



Washington and his family at home, by Currier & Ives. (Image via Library of Congress)

Six Nations and to the French who were constructing a chain of forts from Lake Erie to the Ohio River. Washington's first skirmish with the French late in May, 1754, is often described as the beginning of the Seven Years' War. His military career during the war, although it attracted attention and won respect, was linked to several reverses: In July, 1754, he surrendered his command to a much larger French force from Fort Duquesne; in the summer of 1755 he served as an aide-de-camp with General Edward Braddock's expedition against Fort Duquesne, which ended in ambush and rout; as colonel and commander in chief of Virginia militia, he spent two frustrating years trying to protect the Shenandoah Valley and western Virginia with about three hundred men and inadequate supplies. Moreover, in 1755 and

1757 Washington stood for election to the Virginia House of Burgesses and was twice defeated. At the same time, he unsuccessfully sought a regular commission in the Royal Army.

After cooperating with the last expedition against Fort Duquesne in 1758, which ended in French withdrawal and the establishment of Fort Pitt at the forks of the Ohio, Washington returned to civil life. He won election to the House of Burgesses in 1758. In January, 1759, he married Martha Dandridge Custis, a wealthy widow, and settled with her and her children at Mount Vernon. For fifteen years he enjoyed the life of a family man, planter, colonial legislator, and justice of the peace; and yet, to decorate his home, Washington ordered portrait busts of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, Charles XII of Sweden,

had become convinced that such action was necessary on receiving an urgent warning from his military authority at New Orleans, General James Wilkinson, who later became the government's most important witness at Burr's trial. Burr and Wilkinson had plotted together in Philadelphia and later in New Orleans. Wilkinson, as it was later learned, had been a well-paid spy for Spain at various times. He collected more Spanish gold by pretending to save Mexico from Burr's military invasion. He then posed as protector of the United States, claiming that he was saving Louisiana from the menacing Burr. Whatever Burr may actually have had in mind, he knew that it would not work with Wilkinson now against him and a warrant out for his arrest. He tried to reach sanctuary in Florida by traveling overland but was recognized, arrested, and sent to Richmond to stand trial for treason.

A grand jury, with John Randolph as foreman, found ample grounds for indicting Burr, and he came to trial in August, 1807. Jefferson's attorneys gathered an enormous amount of evidence, but much of it was contradictory. To this day, no one really knows exactly what Burr had in mind or even if he knew himself. The trial did reveal that Jefferson was something less than an absolute civil libertarian, for he had published the government's case against Burr in advance of the trial and prejudged him guilty. Ironically, the Republican Judiciary Act of 1802 established procedures by which Jefferson's political enemy, John Marshall, sitting as a circuit court judge, presided at Burr's treason trial. In instructing the jury, Marshall narrowly defined treason as an overt act against the United States observed by at least two witnesses, and the jury found that Burr's guilt had not been proved. In the course of the trial, Jefferson invoked executive privilege by declining to answer Marshall's subpoena to appear as a witness. Jefferson, sorely disappointed at what he regarded as yet another instance of reckless Federalist obstruction to good government



Aaron Burr. (Image via Library of Congress)

and believing Marshall's conduct on the bench to have been criminally wrong, sent the record of the trial to the House of Representatives, hinting that it might find grounds for the chief justice's impeachment. He also suggested amending the Constitution to make federal judges removable. Nothing came of these ideas.

Jefferson could at least take pleasure in the loyalty to the Union exhibited by almost all Westerners during Burr's scheming, arrest, and trial. Meanwhile, it was still possible to convict Burr for the lesser charge of violating the neutrality laws, which he had admitted doing while denying the charge of treason. Burr, however, jumped bail and fled to Europe, where he spent several years trying to sell chimerical schemes to the British and French governments. In 1813, he returned quietly to New York, where he prospered modestly as a lawyer until his death in 1836.

brought Jackson into an extensive and influential Tennessee clan and provided countless in-laws to replace his own lost family. The couple's youthful ardor matured into a devotion that deepened as they grew older. Lengthy periods of separation, the loss of Rachel's girlish beauty, and her increasingly religious, sometimes hysterical temperament could not shake Jackson's affection for her. Not surprisingly, in view of his violently attenuated childhood, Jackson was a man of fierce and, at times, uncontrollable emotions. He carried a reputation as a hellion from some youthful escapades, and explosive quarrels surrounded him well into middle age, but his passions and inexhaustible energies never swayed him from his attachment to Rachel. Their mutual affection and utterly conventional domestic life furnished a needed emotional anchor throughout his turbulent military and political career.

Only one misfortune marred their marriage. Though Jackson loved children and desperately desired some of his own, the couple remained childless. Rachel's brothers and sisters obligingly provided a corps of nieces and nephews for the Jacksons to stand godparent to, and one, Andrew Jackson, Jr., son of Rachel's brother Severn, for them to adopt.

Jackson's adherence to Governor William Blount brought him rapid political preferment in the 1790's. Chosen a delegate in 1795 to Tennessee's state constitutional convention, he was then elected the state's first congressman and shortly promoted to senator. After a year, he resigned to take a job closer to home, as judge of Tennessee's superior court. Meanwhile, he was undertaking large-scale land speculations in partnership with John Overton. Still a very young man, Jackson seemed destined for greatness, but the next few years brought a series of setbacks that halted his meteoric rise and threatened to close out his political career.

The Blount faction fell from power at the turn of the century, and Jackson fell with it. Over his head in land speculations, Blount entered into a conspiracy to seize Spanish Florida and Louisiana for the British. The conspiracy came to light; Blount was expelled from the United States Senate in 1797 and died in 1800. Governor John Sevier, commanding a rival faction, replaced him as Tennessee's most powerful politician. Jackson and Sevier quarreled first in 1797, when Jackson was in Congress. The dispute was patched over, but it reopened in 1802, when Jackson challenged Sevier for election as major general in command of the Tennessee militia. Jackson won the post, but the aftermath brought the two men to a showdown in the streets of Knoxville, followed by preparations for a formal duel. No one was hurt, but his estrangement from the now-dominant Sevier faction shut Jackson off from further political advance in Tennessee. His subsequent angling for a federal appointment in Louisiana also came to nothing.

The Sevier feud inaugurated a series of quarrels, over matters both vital and trivial, between Jackson and a variety of Tennessee foes. The most notorious of these, in 1806, began with a minor misunderstanding over a horse race and ended with a duel in which Jackson shot young Charles Dickinson dead after taking Dickinson's own bullet in his chest. A coterie of close friends — most notably John Coffee, John Overton, and the Donelson clan — stood by Jackson (and sometimes fought in his behalf) through these troublous affairs, but they made for him many other enemies and earned for him a reputation as a bellicose and perhaps unstable man.

Financial reverses accompanied the collapse of Jackson's political prospects. In the course of his freewheeling speculations, Jackson had carelessly endorsed the notes of one David Allison of Philadelphia. The notes came due, Allison defaulted, and Jackson found himself hard pressed

acquire California, New Mexico, and other further territory, as an indemnity for this war, if we can."

The War with Mexico

The war with Mexico was a short war, as wars go, yet it was an extremely important conflict for the United States. Stung by the taunts of European powers that republics were ill equipped to fight wars and, because they eschewed professional standing armies, helpless to defend themselves, Americans saw in the war an opportunity to strengthen republicanism, both at home and abroad. Those who were uncomfortable with a conflict between two republics were also aware that Mexico's republican institutions had never been allowed to work, that repeated revolution and turmoil had destroyed their effectiveness, and that, in fact, the nation, through much of its life, had been ruled as a military dictatorship. Thus, the war for many assumed an idealistic character.

At the same time, it was clear that the United States would benefit greatly by a victory over Mexico. Polk's continental vision would become a reality and his dream of adding California to the nation would be fulfilled. The war was a natural outgrowth of the expansionist feeling of the 1840's, a feeling that Polk shared. Although he denied that it was being fought for conquest, the circumstances of its origin suggested otherwise. As a result, Polk's role has been a controversial one in American historiography, as some historians have insisted that he deliberately provoked an unjust war in order to satisfy his lust for more territory.

Following the call for volunteers, a wave of war excitement passed over the country. Men flocked to the colors, many more than could be handled, and the quotas assigned some of the states were oversubscribed. The war, fought in a distant exotic land, held a romantic appeal for those who volunteered, an appeal that soon

faded as the fighting began. The response to the volunteer calls, however, confirmed the belief that the republic could rely on its citizen-soldiers during times of crisis.

The problems faced by the Polk administration in fighting the war were enormous; that they were met and for the most part solved was a tribute to the president's administrative ability. For the first time, the country was compelled to raise large numbers of troops in a short time, to train, equip, and move them quickly to distant points. Knowledge of Mexico was sketchy and the means for gathering intelligence either nonexistent or crude. War material had to be produced on an unprecedented scale, and quartermaster stores (everything necessary to support an army in the field) had to be provided without delay. Ships were built, purchased, or chartered to carry the men to the battle areas. The need to coordinate naval and land operations and to direct the movement of troops in enemy territory placed a premium on military skill and ingenuity.

Military operations were mounted in three areas. General Zachary Taylor crossed the Rio Grande and moved into northern Mexico, fighting a desperate and costly battle for Monterrey in September, 1846, and achieving one of the greatest victories of the war at the Battle of Buena Vista in February, 1847. A second army, commanded by General Stephen Watts Kearny, moved west from Missouri over the Santa Fe Trail, occupying New Mexico and, in conjunction with naval forces, taking possession of California. A third front was opened in the spring of 1847 when General Winfield Scott, in the greatest amphibious operation to that time, landed twelve thousand soldiers at Vera Cruz. Marching inland along the route of Hernán Cortés's sixteenth century invasion, Scott's army fought several sharp engagements, including a series of battles in the vicinity of Mexico City, before occupying the Mexican capital in September, 1847. With the



"Another Voice for Cleveland" – a reference to his alleged illegitimate child.
(Image via Library of Congress)

Cleveland's sexual life. As far as the Democrats were concerned, a mugwump summarized the campaign and the issues most clearly:

We are told that Mr. Blaine has been delinquent in office but blameless in public life, while Mr. Cleveland has been a model of official integrity but culpable in his personal relations. We should therefore elect Mr. Cleveland to the public office which he is so well qualified to fill, and remand Mr. Blaine to the private station which he is admirably fitted to adorn.

In the end, the election may have been decided by several unwise political decisions Blaine made during the closing days of the campaign. On the morning of October 29, 1884, an exhausted Blaine met with a group of clergymen, whose spokesman told the Republican candidate that the Democratic Party was one of "Rum, Romanism,

and Rebellion." Democrats seized on this remark, which Blaine did not challenge, to drive a wedge between Blaine and his Irish supporters. That night Blaine committed another mistake. He attended a fund-raising dinner at Delmonico's that was attended by two hundred of the wealthiest men in the United States. Dubbing it the "prosperity dinner," newspaper editorialists and cartoonists used it to emphasize Blaine's support for the monied interests in America. A *New York World* cartoon showed "Belshazzar Blaine" eating terrapin and canvasback duck and sipping champagne while a starving family begged for crumbs.

Less than a week later, Cleveland won a narrow victory. The election was particularly close in New York, which Cleveland carried by a plurality of only 1,149 votes. Mugwump support, Bourbon politics, and Blaine's own mistakes had carried a Democrat into the White House, the first to make his home there in twenty-four years.

First Administration: Pensions, Tariffs, and the Nation's Currency

Cleveland was forty-eight when he took office. Short but weighing more than 250 pounds, he was clean-shaven, except for a mustache, during an age when most politicians wore beards. Close friends found him a boon companion on hunting and fishing trips, but in public he was cold and distant. Intellectually, he was much the same man that the citizens of Buffalo had elected mayor in 1881. His goals still included governmental efficiency and economy, and he was more than ever the friend of business. His cabinet reflected his leanings. Although it contained

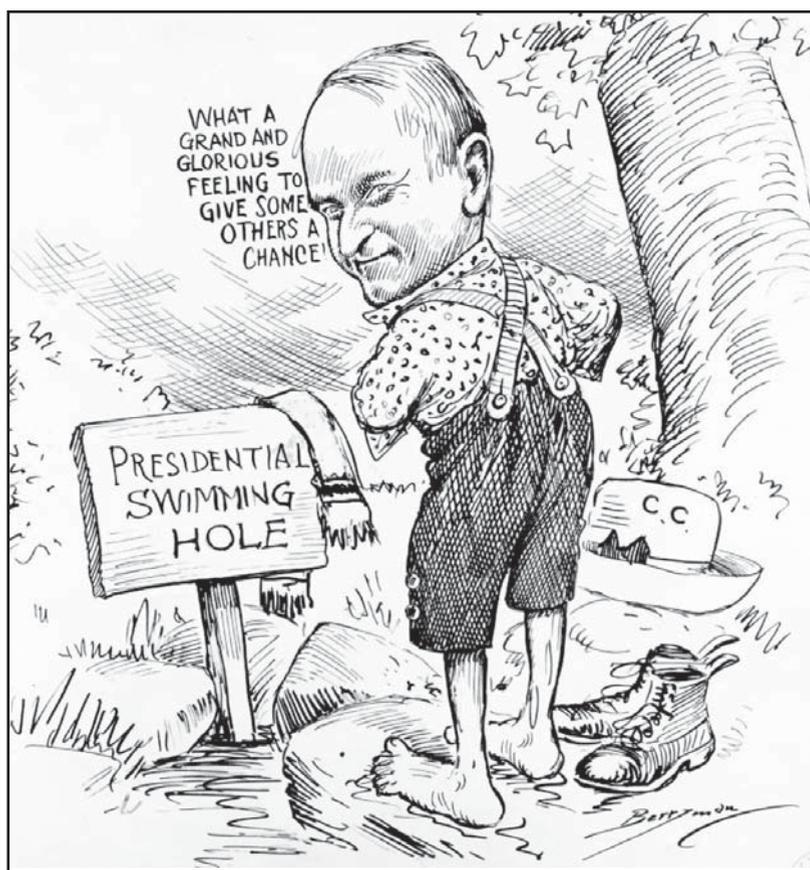
Foreign Policy: Involvement Without Commitment

Coolidge came to the White House with experience in local and state government, but he was quite ignorant of international politics. From the first, he deferred to professional policy makers in this area. In December, 1923, Coolidge expressed thoughts that excited the possibility of Washington's diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union. Secretary of State Hughes quickly dashed the hopes of those Americans who favored that course, and Coolidge acquiesced. He, moreover, allowed the State Department to exploit the communist issue in its Central American endeavors. Robert Olds, undersecretary in 1926, and Kellogg tried to link Mexico and Nicaragua to a Kremlin threat to the Panama Canal, but Americans, however hateful they were of the Soviet experiment, failed to respond. Rather they welcomed the peaceful settlement of the dispute with Mexico over property rights of foreigners, particularly those of American petroleum companies, and an election in Nicaragua under the supervision of American military personnel after the conclusion of that country's civil war.

Unfortunately, American marines, whom Coolidge had returned to Nicaragua in 1926 after a brief withdrawal, soon found themselves warring against the forces of Augusto Sandino, a revolutionary committed to the complete withdrawal of American military forces from his country. The continued skirmishes precipitated a lively debate that saw George Norris in 1928 sponsor

amendments to a naval appropriations bill that called for the partial or complete withdrawal of the marines and an accounting to the Senate if the president kept them in Nicaragua past the designated date. These antecedents of the War Powers Act, however, were voted down. Yet, under Coolidge, the United States retreated from its imperialistic past, anticipating the "Good Neighbor" orientation of Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt. Hughes's impromptu defense of intervention at the Sixth Inter-American Conference at Havana in 1928 constitutes the final assertion of that dubious American right.

The foreign policies associated with the Coolidge administration, then, were reasonably enlightened, if not always successful. Domestic imperatives limited the foreign policy initiatives



Coolidge declined to run for reelection in 1928. (Image via Library of Congress)