

## Chapter 115 - Three Parties Nominate Candidates For The Pivotal 1844 Election

Time: Fall 1842

### The Whigs Suffer Big Set-Backs In The Mid-Year Elections

Whig Party anxiety mounts as the 1844 election approaches, and for good reason.

With Harrison dead after only one month in office, and the apostate Tyler in charge since then, almost none of Clay's American System policies have escaped the veto pen. In turn, the economic recovery promised by the Whigs in 1840 has failed to materialize – with GDP trends falling back into negative territory by 1842.

#### Short-run Economic Trends

<b>GDP</b>	<b>1840</b>	<b>1841</b>	<b>1842</b>
Total (\$000)	1574	1652	1618
% Change	(5%)	5%	(2%)
Per Cap	92	94	89

Vetoes notwithstanding, the country signals its displeasure with the Whigs by returning overwhelming control of the House to the Democrats in the 1842 mid-term election.

#### Off Year Congressional Election Of 1842

<b>House</b>	<b>1840</b>	<b>1842</b>	<b>Chg</b>
Democrats	98	148	50
Whigs	144	73	(71)
Anti-Masonic			
Conservative			
Other		2	2
Senate			
Democrats	22	23	1
Whigs	29	29	NC
Anti-Masonic			
Conservative			
Other			
President	Harrison	Tyler	

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Time: April 1, 1844

## The Liberty Party Again Nominates Abolitionist James Birney



Salmon Chase (1808-1873)

The anti-slavery Liberty Party is first to hold a nominating convention in 1844, meeting in the western New York town of Arcade.

Its delegates are drawn from the New York and Ohio wings of the abolitionist movement, as distinct from the Boston-based supporters of Lloyd Garrison.

Both groups seek an end to slavery, but they differ fundamentally on the means required. Garrison remains committed to writing and speaking out against the slave-holders, the churches and the federal government – most recently calling the Constitution “an agreement with hell” and urging people not to vote. The Liberty Party men view Garrison as naïve, and argue that only through political action will their end be achieved.

The party’s first foray into politics occurs in 1840 and it is a fiasco, with nominee James Birney winning less than 7,000 votes nationwide in the election. This time around, they intend to do better.

Leading their political thinking and strategy is the Ohioan, Salmon P. Chase, who joins the cause in 1837, after Birney is attacked in Cincinnati by anti-abolitionist mobs. For the next seven years, Chase attempts to build the Liberty Party into a national force.

As a highly skilled lawyer, Chase recognizes that the Constitution and the Northwest Ordinance affirm the lasting presence of slavery in the Southern states east of the Mississippi. But, he argues, that principle does not extend to other new states admitted to the Union. Stopping its spread is not the full answer sought by the Garrison forces, but Chase regards it as a solid starting place to bring politics and law to bear on the South.

Over time this strategy – stopping the future expansion of slavery – will fuel the Republican Party and lead to Southern secession and civil war.

But in 1844 the Liberty Party still lacks a political candidate capable of competing on the national stage. It again is left with James Birney to head the ticket, along with Tom Morris, ex-Senator from Ohio, as his running mate.

Together they will garner a paltry 2% of the popular vote in the upcoming election – although many will later argue that their showing in New York actually costs Henry Clay a victory.

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Time: May 1, 1844

### The Whigs Again Call On Henry Clay

Despite the mid-term losses, the Whigs continue to believe the public, both North and South, will again support their platform for building the country's infrastructure.

They are heartened by party solidarity against the annexation of Texas in the Senate – even though over half of all Whigs in the chamber are from slave-holding states.

Likewise in the House, where one of their emerging spokesmen, Alexander Stephens of Georgia, dismisses the Tyler-Calhoun treaty proposal as a “humbug,” designed simply to weaken Whig unity.

Instead of promoting costly, and dangerous, military schemes to expand America, the Whigs want to consolidate and improve the capacities of states already in the Union. As Clay says:

*I think it is far more wise an important to compose and harmonize the present confederacy, as it now exists, than to introduce a new element of discord and distraction (i.e. Texas) into it.*

This has been the Whig's message since their origin in 1828.

America's greatness will follow from its ability to create an economic juggernaut, advantaged over the rest of the world. Successful international trade is one aspect of this, but vital “home markets” are its essence. The efficient production and distribution of goods from the East coast to the Mississippi will guarantee the “American dream” for all citizens.

It will result from the Whig's “American System” of investments in infrastructure and education, a sound currency and reliable banks, and sensible regulations and tariffs.

And no one speaks for this system better than its founder, Henry Clay.

Though thoroughly beaten by Jackson in 1832 and rejected in favor of the war hero, Harrison, in 1840, Clay is certain his time has come to succeed Tyler in the White House.

The Whigs signal their confidence in him through a brief, mostly perfunctory, national convention in Baltimore on May 1, 1844, where he is nominated by acclaim, and ex-New Jersey Senator Theodore Frelinghuysen, is chosen as his running mate.

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Time: 1840's

### **The “Young America” Movement Re-shapes The Democrat Party**

For the Democrats, the 1840 loss to Harrison serves as a wake-up call to transition from the Jackson-Van Buren era to a new generation of national leaders.

The path they choose is the “Young America Movement,” patterned after similar “young” initiatives materializing across Europe. The author Cornelius Matthews describes it in a speech he delivers on June 30, 1845:

*Whatever that past generation of statesmen, law-givers and writers was capable of, we know. What they attained, what they failed to attain, we also know. Our duty and our destiny is another from theirs. Liking not at all its borrowed sound, we are yet (there is no better way to name it,) the Young America of the people: a new generation; and it is for us now to inquire, what we may have it in our power to accomplish, and on what objects the world may reasonably ask that we should fix our regards.*

In the hands of the politicians, the message is one of “American Exceptionalism.”

It is marked by a rugged assurance that the nation is destined by history to lead the world in everything, government to commerce, intellectual to cultural advances.

It embraces free trade across the globe, certain that it will profit most by opening new markets.

It welcomes wide open borders, with immigrants from all over given a chance to share in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – while also joining the Democratic Party.

It breaks beyond the constraints of the agrarian-centric economy and supports industrialization, infrastructure upgrades, even modest tariffs to support domestic manufacturing.

And it is absolutely committed to expanding the nation’s borders to the west coast, and even into the Caribbean and Central America.

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Time: 1840's

### **Stephen A. Douglas Symbolizes The Young Americans Movement**

In 1843 a new figure leaps onto center stage in Congress, representing the Young America Movement and dedicated to restoring Democratic Party control in Washington. That figure is Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois.

Stephen Douglass (he later drops the second “s”) is born in Brandon, Vermont in 1813 to a sixth generation New England family. His father is a physician who dies suddenly at age thirty-two when he is only two months old. He is raised by his mother and her bachelor brother (his uncle) on their combined family farms. He is also influenced as a youth by his grandfather, Benajah Douglass, an outspoken five term member of the Vermont General Assembly.

His early formal education is very limited, only 3-4 months of schooling whenever his duties on the farm allow. At age fifteen, he is fed up with his situation and decides to move out on his own, some 14 miles away to the town of Middlebury, where he apprentices as a carpenter. While he is there for only eight months before moving back home, it is during the 1828 presidential campaign, a moment where he first becomes enthralled with politics and aligns himself with the Democratic Party principles of Andrew Jackson.

Douglas remains in Brandon for two more years, working as a carpenter and attending grade school. When his mother marries a man from Canandaigua, New York, he accompanies her there in December 1830, and enrolls in the Canandaigua Academy. He is known as a diligent student, who actively engages in the debate club and is seen as a future politician by his peers.

Upon graduating, Douglas sets his sights on becoming a lawyer, but recognizes that the standards for passing the bar in New York State require four more years of study. This prompts his decision to head out west, where no such academic rigor is demanded. In June 1833 he begins a six month journey which includes brief stops in Cleveland and St. Louis before finally settling down in Winchester, Illinois. Once there, he runs a grade school for 40 students to earn a living, while adding enough bits and pieces of legal know-how to pass a brief oral exam and secure a law certificate.

In 1834 Douglas opens a practice in Winchester, but quickly finds that his true calling lies in the political arena. He dedicates himself to organizing a vibrant Democratic Party in Morgan County, 36 miles west of Springfield, which becomes the state capital in 1839. He attends sessions of the Illinois General Assembly as a lobbyist, and persuades legislators to pass a bill whereby states attorneys in Illinois are chosen by the people rather than appointed. In turn, he is elected to his first official office on February 10, 1835, as States Attorney for the First District, riding the circuit across eight counties, meeting voters, initiating his moniker as “Judge Douglas.”

From there his career gains momentum. In August 1836 he is elected to represent Morgan County in Illinois’s Tenth General Assembly, which includes Abraham Lincoln, James Shields, Edward Baker, James Semple and other future political leaders.

In March 1837, his campaign work on behalf of Van Buren’s presidential election lands him a patronage job paying \$3,000 a year as Registrar of the Springfield Land Office. In November of that year his Democratic Party nominates him to run for the U.S. House – but he loses in 1838 by 36 votes (out of 36,495 cast) to John Stuart, a Whig and law partner of Abraham Lincoln.

On March 2, 1839 he resigns as Registrar and devotes himself to strengthening his party and re-electing Van Buren in his race vs. Harrison. This leads to the first series of public debates against

his local rival, Abraham Lincoln, to be repeated nearly twenty years later when both vie for a U.S. Senate seat. One topic where they already disagree is over a bill to ban abolition societies in Illinois. The bill passes 77-6 with Douglas supporting it and Lincoln in the minority.

All in all, Douglas makes some 207 speeches around the state on behalf of the Democrats and Van Buren, who carries Illinois while losing out nationally.

Douglas’s political efforts are again rewarded when the Democratic controlled legislature appoints him as Illinois Secretary of State in November 1840 and then as Associate Justice of the state Supreme Court in 1841. Despite the fact that he is only twenty-eight years old, he has already argued fifteen cases before the high court, winning twelve and losing three. During his two year stint on the court he comes down hard against an abolitionist for harboring a run-away slave, while supporting Joseph Smith and the Mormons, earning their lasting praise.

In 1842 he loses his second political race, this time for a U.S. Senate seat, which goes to another, more senior Democrat, Sidney Breese. He is typically undaunted by the set-back and bounces back on August 7, 1843 by winning a race for the U.S. House. When the 28<sup>th</sup> Congress convenes on December 4, Douglas joins an impressive freshman class which includes the Georgia Whigs, Cobb and Stephens, anti-slavery men, Hale and Hamlin, states’ rights southerners, Slidell and Clingman.

But none will come to representing the diverse factions within the Democratic Party better than Stephen Douglas, over the next fifteen years. He is a northern man by birth; an expansionist westerner by choice; a full-fledged protégé of Andrew Jackson; a believer in the sacred Union, the Constitution, the will of the people; and, by 1848, an owner through marriage of a Mississippi plantation and over one hundred slaves.

He also brings an aggressive style to the floor of congress that justifies his nickname as “the Little Giant.” He is 5’4” tall, with a large head and a barrel chest mounted on short stubbly legs, and a stentorian voice firing short assertions seldom lacking in certainty.

With Jackson aging toward death in June 1845, and Van Buren on the ropes after his difficult term, Stephen Douglas at age thirty intends to revitalize the Democratic Party and ride it into a White House win for himself.

**The Amazing Rise Of Stephen A. Douglas To National Prominence**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Milestones</b>
April 23, 1813	Douglas born in Brandon Vt to MD father and Sally Fisk
June 1813	Father dies and mother and her brother merge farms
1820-1827	Youth works on farm and attends 3-4 months of grade school per year
Spring 1828	Moves to Middlebury, apprentice carpenter, interest in politics
Winter 1828	Back in Brandon, rejects farming, carpentry, Andrew Jackson backer
December 1830	Mother remarries and he moves with her to Canandaigua, New York

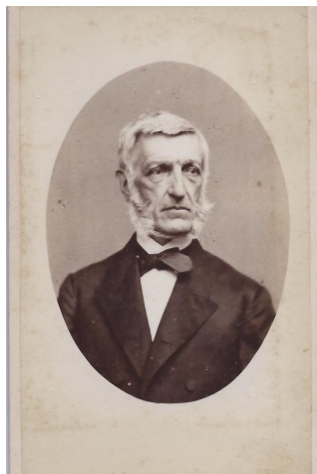
1831-1833	Finishes grade school, begins to read law with well-known attorneys
June 24, 1833	Departs for west since NY bar standards requires 4 more years of study
Summer 1833	Stays briefly in Cleveland
Fall 1833	Another brief stop-over in St Louis before off to Jacksonville, Illinois
November 1833	Out of funds and walks to Winchester, IL to settle down
December 1833	Opens grade school for 40 children for support while studying law
March 1834	Closes school after 4 months and obtains a law certificate despite "gaps"
Spring 1834	Opens practice and decides to organize Democratic Party in his county
December 1834	Attends Illinois legislative session in capital of Vandalia to build Party
January 30, 1835	Bill he writes as lobbyist to have people choose states atty's passes
February 10, 1835	He is elected States Attorney for 1 <sup>st</sup> District riding circuit for 8 counties
1835	Law practice sputters and he settles on politics as his true calling
April 1835	Arranges first Democratic Party convention in Morgan County, IL
August 1836	Wins election to represent Morgan Cty in 10 <sup>th</sup> Illinois General Assembly
March 9, 1837	Resigns Leg seat & named by MVB Registrar of Springfield Land Office
November 1837	Nominated by Dems to run for US House vs. John Stuart, AL law partner
Fall 1838	Douglas loses to Whig Stuart by 36 votes out of 36,495 cast
March 2, 1839	Resigns Land Registrar job to focus on building Dem party and himself
November 1839	He and Lincoln begin series of debates over us bank, MVB admin, etc.
March 1840	Over 1,000 in Jacksonville hear a Douglas-Lincoln debate
Summer 1840	Douglas delivers 207 political speeches across Illinois
November 30, 1840	Dem controlled Illinois State Senate names him Secretary of State
By end 1840	Has argued 15 cases before Illinois Supreme Court with 12-3 record
1841	Resigns as Sec of State and named (at 28) to Illinois Supreme Court
June 1841	Judge Douglas orders Mormon leader Joseph Smith to be freed from jail
1842	MVB visits during election season and Dems win in August elections
December 16, 1842	Douglas loses US Senate nom to Sidney Breese on 19 <sup>th</sup> conv ballot by 56-51

April 1843	Decides against abolitionist Richard Eells for harboring run-aways
June 5, 1843	Douglas wins nomination for US House vs. Whig Orville Browning
June 28, 1843	He resigns from Supreme Court after 2 years
August 7, 1843	He is elected to House at age 30
December 4, 1843	Opening session of 28 <sup>th</sup> congress/news

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Time: May 27, 1844

### The Democrats Choose A “Dark Horse” In James Polk



George Bancroft (1800-1891)  
Who Nominates Polk

Based on the collapse of the Whig agenda after Harrison’s death, and their strong showing in the 1842 off-year elections in the House, the Democrats are confident they can retake the presidency in 1844.

The only thing standing in their way is agreement on the right presidential candidate.

The party’s nominating convention convenes in Baltimore on May 27, four weeks after the Whigs have selected Clay. It plays out in the context of the fiery debate in the Senate over whether or not to annex Texas. So far, the opponents have been prevailing, led on the Democratic side by Thomas Benton of Missouri. In April, Martin Van Buren is drawn into the controversy and, like Clay, he publicly argues against a Texas deal, fearing war.

What he fails to realize at the time is that his mentor, Andrew Jackson, has switched positions, now favoring the annexation, and still wielding enough political power within the party to get his way.

Still, when the opening gavel sounds, Van Buren remains the clear cut favorite to win the nomination for a third straight time, despite his loss to Harrison in 1840. His main challenger is a sixty-one year old westerner, Lewis Cass, whose credentials are splendid -- Exeter Academy, freemason, general in the 1812 War, first Governor of the Michigan Territory, Jackson’s Secretary of War and Ambassador to France, supporter of adding Texas.

Alarm bells sound immediately in Van Buren’s camp when his opponents – who refer to him as “Van Ruin” --pass a rule requiring the nominee to win by a two-thirds majority, a near impossibility now for the ex-president.

Van Buren does lead after the first ballot, but then falls steadily until the fifth round when Cass overtakes him.



**First Five Ballots In 1844 Race (174 To Win)**

Candidate	1	2	3	4	5
Van Buren-NY	146	127	121	111	103
Lewis Cass-Mich	83	94	92	105	107
Rich Johnson-Ky	24	33	38	32	29
Calhoun-SC	6	1	2	0	0
Buchanan-Pa	4	9	11	17	26

The Michigan man adds a few more delegates in the next two ballots reaching the 123 level, still well short of the 174 votes needed to win. By the eighth ballot, it's clear that neither man can win, and the search is on for a "dark horse" or compromise candidate.

Andrew Jackson has had one in mind all along, his fellow Tennessean, James Knox Polk.

Polk arrives at the convention with almost no standing. He plans to support Van Buren and, if the New Yorker wins, hopes to be considered as Vice-President. But the odds are against him, until the convention is stalemated.

At that point, Polk's mentor Jackson seizes the initiative. Three supporters, Gideon Pillow, his ex-law partner, advisor Cave Johnson, and George Bancroft, of Massachusetts join forces and offer his name on the eighth ballot, before either James Buchanan or Richard Johnson can try to fill the void. A quickly convened ninth ballot becomes a stampede in favor of Polk. Governor George Dallas, from Pennsylvania, is chosen as Vice-President – and the Democrats have their ticket for 1844.

**Full Voting Results At The 1844 Democratic Convention (174 To Win)**

Candidate	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Van Buren-NY	146	127	121	111	103	101	99	104	0
Lewis Cass-Mich	83	94	92	105	107	116	123	114	29
Rich Johnson-Ky	24	33	38	32	29	23	21	0	0
Calhoun-SC	6	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Buchanan-Pa	4	9	11	17	26	25	22	0	0
Polk-Tenn								44	231

So it will be "Little Hickory." A Southerner, successful lawyer, militia man, slave-holder, pro-states' rights and anti-US Bank, friend of Jackson and Sam Houston, and ardent supporter of "manifest destiny."

But Polk's surprising win will come at the expense of unity within the Democratic Party – especially among the powerful New York block who feel that Van Buren has been robbed by Southerners in Baltimore. In the years ahead they will seek revenge, earning the nickname as party "Barnburners."

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Time: 1844

### The Nativist American Party Make Its First Appearance

One other nascent political party also makes its first appearance during the 1844 election cycle. It is referred to early on as the American Republican Association, before morphing into the Native American Party and finally, the “Know Nothings.”

It originates with a South Carolinian named Lewis Charles Levin, son of Jewish parents, who graduates from his state university and tries his hand at the law and teaching before becoming a Methodist preacher. His temperament, however, is anything but pastoral, and he is known for engaging in fistfights and gun duels. After one such incident he is forced to leave Mississippi, and lands in Philadelphia.

Once there, he throws himself into a crusade against alcohol, carried out in his newspaper, the *Temperance Advocate*, and in elaborate public events dubbed “bonfires of booze,” aimed at shutting down taverns. This cause, however, soon gives way to another, his obsessive attacks against Catholic immigrants.

Since the early 1830’s, immigration to America is on the rise, with most of it coming from Roman Catholics fleeing Ireland and Germany.

**Immigration Trends By Country**

<b>5 Years</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Irish</b>	<b>German</b>	<b>All Other</b>
1820-4	74.8	11.7	1.9	25.1
1825-9	130.3	40.0	3.8	46.0
1830-4	326.5	54.1	39.3	137.1
1835-9	389.8	116.6	85.5	105.8
1840-4	481.2	181.7	100.5	117.8

Levin regards the Catholics as untrustworthy and dangerous for reasons mirroring the Anti-Masonic fervor in upstate New York in 1828. Theirs is a secret society, he says, whose allegiance is to the Pope in Rome, not to the government in Washington. Its corrupt religious practices and authoritarian rule are what drove settlers to America in the first place – so what sense does it make to open the nation’s borders to a proven enemy.

Having latched on to these themes, Levin organizes the American Republican Association in Philadelphia in 1844 and publishes another newspaper, *The Daily Sun*, devoted to attacking Catholic immigrants.

A flashpoint comes when Francis Kenrick, the Bishop of Philadelphia, asks the local School Controllers to excuse Catholic students from participating in the traditional practice of reading from the Protestant Bible at the start of each day. When the request is granted, Levin’s backers

claim that the real intent is to eliminate all traces of the Protestant religion from the school curriculum.

What follows in Philadelphia in the spring and early summer of 1844 is a recreation of European-style religious battles between Protestant and Catholic. The first outbreak takes place on May 3, 1844, after an attempt by Lewis Levin to speak in the Catholic neighborhood of Kensington is broken up by Irish protesters. Levin returns with 3,000 supporters and fighting continues through May 8, with local police outmanned and unable to quell the mobs. The toll includes some fourteen deaths, another fifty injured, and two hundred left homeless. The Sisters of Charity Seminary is attacked, along with the Hibernia fire station. Two Catholic churches – St. Michaels and St. Augustine’s -- are burned to the ground, and the rioting ends only after the state militia under General George Cadwallader is called into action.

A second outbreak occurs in July, centered on St. Philip Neri’s Catholic Church. Fearing a nativist attack during the July 4 celebrations, the church pastor asks Pennsylvania Governor David Porter for support from the militia. On the evening of July 6, a sizable defensive force, again under Cadwallader, confronts a rock-throwing mob of several thousand, the result being a momentary stand-off. This truce breaks down a day later and open warfare – including cannon fire from both sides in the streets – leaves another fifteen killed and many others wounded. This time a military force of some 5,000 troops is needed to end the carnage.

Newspapers across the country report on the alarming level of violence in Philadelphia, and the difficulty faced by officials in stopping it. The Catholic Church sues the city for failing to adequately protect its property, winning a \$45,000 payment, and begins opening its own schools to teach the faith. Meanwhile the city fathers pass bills requiring that one policeman be hired for every 150 residents, and designating a full infantry regiment, along with artillery and cavalry support, for call-up in case of any more disturbances.

While not yet sufficiently organized to impact national voting in 1844, it does elect six U.S. House members.

One of them is Levin himself, joined by one other Pennsylvania congressman and four from neighboring New York.

Together they begin the campaign to halt further immigration and secure America for “real Americans,” not foreigners.