

Chapter 110 -- Van Buren Barely Wins The Election Of 1836



Dates:
1836

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The Election Of 1836



The White House

Election ballots are cast between November 3 and December 7, 1836, by some 1.5million voters, up from the 1.3 million turnouts in 1832.

The winner is Martin Van Buren, whose margin of victory in the popular count – 51% to 49% -- signals the rising popularity of Clay’s Whig coalition.

1836 Presidential Election Results

Candidates	Party	Pop Vote	Electors	South	Border	North	West
Martin Van Buren	Democrat	764,176	170	57	4	101	8
William H. Harrison	Whig	550,816	73	0	28	15	30
Hugh White	Whig	146,107	26	26			
Daniel Webster	Whig	41,201	14			14	
Willie Mangum	Whig	--	11	11			
Total		1,502,300	294	94	32	130	38
Needed To Win			148				

The Democrats carry 14 states in total, with four pick-ups from 1832 – Rhode Island, Connecticut, Michigan and Arkansas, the latter two voting for the first time.

The Whigs capture 12 states, with seven additions brought in by the regional favorites – Mangum (South Carolina), White (Georgia and Tennessee), and Harrison (Vermont, New Jersey, Ohio, and Indiana). Meanwhile Webster keeps Massachusetts in the Anti-Jackson column.

The fact that the ex-military hero, Harrison, takes seven states overall, and dominates in the West, is not lost on Whig Party leaders looking ahead to the 1840 race.

Party Power By State

South	1832	1836	Pick-Up	EC Votes
Virginia	Democrat	Democrat		23
North Carolina	Democrat	Democrat		15
South Carolina	Nullifier	Whig (Mang)	Whig	11
Georgia	Democrat	Whig (White)	Whig	11
Alabama	Democrat	Democrat		7
Mississippi	Democrat	Democrat		4
Louisiana	Democrat	Democrat		5
Tennessee	Democrat	Whig (White)	Whig	15
Arkansas	---	Democrat	Democrat	3
Border				
Delaware	Nat-Rep	Whig (Har)		3
Maryland	Nat-Rep	Whig (Har)		10
Kentucky	Nat-Rep	Whig (Har)		15
Missouri	Democrat	Democrat		4
North				
New Hampshire	Democrat	Democrat		7
Vermont	Anti-Mason	Whig (Har)	Whig	7
Massachusetts	Nat-Rep	Whig (Web)		14
Rhode Island	Nat-Rep	Democrat	Democrat	4
Connecticut	Nat-Rep	Democrat	Democrat	8
New York	Democrat	Democrat		42
New Jersey	Democrat	Whig (Har)	Whig	8
Pennsylvania	Democrat	Democrat		30
Ohio	Democrat	Whig (Har)	Whig	21
Maine	Democrat	Democrat		10
Indiana	Democrat	Whig (Har)	Whig	9
Illinois	Democrat	Democrat		5
Michigan	---	Democrat	Democrat	3

A regional analysis shows that Van Buren’s win traces to support in Northeast states with high populations and electoral vote counts – most notably New York (42) and Pennsylvania (30).

1836 Shifting State Alignments: Old/New And Slave/Free Electoral Votes

	Slavery Allowed (13)	Slavery Banned (13)
Old Established East Coast States (15)	Democrats – 38 Whigs -- 35	Democrats – 101 Whigs -- 29
Emerging States West Of Appalachian Range (11)	Democrats – 23 Whigs -- 30	Democrats – 8 Whigs -- 30

The four larger states west of the Appalachians go for the Whigs – Ohio (21), Kentucky (15), Tennessee (15) and Indiana (9) – while the other seven fall to the Democrats.

The thirteen “slave states” tilt by a slight 7-6 margin in favor of Van Buren.

1836 Shifting State Alignments: Old/New And Slave/Free

Geography	Democrats	Whigs
Old East Coast States (15)	8 states – 139 votes	7 states – 64 votes
Emerging West States (11)	7 states – 31 votes	4 states – 60 votes
Slavery		
Allowed (13)	7 states – 61 votes	6 states – 65 votes
Banned (13)	8 states – 109 votes	5 states – 59 votes

The Democrats are able to retain control over both chambers of Congress in 1836 – despite losing a total of sixteen seats in the House.

Congressional Election Of 1836

House	1834	1836	Change
Democrats	143	127	(16)
Whig	76	102	26
Anti-Masonic	16	7	(9)
Nullifier	7	6	(1)
Senate			
Democrats	26	35	9
Whigs	24	17	(7)
Nullifier	2	0	(2)

The election, however, holds one further surprise, when all twenty-three of Virginia’s electors refuse to cast their votes for Van Buren’s designated running mate, Richard Mentor Johnson. The Kentucky congressman has become notorious in parts of the south for declaring that Julia Chinn, an octoroon slave, is his common law wife.

Virginia’s action leaves Johnson short of the 148 votes needed for a majority in the Electoral College, and he assumes the vice-presidency only after an affirmative vote in the Senate.

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Martin Van Buren: Personal Profile



Martin Van Buren (1782-1862)

Martin Van Buren is America's first non-Anglo Saxon president, the first from New York state, and the last Northern president to have grown up in the daily presence of slaves.

He is born in 1782 in the Dutch village of Kinderhook, New York, located on the Hudson River, in an area dominated by "patroons" – powerful families, such as the Van Rensselaers and Livingstons, whose 250,000 acre estates trace to early 17th century grants. His roots are positively humbling by comparison.

His father owns a small farm along with six slaves, and runs a tavern in town. Dutch is spoken at home, and the boy learns this before mastering English. He is a precocious child, but money runs out for schooling and, at age 13 he is apprenticed to a local lawyer.

In 1801 he moves to Manhattan to continue his study, and soon comes under the magnetic influence of Aaron Burr, a mentor who will transform his destiny. Burr is already at the peak of his fame, serving as Jefferson's Vice President after founding the Tammany Society to insure his position as godfather of New York politics. While the fatal July 1804 duel with Hamilton caps his future, Burr maintains an almost father-son relationship with Van Buren, and teaches him the merits of Jeffersonian policies along with ins and outs of organizing and aligning men with diverse interests behind a common cause.

In 1807 Van Buren returns to the Hudson Valley as a new man. He marries, begins to raise a family, and is quickly earning an astonishing \$10,000 a year as a lawyer – largely by winning land disputes for small farmers against the powerful patroons who "ran such things" before he joined the scene.

The theme of his practice – the common man standing up against the power and privilege of the rich – will play out through his career and link him inexorably to both Jefferson and Jackson.

In 1812, at age 29, he enters politics as state senator by defeating the patrician Edward Livingston.

In Burr-like fashion, he organizes the "Albany Regency," a cadre of like-minded young men who quickly dominate politics in the capital. He reaches a truce with the powerful DeWitt Clinton by backing his Erie Canal project, and in 1821 wins a close election to the U.S. Senate.

Once in Washington, Van Buren sets his sights on transforming the aging Democratic-Republican apparatus into a modern political machine which he calls "The Democracy." Rather than a loose collection of regional fiefdoms, he envisions a unified Democratic Party, holding national conventions to pick nominees and agree on a platform. Publicity for the candidates would involve a network of supportive journalists and newspapers. Those who deliver the hard detailed work during a campaign are rewarded through patronage jobs – "to the victors belong the spoils."

From the beginning, the “sly fox” Van Buren is an excellent vote counter and political strategist. To win the White House and control the national agenda, the Democrats must:

- Lock in electoral votes across the entire South in one fell swoop – by promising never to interfere with its economically vital practice of slavery; and
- Continue to hammer home, across the North and West, the Jeffersonian virtues of a small fiscally sound federal government dedicated to advancing the interests of yeoman farmers.

Van Buren recognizes early on the shift of political power from South to North, from Virginia to New York, from slave states to free states – and identifies the associated economic fears felt across Dixie. What if a Northern dominated Washington was to suddenly turn against slavery?

The New York congressman, James Tallmadge, has already signaled this possibility in his famous anti-slavery amendment during the 1820 debate over the admission of Missouri. Southerners wonder how this threat, especially from the powerful New Yorkers, can be kept under wraps. Who better than the titular head of the Albany Regency?

Starting with his 1824 visit to Jefferson at Monticello, Van Buren tours the South on behalf of his Democratic Party vision. Ironically he tries to nominate William Crawford rather than Andrew Jackson in the 1824 presidential race. But he recovers from this gaffe, and sets his sights on 1828, which lines up perfectly – Jackson completes a New York-Virginia-Tennessee axis for the Democrats and is up against the dour and vulnerable JQ Adams.

When Jackson wins, he brings his campaign manager into his cabinet as Secretary of State. Two years later he is in London as U.S. Ambassador, and then runs alongside Jackson as Vice-President in 1832. The two men become fast friends along the way, and Van Buren is nominated unanimously at the 1835 Baltimore convention.