

This Day in History... February 9, 1825

John Q. Adams Elected in “Corrupt Bargain”

On February 9, 1825, John Quincy Adams was elected president of the United States even though he had not won a majority of the electoral vote. The unusual outcome exposed deep political divisions and set the stage for one of the most contested elections in early American history.

The election of 1824 took place during a period often called the “Era of Good Feelings,” when the Democratic-Republican Party dominated national politics. The Federalist Party had largely collapsed, leaving only one major political party competing for power. President James Monroe, who had served two terms, followed the precedent set by George Washington and chose not to run for a third term. His vice president, Daniel D. Tompkins, struggled with poor health and political unpopularity, which left no clear successor within the party.

As a result, the race to replace Monroe was crowded and highly competitive. Several prominent figures from Monroe’s own administration entered the contest. These included Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, and Secretary of the Treasury William H. Crawford. Each had national experience and strong political connections. Outside the cabinet, two other powerful figures also ran: Henry Clay, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Andrew Jackson, a senator from Tennessee and a celebrated general from the War of 1812.



Popular “Black Jack” stamp issued during the Civil War.



Crawford placed third, but a severe stroke soon ended his political ambitions.



After losing the election, Jackson and his supporters founded what became the Democratic Party

letter appeared in a Philadelphia newspaper. It accused Clay of striking a secret deal with Adams, trading his support in the House for a powerful cabinet position. Although no formal investigation ever confirmed the claim, Adams did appoint Clay as secretary of state shortly after taking office.

Jackson and his allies labeled the arrangement a “corrupt bargain.” The accusation followed Adams throughout his presidency and weakened his administration. Jackson used the controversy to rally supporters, presenting himself as a victim of political elites. Four years later, in the election of 1828, Jackson defeated Adams decisively, bringing the turbulent chapter of 1824 to a close.



Adams was the fourth secretary of state in a row to become President.



Calhoun remained vice president under Jackson until 1832.



Clay ran for President again in 1832 and 1844, and lost both times.



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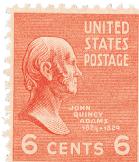
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