

Document Set: JQA on the “corrupt bargain” of 1824

1. John Quincy Adams meets with Speaker of the House Henry Clay before Congress Decides the 1824 Election

Context: Following the reading of the electoral votes, Henry Clay, no longer a presidential candidate, visited Adams to discuss the election, which was set to be decided by the House of Representatives. In his diary, Adams wrote that in a private meeting Clay had informed him that:

“The time had now come, at which he might be explicit in his communication with me, and he had for that purpose asked this confidential interview. . . . In the question to come before the House, between General Jackson, Mr Crawford and myself, he had no hesitation in saying that his preference would be for me.” (*John Quincy Adams diary, 9 January 1825*)

Source: [John Quincy Adams Digital Diary](#)

2. Henry Clay declares his support for John Quincy Adams - and the public reacts, 25-29 January, 1825

Context: After Henry Clay publicly declared his support for JQA the two men discussed the way that Congress and the public had responded.

“There is at this moment a very high state of excitement in the house, Mr Clay, and the majority of the Ohio and Kentucky Delegations having yesterday unequivocally avowed their determination to vote for me. . . . The impression almost universal made yesterday was that the Election was settled in my favour; but the result of the Countermovement, will be the real crisis, and I have little doubt that will be decisive the other way. My situation will be difficult and trying beyond my powers of expression— May but my strength be proportioned to my trial” (*John Quincy Adams, Diary, 25 and 29 January 1825*)

3. President-elect Adams meets with Henry Clay after Congress decided the election, 29 January 1825

“Mr Clay came in and sat with me a couple of hours, discussing all the prospects and probabilities of the Presidential election. . . . His own situation is difficult and critical. He is attacked with fury in the Newspapers for having come out for me; and threats of

violence have been largely thrown out, by the partizans of General Jackson” (JQA diary, 29 January 1825)

[John Quincy Adams Digital Diary](#)

4. President-Elect John Quincy Adams offers the role of Secretary of State to Henry Clay, February 1825

Context: Following Adams’s election as president by the House of Representatives, he offered Henry Clay the position of secretary of state in his administration. Adams stated in his diary that Clay

“said he would take it into Consideration; and answer me as soon as he should have time to consult his friends. . . . He made light of the threatened opposition, and thought all the projects of that nature which have been announced were mere ebullitions of disappointment at the issue of the election, which would soon be abandoned.” (*John Quincy Adams, Diary, 12 February 1825*)

[John Quincy Adams Digital Diary \(primarysourcecoop.org\)](#)

5. William Hill Wells, a lawyer and former Federalist politician from Delaware, describes the public response to the perception of a ‘corrupt bargain’ to John Quincy Adams, 26 February 1825

“Since the election of Mr. Adams to the presidency, the hon. *Henry Clay* has been *burnt in effigy* at Pittsburg, and at two other places near Greensburg, in this state; [in] Carlisle a *transparent coffin* inscribed "*Political Death of Henry Clay*," was [. . .] through the principal streets on the [sh]oulders of four persons, and then the inter[ned] in a "*blazing tar barrel*.”

 Letter from William Hill Wells to John Quincy Adams, 26 February 1825, and encl...

6. President John Quincy Adams believes the public’s belief in a ‘corrupt bargain’ will lead him to lose the election of 1828, diary entry from 17 December 1827

Context: Allegations of a “corrupt bargain” continue in the run-up to the election of 1828, leading Adams to believe his defeat in 1828 was assured. He informed Henry Clay,

“I thought it highly probable that the base and profligate combination against him and me, would succeed in their main object of bringing in General Jackson at the next Presidential Election— And that one of their principal means of success will be this infamous Slander . . . When suspicion has been kindled into popular delusion, truth, and reason, and justice spoke as to the ears of an Adder—the sacrifice must be consummated, before they can be heard” (*John Quincy Adams diary, 17 December 1827*)

[John Quincy Adams Digital Diary \(primarysourcecoop.org\)](http://primarysourcecoop.org)

7. After losing in 1828, John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay continued to deny there had been a ‘corrupt bargain’, 1829-1830

Context: After the election of 1828 had ended Henry Clay continued to defend his actions in deciding the election of 1824, saying to John Quincy Adams,

“So far was I, in voting for you as President, from being influenced by any personal or selfish consideration, that I felt and I stated, at the time, that, if I knew and disapproved every member of your Cabinet, I should still greatly prefer you to General Jackson.” (16 April 1829)

Even after he had left the White House, Adams continued to justify his choice of Henry Clay as his Secretary of State, saying he had chosen him:

“because I believed him the man of the Union best fitted for the place of Secretary of State; and his Execution of its duties had confirmed me in that opinion” (*John Quincy Adams, Diary, 18 January 1830*)

[John Quincy Adams Digital Diary \(primarysourcecoop.org\)](http://primarysourcecoop.org)

8. Congressman John Quincy Adams reflects on the lasting power of the idea of a ‘corrupt bargain,’ diary entry from 30 April 1844

“[Congressman] Linn Boyd of Kentucky...turned off to his new vamped old slander of a corrupt bargain between Henry Clay and me...This stale and base columny, already abandoned and recanted by those who first invented and imposed upon the credulity of their partizans these men are now blowing the coals up to kindle again into a flame to consume Clay’s election hopes and my honest fame.”

<https://www.primarysourcecoop.org/publications/jqa/document/jqadiaries-v44-1844-04-p282--entry30?navmode=searchresults&doci=18>

