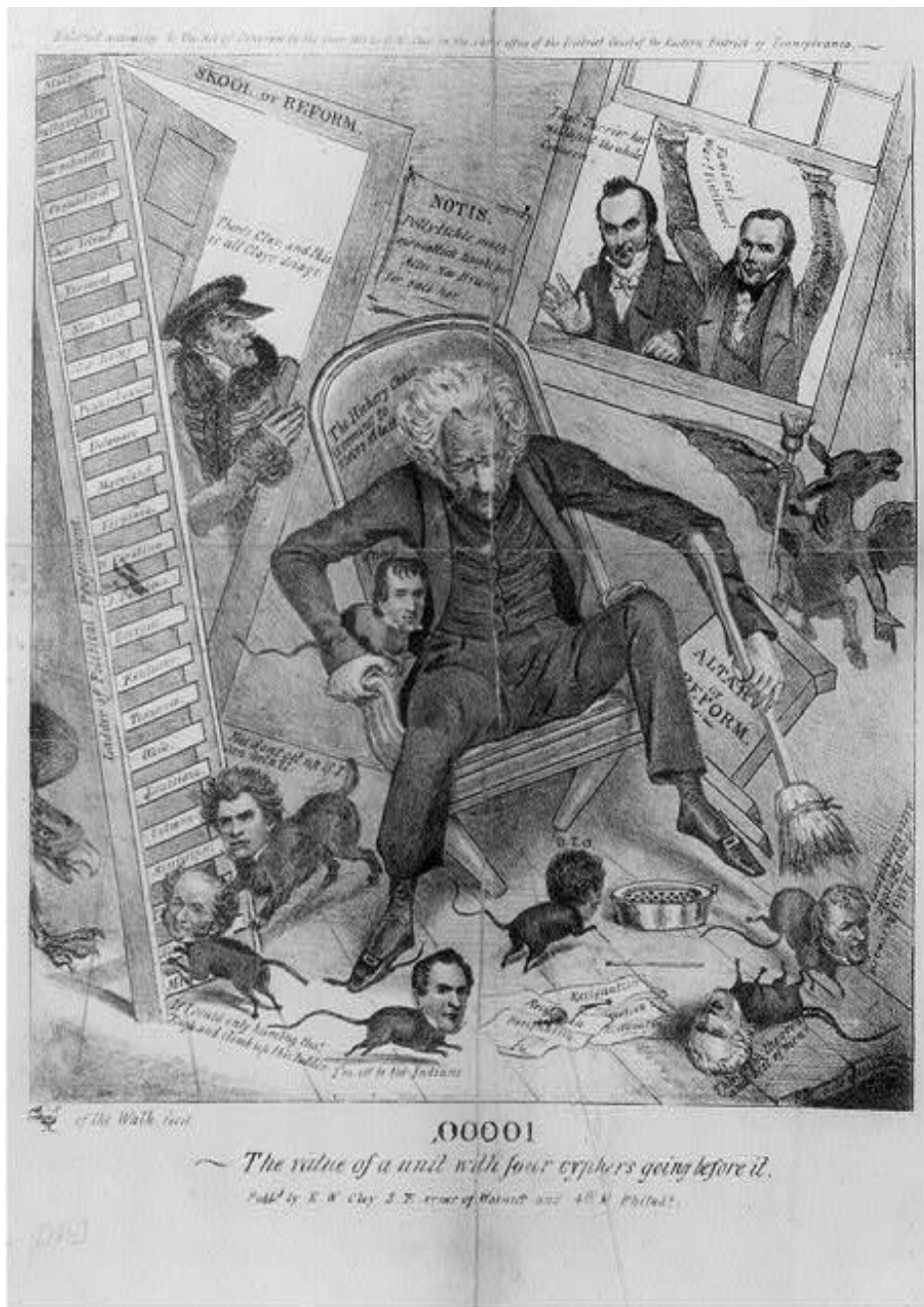


Fig. 2: This satire upon the dissolution of Jackson's Cabinet delighted John Quincy Adams, who recorded that two thousand copies of the caricature were sold in a single day.<sup>266</sup>

<sup>266</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 359.

## Chapter 2: Malign Influence or Injured Innocence?

The dissolution of Jackson's Cabinet marked the culmination of one scandal and the beginning of a second. In this second phase, 'the protagonists were no longer people, but papers' which competed to define the meaning and motivation of the Cabinet dissolution before an audience of the wider public.<sup>267</sup> Like the first scandal, the newspaper war became entangled with the presidential succession. Indeed, Duff Green deliberately provoked the scandal as a vehicle for Calhoun's presidential ambitions. The ultimate failure of this ploy to resurrect Calhoun's candidacy explains the lack of interest displayed by scholars in this second phase relative to the first scandal.

The *United States Telegraph* and the *Washington Globe* were only the foremost papers in a press controversy that spanned the land.<sup>268</sup> However, their insider knowledge of the Administration and location in the capital meant that they would set the terms of this contest. The *Globe* was established in December 1830 by Amos Kendall and Francis Blair on Jackson's behalf, ostensibly as a friendly supplement to the *Telegraph*. Green was not taken in for an instant.<sup>269</sup> Their rivalry became open when the publication of the Seminole Correspondence in February 1831 by Calhoun led the *Globe* to criticise the Vice-President and the *Telegraph* to defend him.<sup>270</sup> Their 'small and peevish war' attained a new dimension after the Cabinet dismissal.<sup>271</sup> To advance Calhoun's prospects by discrediting the Jackson Administration, Green seized upon the dissolution to portray the inner workings of the executive branch as

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<sup>267</sup> Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, p. 130.

<sup>268</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, p. 240.

<sup>269</sup> Duff Green to John C. Calhoun, 19<sup>th</sup> November 1830, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, pp. 261-2.

<sup>270</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 324.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, p. 349.

dangerously reminiscent of the court politics of European monarchies. Central to this portrayal would be tracing the Cabinet dissensions and dissolution to 'the private pique of a vain & indiscreet woman' – Margaret Eaton.<sup>272</sup> In response, Blair attempted to turn the scandal back upon Green. Shifting the focus of controversy to the propriety of his revelations, Blair argued Green had dragged an innocent female into the political arena for partisan purposes.

The prime mover behind the Cabinet dissolution in April 1831 was Martin Van Buren. Though Jackson had often threatened or intimated the possibility of dismissing the refractory Secretaries, he had failed to follow through. Once the breach between Calhoun and Jackson became public in February 1831, Van Buren's position as Jackson's preferred successor was assured. The Secretary of State could gain nothing more from the Eaton controversy, which had hamstrung the Administration for two years and had no end in sight. Therefore, Van Buren adroitly engineered the Cabinet dismissal. Approaching Jackson on one of their frequent horse rides around the countryside, Van Buren proffered his resignation, in the hopes that the rest of the Cabinet would follow suit. By appointing a new Cabinet, Jackson could finish his term free from the disruption of the Eaton controversy.<sup>273</sup> Eaton and Barry co-operated, but Branch, Berrien and Ingham proved reluctant to volunteer their resignations. Jackson then officially requested their resignations, on the grounds that the Cabinet had 'come in... as a unit' and should leave as such.<sup>274</sup>

Jackson and Van Buren were well aware of the attention that the unprecedented event would attract from the press and public, thus far kept in the

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<sup>272</sup> Duff Green to John B. Helm, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1831, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, p. 386.

<sup>273</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, pp. 402-7.

<sup>274</sup> Andrew Jackson to John Branch, April 19<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 266.

dark over the Cabinet dissensions.<sup>275</sup> If it became public knowledge that the ultimate cause was a woman scorned, comparisons with the corrupt courts of Europe would ensue and the Administration suffer incalculable damage. With uncanny prescience, Van Buren warned Jackson of the risk of being ‘drawn into a newspaper controversy’ over the issue.<sup>276</sup> To forestall this outcome, they embarked on a strategy of obfuscation: contriving to place the resignations, according to the report of the British ambassador, ‘upon ground[s] separate from those which, it is well known, have really brought about the dissolution of the Cabinet.’<sup>277</sup> Officially, Eaton attributed his departure to a long-held plan to retire once the Administration had been placed on a favourable footing, while Van Buren sought to avoid a ‘premature agitation of the question of your Successor’ by his withdrawal.<sup>278</sup> Branch, Berrien and Ingham proffered no explanations, presenting their resignations as simply acts of ‘obedience to [Jackson’s] will.’<sup>279</sup> At first, Van Buren believed this obfuscation had succeeded. To all appearances, the Cabinet dissolution was ‘amicably accomplished.’ Yet before long it would assume a ‘very violent character.’<sup>280</sup>

Lacking any precedent in American political history, the Cabinet dissolution ‘stunned the nation.’<sup>281</sup> Visiting Philadelphia when the news struck, Adams found ‘scarcely any other topic of conversation than the recent breaking up of the

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<sup>275</sup> Pigott, “Emily Donelson”, p. 35; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 340; Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 218; Parton, *Jackson*, 289.

<sup>276</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, p. 362.

<sup>277</sup> Charles Vaughan to Lord Palmerston, April 21<sup>st</sup> 1831, quoted in Pollack, *Democracy’s Mistress*, p. 130.

<sup>278</sup> John H. Eaton to Andrew Jackson, April 7<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 257; Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, April 11<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 260.

<sup>279</sup> Samuel D. Ingham to Andrew Jackson, April 19<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 265; John Branch to Andrew Jackson, April 19<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 266; John Berrien to Andrew Jackson, June 15<sup>th</sup> 1831, in *United States Telegraph*, June 23 1831.

<sup>280</sup> Van Buren, *Autobiography*, p. 356.

<sup>281</sup> Robert V. Remini, quoted in Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, p. 263.

President's Cabinet at Washington.<sup>282</sup> This shock was accompanied by fears for the future – did the extraordinary event herald a constitutional crisis or collapse of government?<sup>283</sup> These fears were best exemplified in the rumours overtaking Spanish Cuba. News of the dissolution combined with the sighting of a schooner flying a state (rather than national) flag led to reports that the Union had been dissolved altogether.<sup>284</sup> The passage of time soon quelled anxieties over a wider political upheaval, and the press redirected its scrutiny towards satisfying 'the intense curiosity which prevails to ascertain the causes which produced the breaking up of the late cabinet.'<sup>285</sup> The official resignation correspondence between the President and his Secretaries only stoked the public clamour for answers. These letters were widely condemned for their ambiguity. The *Charleston Mercury* described Van Buren's letter (the longest) 'as mysterious and incomprehensible as a Sibylline oracle.'<sup>286</sup> Meanwhile, the *Lynchburg Jeffersonian* labelled it an attempt 'to throw dust in the eyes of an enlightened people.'<sup>287</sup> The *Wisconsin Republican* concluded that the public, kept in the dark, would be 'left to conjecture' the causes of the Cabinet's breakup.<sup>288</sup>

The curiosity of the public over the dissolution presented Green, with his insider knowledge and the platform of the *Telegraph*, with another opportunity to promote Calhoun's presidential candidacy. Outmanoeuvred in the elite arena by Van Buren, a change of tactics was necessary. Instead of seeking Jackson's endorsement, they sought to strengthen Calhoun's 'attachment... to the great body of the party' in order to realise his presidential ambitions through grassroots

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<sup>282</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 359.

<sup>283</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 163.

<sup>284</sup> *Charleston Courier*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, May 30 1831.

<sup>285</sup> *American Sentinel*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, May 27 1831.

<sup>286</sup> *Charleston Mercury*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, May 5 1831.

<sup>287</sup> *Lynchburg Jeffersonian*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, May 3 1831.

<sup>288</sup> *Wisconsin Republican*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, May 2 1831.

support.<sup>289</sup> By exposing the role female influence (i.e. Margaret Eaton) played in orchestrating the Cabinet dismissal to this targeted demographic, Green sought to discredit the Administration. Consequently, Calhoun's estrangement from the President would become a virtue. Sincerely believing that Margaret Eaton wielded a malign influence over Jackson, Green believed that once the President's use of 'power and patronage to sustain Mrs. Eaton' was 'made manifest to the American people' the reaction against him would be stronger... than it was against his predecessor.'<sup>290</sup>

Newspapers were the most influential political medium because, as Tocqueville observed in 1831, they were the only means to 'put the same thought at the same time before a thousand readers.'<sup>291</sup> Given their role in mediating between the political leadership and their constituents in the incipient democratic political culture of the masses, newspaper historian Jeffrey Pasley contends that 'the newspaper press was the political system's central institution.'<sup>292</sup> Newspapers, according to media historian Gerald Baldasty, provided the 'foundation for a national political network' which united the geographically dispersed and predominantly rural population into the American polity.<sup>293</sup> Congress recognised and buttressed this role through a series of institutional incentives. In a 'disguised government subsidy' the price of newspaper postage was set below the actual cost, and editors could exchange copies of their newspapers with each other for free.<sup>294</sup> Such measures assisted circulation tremendously. In 1830, with a nationwide

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<sup>289</sup> Memorandum by an Unknown Person to Andrew Jackson, [April, 1831], in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, p. 374.

<sup>290</sup> William Stephen Belko, "Duff Green: A Public Life, 1791-1840" (Ph.D dissertation, Mississippi State University, 2002), p. 306; Duff Green to John B. Helm, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1831, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, pp. 388-9.

<sup>291</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 493; Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 220.

<sup>292</sup> Pasley, *Newspaper Politics*, p. 3.

<sup>293</sup> Baldasty, *News*, p. 14.

<sup>294</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, p. 577; Pasley, *Newspaper Politics*, p. 8

population of roughly thirteen million (of which five million, children aside, comprised the electorate of free, white males), there were over sixteen million newspapers circulated via the postal service. By 1832, newspapers comprised 95% of all mail delivered by weight.<sup>295</sup>

Most newspapers were unabashedly partisan; their goal to persuade rather than inform. They did not attempt even a pretence of objectivity. In fact, their partisanship was regarded as a positive good, whereas stances of neutrality were met with suspicion. Green's *Telegraph* had 'no faith in these professions of strict neutrality.'<sup>296</sup> A second Jacksonian editor agreed: 'we most of all things abhor and detest... a neutral newspaper' as pretending 'to be all things to all men.' The editor of such a newspaper either lacked political principles or was 'doing violence to his opinions' in the opportunistic pursuit of personal gain.<sup>297</sup> Just as print-capitalism, according to Benedict Anderson, constructed an 'imagined community' that underpinned the emergence of national identity in the early republic, so too did this system of 'newspaper politics' foster partisan identity among its readers.<sup>298</sup> Tocqueville observed this occurrence firsthand, noting that newspapers 'brought... together' and constructed 'an association that is composed of its habitual readers.'<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Sheppard, "Partisan Press", p. 114; Clerk of the House of Representatives, *Abstract of the Returns of the Fifth Census* (Washington: Duff Green, 1832), p. 47, accessed at <<http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1830a-01.pdf>> on September 17<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>296</sup> *United States Telegraph*, Oct 7 1828.

<sup>297</sup> *Lyons Western Argus*, quoted in Baldasty, *News*, p. 25.

<sup>298</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 62, 64; Pasley, *Newspaper Politics*, p. 11. Both Trish Loughran and Simon Sheppard contest Anderson's formulation, arguing that the integration of isolated communities into a wider print culture fragmented national identity by increasing awareness of sectional differences. However, identity is multi-layered rather than monolithic, and, in any case, national and sectional identities were not yet mutually exclusive during the period in question; Sheppard, "Partisan Press", p. 126. Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), pp. xvii-xix, 384.

<sup>299</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, pp. 223, 221.

The partisan nature of the press meant that typical editors ‘did much more than edit newspapers.’<sup>300</sup> Observing the rivalry of Van Buren and Calhoun play out in the pages of the *Telegraph* and *Globe*, Adams dryly remarked that ‘in our Presidential canvassing an editor has become as essential an appendage to a candidate as in the days of chivalry a squire was to a knight.’<sup>301</sup> The role of the press as intermediary between politicians and the public meant that editors were perfectly positioned to ‘shape public opinion on a massive scale’ to further partisan purposes.<sup>302</sup> Tocqueville noted that the ‘power of the periodical press’ was immense, but ‘each separate journal exercises but little authority’ – and, indeed, their influence varied.<sup>303</sup>

In light of the tyranny of distance, the Washington press possessed disproportionate sway due to their proximity to the centre of political power. They held an ‘established monopoly’ over the political news of the capital and acted as ‘conduits to news outlets throughout the nation’ with their articles reprinted extensively. The ‘incestuous’ relationship between Washington newspapers and the political elite was even institutionalised in 1835, when the Senate restricted access to the floor to journalists from Washington publications.<sup>304</sup> Moreover, the *United States Telegraph* had been the ‘national flagship’ of the Jacksonian coalition for five years, directing ancillary newspapers during Jackson’s 1828 campaign.<sup>305</sup> Despite the encroachments of the *Globe*, Duff Green still wielded a far greater influence over national political discourse than any run-of-the-mill editor. On Calhoun’s behalf Green deployed this influence to apply the strategy they had earlier attempted with

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<sup>300</sup> Baldasty, *News*, p. 30.

<sup>301</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 317.

<sup>302</sup> Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, p. 14.

<sup>303</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 81.

<sup>304</sup> Sheppard, “Partisan Press”, p. 125.

<sup>305</sup> Pasley, *Newspaper Politics*, p. 391; Baldasty, *News*, p. 17.

the Seminole Controversy to the Eaton scandal: utilising the 'press [to] direct the publick indignation against the continuance of this profligate intrigue.'<sup>306</sup>

Calhoun's resort to the court of public opinion represented a retreat from his earlier ideals of republican rule and an accommodation with the emerging democratic political culture. Less than fifteen years earlier Calhoun had scorned the idea that Congress should be bound by voter preferences. Addressing the House of Representatives he had asked rhetorically, 'Have the people of this country snatched the power of deliberation from this body?' Instead, Calhoun had evoked the 'celebrated speech' of Edmund Burke to elaborate a theory of representation in which the role of the public was simply to hold their representatives 'responsible... for the faithful discharge of their duties' rather than instruct them in their deliberations. Furthermore, Calhoun judged the public incompetent to elect the President directly, celebrating that 'his election is... removed... three degrees from the people' via the Electoral College and state legislatures.<sup>307</sup> In such a setting, Green's attempts to win Calhoun the presidency through producing a groundswell of popular support would have been unimaginable.

Since 1817, however, public opinion had become central to the political process. It was 'obsessively' discussed by Americans, who believed the 'statistical collectivity' of informed political opinions equated to the 'general will' of the people. The general will, rather than the deliberations of a virtuous republican elite, could best determine the common good.<sup>308</sup> In this reinterpretation of the doctrine of popular sovereignty, public opinion became the chief source of political legitimacy.

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<sup>306</sup> John C. Calhoun to James H. Hammond, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1831, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, p. 333.

<sup>307</sup> *Proceedings and Debates of the House of Representatives of the United States*, 14<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Jan. 1817, pp. 575-78, accessed at <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwaclink.html>> on August 10<sup>th</sup> 2012.

<sup>308</sup> Gordon S. Wood, *American Revolution*, p. 363; Cotlar, *Transatlantic Radicalism*, pp. 166, 187.

This was put into practice via reforms: the expansion of suffrage and widespread institution of popular presidential voting.<sup>309</sup> Popular opinion was particularly valued by Jacksonians, Green's primary audience, who had framed the 1828 campaign against Adams as the struggle of democracy against aristocracy. Yet, beyond election results, the political system lacked any reliable or scientific means to measure public opinion. Consequently, newspapers assumed this role, casting themselves as the mechanism through which public opinion could be articulated on a daily basis.<sup>310</sup> This role enabled editors, like Green, to represent popular opinion in a certain light to further shape it to their own ends.

Seeking to sustain and intensify the public discontent with the official reasons for the Cabinet dissolution, Green did exactly this. As a result, when he eventually exposed the role of Margaret Eaton he could legitimise it as a response to overwhelming public demand. He achieved this by selectively reprinting editorials from like-minded newspapers (in the absence of copyright or licensing laws this could be done without limit or attribution) and letters to the editor.<sup>311</sup> Issue after issue, the *Telegraph* published content encompassing the geography of the republic. The *Pennsylvania Reporter* complained that 'the whole of the Cabinet have been disbanded for reasons... unknown to us.'<sup>312</sup> A subscriber from North Carolina condemned the 'mystery about the matter' and branded the official reasons as cryptic as 'a response from the Delphic Oracle.'<sup>313</sup> Less subtly, Green simply

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<sup>309</sup> Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, p. 150; Wilentz, *Jackson*, p. 157.

<sup>310</sup> Cotlar, *Transatlantic Radicalism*, p. 179.

<sup>311</sup> Pasley, *Newspaper Politics*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>312</sup> *Pennsylvania Reporter*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, May 3 1831.

<sup>313</sup> Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, June 25 1831.

reported public opinion in accord with his own ends: 'The sum of public opinion is - that the government has been disgraced and the nation outraged.'<sup>314</sup>

Green further stirred up public interest by hinting at the actual cause. Though he withheld the specifics, the *Telegraph* intimated that the 're-organisation of the cabinet' was rooted in a private affair, as it bore 'no relation to the public duties.'<sup>315</sup> This assertion was lent credence by the official resignation letters, in which Jackson praised the 'ability... zeal' and 'efficiency' of the dismissed Secretaries in the performance of their duties.<sup>316</sup> Acting as an outlet for the anti-Eaton Secretaries, Green published a public statement by Ingham which held that the 'official intercourse of the Heads of Departments... had never... been interrupted for a moment.'<sup>317</sup> Instead, Green opined, the cause was to be found in a 'want of harmony... applying to the *social*, and not the *official*, relations of the late incumbents.'<sup>318</sup> This was elaborated upon by Branch, who attributed the 'want of harmony' to the work of malign influences' in the Administration.<sup>319</sup> As Green excited the public clamour to fever pitch, he simultaneously sought to defuse any backlash from his forthcoming revelations.

Green's reticence also stemmed from a second imperative: the informal prohibition upon discussing women openly in the press.<sup>320</sup> Indeed, his restraint only extended to the medium of the press; Green displayed no such caution over

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<sup>314</sup> *United States Telegraph*, July 11 1831.

<sup>315</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 27 1831.

<sup>316</sup> Andrew Jackson to Samuel D. Ingham, April 20<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Bassett (ed.), *Correspondence*, p. 268; Andrew Jackson to John Berrien, June [15<sup>th</sup>] 1831, in *United States Telegraph*, June 23 1831.

<sup>317</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 27 1831; Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, p. 144.

<sup>318</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 17 1831

<sup>319</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 27 1831.

<sup>320</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 218; Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, p. 137; Pigott, "Emily Donelson", p. 35.

disseminating his narrative of malign influence via letters.<sup>321</sup> Editors were customarily reluctant to discuss women in print. The newspaper, after all, embodied the masculine realm of commerce and politics – a world in which women had no place. This cohered with the ‘emerging ideal of domestic privacy’ and the common conviction that women were domestic (not political) beings.<sup>322</sup> Ironically, Green himself risked censure for collapsing public-private boundaries by exposing the monarchic mingling of public and private spheres manifest in a woman’s role in undoing the Cabinet.<sup>323</sup> His fears of backlash were well-founded. The *National Intelligencer* would accuse him of ‘drag[ing] a woman through the political Arena’ while Rebecca Gratz professed herself ‘offended at seeing Mrs Eatons name in every print’ and the ‘decencies of domestic life... [so] violated.’<sup>324</sup> To ensure the subject of controversy would remain the court-like politics of the Administration rather than the propriety of his revelations, Green pre-emptively countered these lines of attack.

Though conceding that ‘domestic concerns’ were usually deemed ‘improper [subjects] for newspaper discussion,’ Green argued the Eaton Affair was an exception to the rule.<sup>325</sup> As the ‘circumstances of 1829’ (his oblique shorthand for the Eaton scandal) were ‘made the basis of official action of the President’ they had ‘lost their private character.’<sup>326</sup> As the cause of the Cabinet dissolution this affair ‘would form an important part of the future history of the Republic’ and hence was ‘no longer... private... *it is public.*’<sup>327</sup> Moreover, Margaret Eaton had ‘unsexed’ herself by

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<sup>321</sup>Duff Green to John B. Helm, 20<sup>th</sup> May 1831, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, pp. 386-9.

<sup>322</sup> Basch, ‘Marriage, Morals, and Politics’, p. 898.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, p. 899.

<sup>324</sup> *National Intelligencer*, quoted in Pollack, *Democracy’s Mistress*, p. 163; Rebecca Gratz to Maria Gist Gratz, [1831], in Philipson (ed.), *Letters*, p. 133.

<sup>325</sup> *Oxford Examiner*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, June 14 1831.

<sup>326</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 27 1831.

<sup>327</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 17 1831.

abandoning the shield of domesticity to enter the public arena.<sup>328</sup> Therefore, the public had 'a right to know what these circumstances were' that undid the Cabinet – an exigency which overrode the usual claims of confidentiality conceded to a domestic affair.<sup>329</sup> The exposure of the Eaton controversy to the public, then, was more than permissible – it was a 'public duty.'<sup>330</sup> Green was doubly bound by his privileged knowledge and as an editor. It was 'the duty of every individual to throw such light upon the subject as he may possess' and, in addition, it was 'the duty of the press to publish truth.'<sup>331</sup>

The narrative of the Eaton scandal fashioned by Green for public consumption was carefully crafted to depict the Jackson Administration as the embodiment of European-style court politics, against which both republican and democratic governance were defined. The corruption of European governance resided in the breakdown of separate social and political spheres, and the coalescence of these private and public realms. Green demonstrated this occurrence in Jackson's executive branch in three key ways: the secrecy surrounding the Cabinet dissolution, malign influences (chiefly Margaret Eaton) wielding covert power via intrigue, and the President's tyrannical attempts to regulate the social intercourse of Washingtonians. The *London Times* aptly identified this portrayal as the source of the scandalised response of the American public. The Cabinet dissolution revealed that 'our brethren west of the Atlantic are not exempted from the private influences in the management of their public affairs, which in their severer moods they ascribe exclusively to the old Courts of Europe.'<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> *United States Telegraph*, October 7 1831.

<sup>329</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 27 1831.

<sup>330</sup> *United States Telegraph*, July 15 1831.

<sup>331</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 18 1831; *United States Telegraph*, July 15 1831.

<sup>332</sup> *London Times*, June 9 1831.

The resemblances with European court politics resonated with the concerns of the 'free, white males' that constituted the Jacksonian electorate.<sup>333</sup> In their political culture, America – the lone republic in a world populated by monarchies – was regarded as an exceptional nation, defined by its difference from the Old World. European precedent, then, was a constant source of comparison.<sup>334</sup> The flipside of this exceptionalism was an abiding anxiety that the United States could succumb to the European example, relapsing into monarchy or tyranny. The traditional fate of classical republics, another key reference point, provided little reason for optimism.<sup>335</sup> Green evoked these fundamental fears to funnel public outrage against the Administration. It was doubly damaging that such scandal should occur under Andrew Jackson, the self-proclaimed outsider and man of the people who had promised to 'cleans[e]' the 'Great Augean Stable at Washington' after the presidency of the aristocratic Adams.<sup>336</sup>

Lacking a reference point in their own history and conscious of European precedent, typical first reactions to the dismissal drew parallels with Europe. Upon hearing the news, Calhoun described the dissolution as 'European in all of its features.'<sup>337</sup> The press followed suit, the *Edgefield Carolinian* noted that the 'change of ministry' undertaken by Jackson followed 'examples... afforded by France and England.'<sup>338</sup> The *Telegraph* also made the link, observing that while 'each successive arrival from Europe brings notice of changes, either made or contemplated, in the

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<sup>333</sup> Zaggari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, p. 154.

<sup>334</sup> Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, p. 7.

<sup>335</sup> Malamud, *Ancient Rome*, p. 10.

<sup>336</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, April [26<sup>th</sup>] 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, pp. 183, 185; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, May 30<sup>th</sup> 1829, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 249; *Lancaster Journal*, quoted in Kim T. Philips, 'The Pennsylvania Origins of the Jackson Movement', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 91, No. 3 (Autumn, 1976), p. 502.

<sup>337</sup> John C. Calhoun to Samuel D. Ingham, May 4<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Clyde N. Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, p. 377.

<sup>338</sup> *Edgefield Carolinian*, in *United States Telegraph*, May 6 1831.

ministry of France and England... an entire change of Cabinet' was hardly typical of the United States.<sup>339</sup> Green simply had to build upon the initial impression of the public by reinforcing the parallels with European politics.

The first parallel drawn by Green was between the secrecy and opaqueness of European governments and the mystery surrounding the 'real motives' underlying Jackson's Cabinet breakup. According to the *Telegraph*, this 'unprecedented change in the government remains as inexplicable to the great body of the governed as if they were the serfs and vassals of an absolute power.' Instead of the transparency and openness expected of republican government, 'darkness... envelopes the conduct of the Executive.'<sup>340</sup> In such court-like atmospheres, in which power was treated as a personal prerogative rather than a public trust, intrigue and female influence could flourish beyond the scrutiny of the citizenry.<sup>341</sup> Once Green himself disrupted this veil of secrecy, these additional features reminiscent of monarchies were laid bare. Rather than the ambiguous explanations provided by the Administration, it was 'Mrs Eaton's influence [that] dissolved the cabinet.'<sup>342</sup> Though such "malign influences" (a staple of Green's editorials) were to be expected in European governments, they were anathema to the expectations of the electorate.

In this context, "malign influence" was a loaded term which evoked a plethora of meanings for contemporary readers. As Joan Scott has observed, words themselves 'have a history.'<sup>343</sup> Their meanings fluctuate over time and cannot be appreciated independently of their milieu. Carrying connotations of corruption,

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<sup>339</sup> *United States Telegraph*, April 22 1831.

<sup>340</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 18 1831.

<sup>341</sup> Allgor, *Parlor Politics*, p. 129.

<sup>342</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 24 1831.

<sup>343</sup> Scott, 'Gender', p. 1053.

'influence' referred to the 'covert exercise of political power' via extra-official means, often in defiance of the popular will.<sup>344</sup> The involvement of women amplified anxiety by invoking fears that their 'distinctive feminine charms' could 'subvert the political process.'<sup>345</sup> Thomas Jefferson, for instance, warned against the 'influence of women in the government' based on his experiences in Revolutionary France. The 'manners of the nation' allowed French women to 'visit, alone, all persons in office, to solicit the affairs of the husband, family, or friends' which had reduced the country to a 'desperate state.' However, Jefferson reassured himself that the American republic was safe from the 'omnipotence' of female influence, which was contained behind the 'domestic line.'<sup>346</sup>

In the case of Margaret Eaton, these anxieties were expressed via a vocabulary of malign female influence primarily informed by classical history and European precedent. Articulating fears surrounding the 'illicit sexual power' elite women could wield, the *Roanoke Advocate* branded Margaret a 'modern Cleopatra' while one reader facetiously enquired whether this 'modern Helen [of Troy]' was as fair as the original.<sup>347</sup> The *New York Daily Advertiser* invoked two powerful courtesans who were mistresses of Louis XV, asking whether 'the Administration had been ruled by a *Madame Pompadour* or *Duchess duBarry*?'<sup>348</sup> One *Telegraph* subscriber drew upon biblical allusions, likening Margaret's influence to the 'whispers of the serpent... in the garden of Eden.'<sup>349</sup> For Green the use of this vocabulary served a secondary purpose. By referring to Margaret as 'Bellona'

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<sup>344</sup> Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, p. 126.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid*, p. 127.

<sup>346</sup> Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, December 4<sup>th</sup> 1788, in Julian P. Boyd (ed.), *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Vol 14, 1788-1789* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 330.

<sup>347</sup> *Roanoke Advocate*, quoted in Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, p.259; *Pollack, Democracy's Mistress*, p. 165.

<sup>348</sup> *New York Daily Advertiser*, quoted in Pollack, p. 146.

<sup>349</sup> Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, June 18 1831.

(Roman goddess of war) Green both alluded to the illicit power she exerted through her husband, the Secretary of War, and evaded, to a degree, the prohibition upon discussing women in connexion with politics in the press.<sup>350</sup>

Green's final parallel with European monarchies centred upon Jackson's efforts to 'regulate the intercourse of female society.'<sup>351</sup> Under the sway of Margaret Eaton, the President had sought to 'compel' the families of Ingham, Branch and Berrien to associate with that of Major Eaton' under threat of dismissal.<sup>352</sup> This represented a vast overreach of presidential power beyond the public sphere into the domestic realm, and smacked of tyranny. Moreover, Jackson was arrogating the role of women in regulating their families' social intercourse. The *Telegraph* reprinted a *Connecticut Herald* editorial that accused Jackson of 'attempting to engraft upon our government the worst features of absolute monarchy.'<sup>353</sup> A letter to the editor reversed Jackson's epithet of Calhoun as a traitorous Brutus – 'Et tu Brute?' – to argue that Brutus 'was an honourable man' while Jackson 'assumes the character of Caesar... a tyrant.'<sup>354</sup> Intriguing for power, Van Buren then 'availed himself of this peculiar situation to ingratiate himself into the favor of the President by urging the propriety' of his efforts to dictate social intercourse.<sup>355</sup>

By emphasising the role of Van Buren and his cohorts, Green was able to separate the President... from the intrigues passing around him.'<sup>356</sup> This language of intrigue originated from the republican vocabulary of the Revolutionary generation,

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<sup>350</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 25 1831.

<sup>351</sup> John C. Calhoun to Bolling Hall, October 19<sup>th</sup> 1831, Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, p. 482; John H. Eaton, *Candid Appeal to the American Public: In Reply to Messrs. Ingham, Branch and Berrien on the Dissolution of the Late Cabinet* (Washington: Globe Office, 1831), p. 15.

<sup>352</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 14 1831.

<sup>353</sup> *Connecticut Herald*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, June 25 1831.

<sup>354</sup> Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, June 8 1831; Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun, May 30<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1829*, p. 322.

<sup>355</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 14 1831.

<sup>356</sup> *United States Telegraph*, July 11 1831.

who had similarly used it to separate the king from his ministers.<sup>357</sup> In Green's portrayal, Van Buren headed a 'secret cabal' of 'corrupt counsellors' that virtually held the President hostage. They undertook 'an organised plan of intercepting every thing which they believe will open his eyes to their practices.'<sup>358</sup> Jackson, then, was the 'victim of a faction, and the creature of a political intrigue.'<sup>359</sup> The President, therefore, was 'not so much to blame' for the dire state of his Administration as 'his selfish and wicked advisers.'<sup>360</sup> This rendering of events certainly persuaded Margaret Bayard Smith, who, by August 1831, believed the President was an 'old man... in his dotage' unaware of 'what he says or what he does.'<sup>361</sup>

At first, Green may have had some small hope of discrediting Van Buren in Jackson's eyes via this ploy and thereby positioning Calhoun as his successor. Indeed, as late as May 1831 the *Telegraph* noted its 'regret' over the 'altercation which has taken place between the first and second officers of the Government' and hoped 'it may prove a temporary misunderstanding.'<sup>362</sup> But more importantly, through this tactic Green countered accusations of disloyalty to Jackson and positioned himself (and Calhoun) as still within the party, which was a loose coalition primarily united by the figure of Jackson and his personal popularity. As Daniel Webster observed, however, Green and Calhoun faced 'great difficulty' in separating 'opposition to Van Buren from opposition to the President.'<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Parsons, *Modern Politics*, p. 78.

<sup>358</sup> *United States Telegraph*, July 9 1831. Green's critique of these counsellors – 'Blair, Lewis, Kendall, & Co' – would eventually evolve into the epithet 'Kitchen Cabinet' in 1832, which would be assimilated into the American political lexicon; *United States Telegraph*, July 14 1831; *United States Telegraph*, March 27 1832.

<sup>359</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 18 1831.

<sup>360</sup> *Lynchburg Jeffersonian*, reprinted in *United States Telegraph*, June 29 1831.

<sup>361</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, pp. 319-20.

<sup>362</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 9 1831.

<sup>363</sup> Daniel Webster, quoted in Parton, p. 296.

Once Jackson made his personal opposition to the *Telegraph* clear, this proved an impossible balancing act to maintain. By July, Green had 'no alternative left but to ascribe to him all that has taken place.'<sup>364</sup> In any case, this only hastened their ultimate goal of placing Calhoun before the party as an alternative presidential candidate. The consequent opposition to Jackson's re-election was grounded upon two key arguments: that Jackson's popularity could not survive the backlash over his role in the Eaton controversy, and that this role demonstrated that he had 'trample[d] underfoot the principles upon which he was elected.'<sup>365</sup> Conversely, the *Telegraph* refused to 'desert the principles upon which it was established.'<sup>366</sup> In short, Jackson, not Calhoun and Green, had left the party – a point driven home by signing off letters to the editor from 'an original Jacksonian.'<sup>367</sup>

Green made a virtue of this estrangement from the President. In contrast to the power-hungry intriguers, Green, Calhoun and the anti-Eaton Secretaries were motivated by considerations of the public good. They acted as Jackson's 'honorable, high-minded and independent friends' by risking their own political preferment and self-interest to 'dare tell him when and where he is wrong.'<sup>368</sup> To an earlier generation of elites inculcated with the values of classical republicanism, Green's act of self-sacrifice for the common good would have epitomised disinterested public virtue. Appealing to the emerging democratic political culture, Green instead cast himself as the exemplar of "manly independence." Reflecting the premium placed upon public opinion as the chief source of political legitimacy, Green did not voice

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<sup>364</sup> *United States Telegraph*, July 14 1831.

<sup>365</sup> Sheppard, "Partisan Press", p. 166; *United States Telegraph*, July 15 1831; *United States Telegraph*, April 26 1831.

<sup>366</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 2 1831.

<sup>367</sup> Wilentz, *Jackson*, p. 84; Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, July 19 1831; Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, March 27 1832; Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, August 4 1831; Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, October 13 1831.

<sup>368</sup> *United States Telegraph*, July 6 1831.

this sentiment himself. Rather, the *Telegraph* published a surfeit of letters to the editor and public toasts praising its 'recent course' as 'independent and patriotic' and the 'manly and independent stand... taken in favour of Mr. Calhoun' by its editor.<sup>369</sup> The emphasis upon independence should not be misconstrued in terms of modern journalistic objectivity. "Independence" was usually coupled with "manly" to identify Green's behaviour with normative manhood while reinforcing the corrupt state of affairs under Jackson, where the public and private were hopelessly intermingled and women wielded power over men.

As Green disseminated his narrative, the Administration and its mouthpiece, the *Globe*, were put on the defensive. With the strategy of obfuscation a failure, the *Globe* (previously published twice weekly) transitioned into a daily format in mid-June to counter the *Telegraph* with its own version of events.<sup>370</sup> When this recourse failed to quell the scandal, John Eaton elaborated upon this narrative in a lengthy political pamphlet published in September 1831. He made it clear that print was not his first choice: he preferred to defend his wife's character and familial honour via personal redress (duelling). This was not simply lip service that enabled Eaton to claim the mantle of a muscular masculinity, though it certainly served that purpose. In fact, Eaton issued challenges to Ingham, Branch and Berrien during the newspaper war, but all shrunk 'from an honourable and just accountability.'<sup>371</sup>

Denied honourable redress, Eaton resorted to ridicule to rebut charges of his wife's malign political influence. The idea that that a single woman was 'so formidable in influence and power as to require' an 'array of Cabinet counsellors'

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<sup>369</sup> Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, June 15 1831; Letter to Editor, in *United States Telegraph*, June 16 1831.

<sup>370</sup> Pigott, "Emily Donelson", p. 34; Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, p. 146.

<sup>371</sup> John H. Eaton, *Candid Appeal*, p. 4.

and 'fashionable ladies' to contain her was 'truly ridiculous.'<sup>372</sup> Rather than interfering in public affairs until her exposure by the *Telegraph*, Margaret Eaton had been 'dragged before the public' by Green to 'defame her reputation for political purpose.'<sup>373</sup> Therefore, rather than embodying malign influence, Margaret was portrayed as the incarnation of injured female innocence. Her defenders accomplished this by invoking an antithetical imagery of womanhood. She was cast in the normative role of a dutiful wife and mother. The *New York Courier & Enquirer* expressed outrage that 'an American female... a wife and mother' should be 'compared to a Pompadour or a DuBarry... the infamous courtesans of the time of Louis XIV and XV.'<sup>374</sup> Likewise, Eaton reminded readers that his wife was first and foremost 'a mother, with two innocent daughters.'<sup>375</sup>

Far from a high-minded concern for the public good, then, the motives for which Green 'invaded the sanctuary of domestic life' were as base as the act itself.<sup>376</sup> Despite the vehement denials of the *Telegraph*, Eaton argued his true motives were the 'political designs' upon the presidency by Calhoun, of whom 'Duff Green... has been from the first the instrument.'<sup>377</sup> Green was not independent – simply the 'devoted, active partizan' of the Vice-President.<sup>378</sup> Nor was Green's behaviour manly, by 'calumniating female innocence' for 'political interests' he had abrogated the role and duties of normative masculinity.<sup>379</sup> In antebellum society, patriarchal power entailed paternal responsibilities, chiefly the protection of dependents such

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>373</sup> *New York Courier & Enquirer*, quoted in Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, p. 146.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid.

<sup>375</sup> John H. Eaton, *Candid Appeal*, p. 11.

<sup>376</sup> *Washington Globe*, June 25 1831.

<sup>377</sup> *United States Telegraph*, July 15 1831; *United States Telegraph*, April 25 1831; John H. Eaton, *Candid Appeal*, p. 26.

<sup>378</sup> John H. Eaton, *Candid Appeal*, p. 26.

<sup>379</sup> *Washington Globe*, June 13 1831.

as women.<sup>380</sup> Inverting the role of ‘protector’ Green had engaged upon ‘wanton attacks on female character.’<sup>381</sup> He had also failed to ‘act like a man’ by his ‘vague insinuations’ and ‘stab[s] in the dark.’<sup>382</sup> Innuendo was a ‘womanly weapon,’ whereas a gentleman would openly stake his honour upon the truth of his statements.<sup>383</sup>

As it was beneath the dignity of his office, Jackson could not overtly involve himself in the ‘editorial war’ over public opinion between the *Telegraph* and *Globe*.<sup>384</sup> He did, however, involve himself in the parallel struggle that raged beneath the surface over the allocation of resources to the respective newspapers. The primary sources of press revenue were political, particularly since subscribers often failed to pay and commercial advertising frequently originated from political supporters.<sup>385</sup> For Washington newspapers, government printing contracts constituted the chief form of political patronage, deriving from the executive departments and the position of official printer to each house of Congress.<sup>386</sup> Playing it safe, the canny Green had waited until his successful re-election as printer to the Senate and the House for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Congress (1831-33) before publishing the *Seminole Correspondence*.<sup>387</sup>

This proved a prudent precaution. Once the resultant editorial war broke out, Jackson undertook multiple measures to benefit the *Globe*’s financial base to the

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<sup>380</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence*, p. 180.

<sup>381</sup> John H. Eaton, *Candid Appeal*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>382</sup> *Washington Globe*, quoted in *United States Telegraph*, June 10 1831.

<sup>383</sup> Pollack, *Democracy’s Mistress*, p. 137; Kenneth Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 32, 41.

<sup>384</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 17 1831.

<sup>385</sup> Pasley, *Newspaper Politics*, p. 15; Charles G. Steffen, ‘Newspapers for Free: The Economies of Newspaper Circulation in the Early Republic’, *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Autumn, 2003), p. 384.

<sup>386</sup> Baldasty, *News*, p. 20.

<sup>387</sup> Adams, *Memoirs*, p. 317.

detriment of the *Telegraph*. By executive order, the printing of the executive departments was diverted from the *Telegraph* to the *Globe*. Jackson also exerted ‘wholly improper’ pressures upon federal office-holders, bluntly telling them ‘I expect you all to patronise the *Globe*.’<sup>388</sup> Like visits to Margaret Eaton, subscriptions to the *Globe* became a ‘litmus test’ of loyalty to the President.<sup>389</sup> This was not unprecedented; in the absence of official party memberships, newspaper subscriptions served as statements of political alignment.<sup>390</sup> Moreover, additional funds were secretly (and illegally) funnelled to the *Globe* via the Post Office.<sup>391</sup> These measures were successful, enabling the *Globe* to increase circulation from 2,000 subscribers in July 1831 to 3,700 by November 1831, as well as providing sufficient resources for the *Globe* to transition into a daily newspaper.<sup>392</sup>

By trumpeting the implementation of these measures, Green turned them to his advantage and reinforced his parallels with European court politics. The methods by which ‘the *Globe* is sustained and the *Telegraph* assailed’ were presented as evidence of the clandestine intrigues with which the Jackson Administration was allegedly rife.<sup>393</sup> As the executive departments withdrew their patronage one by one, Green published their cancellation letters accompanied by caustic commentary.<sup>394</sup> Moreover, the ‘withdrawal of all the patronage of the

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<sup>388</sup> Sheppard, “Partisan Press”, pp. 161-2; Andrew Jackson, quoted in Sheppard, “Partisan Press”, p. 161.

<sup>389</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 239.

<sup>390</sup> Andrew Jackson to John C. McLemore, December 25<sup>th</sup> 1830, in Feller (ed.), *Papers of Andrew Jackson 1830*, p. 712.

<sup>391</sup> Sheppard, “Partisan Press”, p. 162. This illegality was discovered by a Whig Senate investigation.

<sup>392</sup> *Ibid*, p. 161. Official subscription figures underestimate the extent of newspapers’ influence. There existed a multiplier effect due to joint subscriptions, public reading rooms and the borrowing or theft of newspapers. In 1821, the editor of the *National Intelligencer* estimated that the actual audience of newspaper readers outstripped that of registered subscribers fivefold; Pasley, *Newspaper Politics*, p. 7; Steffen, ‘Newspaper Circulation’, pp. 382, 384.

<sup>393</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 11 1831.

<sup>394</sup> Elijah Hayward (General Land Office) to Duff Green, in *United States Telegraph*, July 1 1831; J. B. Thornton (Second Comptroller’s Office) to Duff Green, in *United States Telegraph*, June 6 1831.

Departments was but the preliminary step' in their ultimate purpose of 'putting down the Telegraph.'<sup>395</sup> Throughout the country, great efforts were made to 'induce the friends of the Administration... to substitute the Globe for the Telegraph.' Office-holders, too, 'received pretty distinct intimations' to transfer their support accordingly.<sup>396</sup> *Telegraph* subscribers reported on such happenings in their own locales: observing 'efforts... to lessen your subscription lists' and to 'persuade me to subscribe for the Globe.'<sup>397</sup> In what were no doubt intended as salutary examples, such letters closed with a promise to 'make amends by obtaining new subscribers' and thus 'balance... your withdrawals.'<sup>398</sup>

These measures also afforded Green the opportunity to further characterise his course as independent and driven by concern for the common good, while reinforcing his portrayal of Jackson as a tyrant. Just as Jackson had sought to dictate the 'the social intercourse of the citizens of Washington' he now endeavoured to 'direct them in the choice of a new paper.'<sup>399</sup> Defying this tyranny, Green refused to 'prostitute his press' in the pursuit of 'private interest.'<sup>400</sup> While Blair's *Globe* was chiefly 'interested in the profits... given him by the public offices' the *Telegraph's* only interest was in 'performing our public duty.'<sup>401</sup>

Though Calhoun published a rejoinder to Eaton's pamphlet in late October, the newspaper dispute had begun to peter out. Calhoun's response reiterated Green's themes, but ran to far fewer pages than Eaton's pamphlet and received no

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<sup>395</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 14 1831; *United States Telegraph*, June 6 1831.

<sup>396</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 14 1831.

<sup>397</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 30 1831; *United States Telegraph*, June 29 1831.

<sup>398</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 4 1831; *United States Telegraph*, July 8 1831.

<sup>399</sup> *United States Telegraph*, June 14 1831.

<sup>400</sup> *United States Telegraph*, July 15 1831.

<sup>401</sup> *United States Telegraph*, May 14 1831; *United States Telegraph*, June 6 1831.

response in turn.<sup>402</sup> The Vice-President, like the rest of the nation, was preoccupied with a more pressing issue: the looming crisis over South Carolina's threat to nullify the federal tariff.<sup>403</sup> Moreover, the open sore of the Eatons' presence in Washington had disappeared with their departure to Tennessee in September. The Nullification Crisis would prove the final nail in the coffin for Calhoun's presidential hopes; from then on his politics tended to the sectional. In 1832, Van Buren would take Calhoun's former position upon Jackson's ticket, and then succeed him to the presidency four years later.

Though it was small consolation for Green, his narrative of malign influence won out over that of injured innocence and would characterise the popular memory of the Eaton Affair through the nineteenth century. The conspiratorial currents in American political culture, labelled the 'paranoid style' by Richard Hofstadter, predisposed the public towards accepting Green's narrative.<sup>404</sup> Marszalek observed that, even during the newspaper war itself, the bulk of press coverage surrounding Margaret Eaton comprised 'allegations that she was immoral and... dominated the Jackson administration.'<sup>405</sup> By 1860, Parton observed that 'Van Buren has long rested under the imputation of having precipitated this quarrel for purposes of his own.'<sup>406</sup> In 1873, Wigfall even duplicated Green's phraseology to speak of Calhoun's stand as an 'act of manly independence.'<sup>407</sup> Likewise, late nineteenth-century newspapers which revisited the scandal restated Green's version of events. In 1876, the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* spoke of the 'Queen of society' who held Jackson

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<sup>402</sup> Calhoun, 'Reply to John H. Eaton's Address', October 19<sup>th</sup> 1831, in Wilson (ed.), *Papers of John C. Calhoun 1829-1832*, pp. 474-81.

<sup>403</sup> Kirsten E. Wood, *Gender and Power*, pp. 242-3; Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 193.

<sup>404</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), pp. 4, 6, 14, 15. Jackson's presidency witnessed additional conspiratorial narratives gain traction: the anti-Masonry movement, and Jackson's own Bank War.

<sup>405</sup> Marszalek, *Petticoat Affair*, p. 181.

<sup>406</sup> Parton, *Jackson*, p. 310.

<sup>407</sup> Anonymous, 'Doom of the Republic', p. 217.

'utterly in her power' and thus 'virtually became chief officer of the republic.'<sup>408</sup>

Three years earlier the *Daily Evening Bulletin* had labelled her 'The Woman Who

Ruled at the White House' and 'once held the destinies of a nation in her hand'

while in 1896 the *Chicago Tribune* retold the stories of how she 'had broken up the

Cabinet of the nation, and made and marred the fortunes of the statesmen of the

young republic.'<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, August 13 1876.

<sup>409</sup> *Daily Evening Bulletin*, December 27 1873.  
*Chicago Tribune*, June 28 1896.

## Conclusion

On December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1861, the famed British war correspondent William Howard Russell dined with Simon Cameron, Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of War. Cameron entertained those present with tales of Washington's political gossip from his younger days. The only anecdote Russell considered worth recording was the scandal surrounding Margaret Eaton under Jackson's presidency. In words that could have been Green's own, Cameron spoke of Margaret as a 'beautiful, [b]old and witty... publican's daughter' who rose to become a 'leading personage in the State' and 'ruled the imperious, rugged old Andrew Jackson so completely that he broke up his Cabinet and dismissed his ministers on her account.'<sup>410</sup>

Though the Eaton Affair remained present in popular memory even in the midst of the Civil War, twentieth-century historians dismissed it as inconsequential. Taking scandal seriously, however, it becomes evident that the Eaton Affair was just as significant as the nineteenth-century believed, though they lacked the analytic vocabulary to fully express its import. There were, in fact, two distinct controversies occurring in sequence; in the elite arena of Washington politics and the wider public sphere respectively. The gendered narratives disseminated to address these distinct, yet overlapping, scandals all ultimately contributed to the construction of a masculine model of politics. Though historian Rosemarie Zagarri has highlighted how the redefinition of political participation in terms of male-only activities like voting or office-holding limited political opportunities for women, her narrative ends prematurely with the election of Andrew Jackson.<sup>411</sup> In fact, Jackson's election

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<sup>410</sup> William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South* (New York: T.O.H.P. Burnham, 1863), p. 581 [December 3<sup>rd</sup> 1861].

<sup>411</sup> Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash*, p. 2.

only began this process for Washington's elite political culture while it was still underway in mass political culture.

The narratives of moral censorship and political conspiracy articulated in the elite arena shared a fundamental assumption – politics was a masculine activity. For Jackson, the autonomous exercise of political power by women was so unthinkable that a vast conspiracy embracing his family, Cabinet and Vice-President seemed a more plausible explanation for the boycott of Margaret Eaton. Likewise, the successful exercise of their influence to exclude Margaret required elite women to define it as non-political in nature. Though Jackson never achieved her social acceptance, nonetheless his efforts severely curtailed elite female power, as did the advent of institutionalised political parties – alternative extra-official power structures – under his presidency.<sup>412</sup>

Though curtailed, elite female involvement in Washington's networks of power and patronage survived to the Civil War. Only recently, Cameron had repaid a 'trifling service [Margaret] had done' him 'in the days of her power... by conferring some military appointment on her grandchild.'<sup>413</sup> Margaret had also obtained the post of assistant Librarian to the House of Representatives for her newlywed third husband.<sup>414</sup> However, the aftermath of the newspaper war rendered the invisibility of elite female power an imperative, lest it provoke a similar reaction among the electorate. This is evidenced by the paradoxical role of Jessie Frémont in her husband's 1856 presidential campaign. The most popular campaign tale told about Jessie described her refusal to lobby her husband at the urging of pro-slavery women. Jessie's normative behaviour – refusing to forsake her

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<sup>412</sup> Smith, *Forty Years*, p. 344.

<sup>413</sup> Russell, *Diary*, p. 581.

<sup>414</sup> Pollack, *Democracy's Mistress*, p. 244.

domestic role to intrude into the masculine political realm – was contrasted against the ‘corrupted femininity’ of the pro-slavery women, who assumed political roles so their domestic duties would continue to be performed by slaves. In a supreme irony, Jessie herself crafted this anecdote – a fact concealed by Republicans in accordance with widespread hostility to female involvement in politics.<sup>415</sup>

Likewise, the *Telegraph’s* narrative of malign influence and the *Globe’s* narrative of injured innocence shared this fundamental assumption. Whether Margaret intruded herself upon the political realm or was dragged in by opportunists, this was a world to which she simply did not belong. The exposure of female power at the heart of the republic shocked the electorate; crystallising a previously inchoate hostility towards female influence into a key precept of mass political culture. Women themselves internalised and disseminated these values. Hostility to female power became a staple of the didactic literature written by and for women. Literary figure Lydia Sigourney warned against ‘the admixture of the female mind in the ferment of political contention.’ In history, when ‘the gentler sex [has] usurped the spectre of the monarch’ the results were disastrous – ‘cabinet-councils perplexed by intrigue or turbulent with contention.’<sup>416</sup> Writing in 1838, she may well have been referring to the Cabinet dissensions wrought by Margaret Eaton. In 1839, Margaret Coxe wrote that a ‘*female politician* is only less disgusting than a female *infidel*’ – both antithetical to ideal womanhood.<sup>417</sup>

From the 1830s onwards, women could only legitimately access the public sphere by defining issues as domestic or their purposes as moral – following in the

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<sup>415</sup> Pierson, *Free Hearts*, pp. 132-3.

<sup>416</sup> Lydia Huntley Sigourney, *Letters to Mothers* (Connecticut: Hudson & Skinner, 1839), pp. 14-15; Elizabeth Petrino, ‘Nineteenth-century American women’s poetry’, in Dale M. Bauer & Philip Gould (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century American Women’s Writing* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 128.

<sup>417</sup> Margaret Coxe, *The Young Lady’s Companion* (Columbus: I. N. Whiting, 1839), p. 10.

footsteps of the Washington ladies. By casting activism in temperance or abolitionist movements as extensions of their traditional feminine roles and responsibilities, women avoided provoking male ire through an intrusion upon the 'masculine turf' of politics.<sup>418</sup> The Eaton Affair, then, left a far greater mark upon history than most historians have admitted, and deserves to be treated as more than simply a titillating anecdote that enlivens the pages of a dry and dusty tome recounting the Age of Jackson.

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<sup>418</sup> Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash*, pp. 142-3, 145.

Appendix 1



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