

## Vice Presidents of the United States William Rufus King (1853)

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Introduction by Mark O. Hatfield.

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The ceremony, although simple, was very sad and impressive, and will never be forgotten by any who were present. To see an old man, on the very verge of the grave, clothed with honors which he cared not for, and invested with authority which he could never exercise, was truly touching. It was only by persuasion that Mr. King would go through with the ceremony, as he looked on it as an idle form, for he said he was conscious he would not live many weeks.

—*National Intelligencer*, April 8, 1853

Since the adjournment of Congress, the Vice President of the United States has passed from the scenes of earth, without having entered upon the duties of the station to which he had been called by the voice of his countrymen. Having occupied, almost continuously, for more than thirty years, a seat in one or the other of the two Houses of Congress, and having by his singular purity and wisdom, secured unbounded confidence and universal respect, his failing health was watched by the nation with painful solicitude. His loss to the country, under all circumstances, has been justly regarded as irreparable.

—Franklin Pierce, December 5, 1853<sup>1</sup>

On April 18, 1853, death cheated William King of his life's calling. Experience and temperament had uniquely prepared him to be the Senate's constitutional presiding officer, but tuberculosis denied him that role as vice president.<sup>2</sup> Between 1836 and 1850, King had won a record-breaking eleven elections to the post of Senate president pro tempore. At the time of his 1852 election to the vice-presidency, only one other member in the body's entire history had exceeded King's twenty-eight years and ten months of Senate service.<sup>3</sup> Warm-hearted and even-tempered, King personified balance and fairness in deeply disputatious times. Elected to the vice-presidential term that ran from March 4, 1853, to March 3, 1857, King was positioned to occupy center stage during such tumultuous

future performances as the party-rending 1854 struggle over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and—the single most dramatic act in the Senate's history—the 1856 caning of Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner by a South Carolina representative. One can now only speculate about the calming role that this natural mediator might have played in such events, although, ultimately, personalities and minds much stronger than his would direct the fateful course to national disunion and civil war.

William King was far from a genius and he had little talent as an orator. These qualities were so well noted during his lifetime that a fellow southerner, Senator Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia, felt free to remark on them even in the speak-no-evil context of a funeral oration. Hunter was quick to acknowledge, however, that this guileless and self-effacing man was an individual of integrity, sound judgment, and rich experience, who could be stern "when the public interests or his personal honor required it." Hunter and others lamented the demise of such a moderate and conciliatory statesman at "a period like this [April 1853], pregnant with change, and teeming, perhaps, with great and strange events."<sup>4</sup> Symbolic of the sectional balance that King tried to achieve, the Virginia senator's eulogy was followed by one from a longtime friend from Massachusetts, the renowned orator Edward Everett. Everett reminded all that when the Senate over the past several decades had needed a presiding officer in the absence of the vice president, its members "turned spontaneously" to Senator King. "He possessed, in an eminent degree, that quickness of perception, that promptness of decision, that familiarity with the now complicated rules of congressional proceedings, and that urbanity of manner, which are required in a presiding officer."<sup>5</sup>

### **Early Career**

William Rufus Devane King was born in Sampson County, North Carolina, on April 7, 1786, the second son of William King and Margaret Devane. His father, a wealthy planter and justice of the peace, had fought in the Revolutionary War, served as a delegate in the state convention called to ratify the U.S. Constitution, and was an occasional member of the North Carolina state assembly. At the time of his son's birth, he owned more than two dozen slaves. Young William studied at local academies and at the University of North Carolina Preparatory School, a facility established in 1795 to cater to the educational needs of "raw, mostly untaught youths of diverse ages and acquirements."<sup>6</sup> He entered the University of North Carolina in the summer of 1801 and proved to be a capable student, but he left that institution at the end of his junior year.<sup>7</sup> Following a period of legal training with Fayetteville's William Duffy—one of the state's leading lawyers—he gained admission to the North Carolina bar in 1805. A Jeffersonian Republican, King served in the North Carolina legislature's house of commons from 1808 to 1809, and then as solicitor of the fifth circuit of the state superior court at Wilmington. In 1810, several months short of the constitutionally prescribed age of twenty-five, he won the Wilmington district's seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.<sup>8</sup> There he joined with House Speaker Henry Clay, also a freshman member, John C. Calhoun, and other young, expansionist "warhawks" of the Twelfth Congress in a determined and successful campaign to initiate hostilities with Great Britain. In November 1816, King traded lawmaking for diplomacy by resigning from the House to serve as legation secretary under William Pinkney, recently appointed U.S. minister to Russia. Pinkney and King traveled first to the Kingdom of Naples in an unsuccessful attempt to obtain compensation for seized American ships. In January 1817, they reached St. Petersburg, where they served for a year. In February 1818, without waiting to be formally recalled, Pinkney and King returned to the United States.<sup>9</sup>

King then moved from North Carolina to the rich economic and political opportunities of the newly organized Alabama Territory. In October 1818, he purchased 750 acres of land and created an Alabama River estate, "King's Bend," six miles from the town of Cahaba, the new state capital. In March 1819, King and several others organized a land company and founded the nearby town of Selma, which he named for a site in classical legend that occupied high bluffs above a river.<sup>10</sup> The town prospered because of its proximity to Cahaba, which remained the state's capital until 1826. The former congressman and diplomat rose quickly to local prominence and was selected as a delegate to the territory's July 1819 constitutional convention and then, in December 1819, as one of Alabama's first United States senators.

### **Senator from Alabama**

Despite his lengthy Senate service and his important role as conciliator in a fractious era, William King is not today counted among the great statesmen of the Senate's "Golden Age."<sup>11</sup> One scholar of the period, mindful of King's

practice of wearing a wig long after such coverings had gone out of fashion, dismissed him as a "tall, prim, wigtopped mediocrity." Novelist John Updike, after his own extended research, took a more positive view of the slender and courtly statesman. Describing King's face as "darkly handsome and smolderingly receptive," he characterized the senator as "one of those eminences whose strong impression on their own times has suffered a gradual erasure upon the tablets of history."<sup>12</sup> A fellow senator offered the following assessment:

He was distinguished by the scrupulous correctness of his conduct. He was remarkable for his quiet and unobtrusive, but active, practical usefulness as a legislator. He was emphatically a *business member* of the Senate, and, without ostentation, originated and perfected more useful measures than many who filled the public eye by greater display and daily commanded the applause of a listening Senate. . . . [T]o his honor be it spoken, he never vexed the ear of the Senate with ill-timed, tedious, or unnecessary debate.<sup>13</sup>

A moderate Democrat, King became an active supporter of Andrew Jackson soon after the 1825 decision of the House of Representatives to select John Quincy Adams over Jackson for president. In the 1828 presidential election, Alabama cast its electoral votes for Jackson, due in large measure to King's efforts. King generally supported the Jackson administration during its stormy eight-year life, although as a southerner he was also associated with the "little Senate" group considered loyal to Jackson's nemesis, South Carolina's John C. Calhoun.<sup>14</sup> The Alabama senator shared Jackson's hostility to Kentuckian Henry Clay's "accursed American System" of centralized governmental action against foreign competition through protective tariffs, a central banking system, and a public works program of canal and road-building.

In 1831 and 1832, King used his chairmanship of the Senate Committee on Public Lands to advance Jackson administration land policies. Consistent with his long-held views on the subject, he attacked the notion that public lands should be priced primarily to produce large amounts of federal revenue (that would go "to the East to pay the pensioners and support the fortifications"); he believed public lands should be sold only to those who actually planned to settle them. A reduction in land prices would simultaneously stimulate territorial settlement and national economic growth.<sup>15</sup> King also subscribed to his region's hostility to high protective tariffs, arguing that high rates tax "the many for the benefit of the few," but he opposed John C. Calhoun's theory that the South had the right to "nullify" odious laws, such as the 1828 "Tariff of Abominations." "I view [nullification] as neither peaceful nor constitutional, but clearly revolutionary in its character, and if persevered in, must, in the nature of things, result in the severance of the Union. From such a calamity may God in His mercy deliver us." When Clay early in 1833 presented a compromise tariff bill that defused the building confrontation between federal force and state resistance, King, ever the moderate, quickly rose to support the measure. His moderation irritated both President Jackson and southern hard-liners, who charged that he had not worked hard enough to defend his region's interests.<sup>16</sup>

King contested Henry Clay's 1832 move to recharter the Bank of the United States, not because he opposed the bank, but because he objected to Clay's political opportunism, tied to that year's presidential election. When, as part of that controversy, Jackson ordered the removal of federal funds from the bank and then refused to respond to a Clay-inspired Senate demand for a copy of a related document, the Senate took the unprecedented action on March 28, 1834, of censuring the president. Administration partisans, led by Missouri Senator Thomas Hart Benton and King, launched a vigorous and ultimately successful campaign to expunge the censure from the Senate's journal. King, who had become widely respected for his knowledge of the Senate's rules and precedents, argued that Jackson's refusal to produce the document was in no way an assault on senatorial prerogatives. "The Senate was in no danger," he asserted, "it had never been so strong or so saucy as it was at the present moment; why, then, was it like the Italian beggar, continually wounding itself, for the purpose of exciting the commiseration and benevolence of the public."<sup>17</sup>

King's conflict with Clay and the dangerous tenor of the times are symbolized in the clash between the two men that took place in March 1841, as the Senate, under Clay's leadership, for the first time passed to the control of a new Whig majority. A great battle developed over Senate printing patronage as Clay sought to dismiss Democrat Francis P. Blair, editor of the *Washington Globe*, as official Senate printer. Clay "believed the *Globe* to be an infamous paper, and its chief editor an infamous man." King responded that Blair's character would "compare gloriously" to that of Clay. The Kentucky senator jumped to his feet and shouted, "That is false, it is a slanderous base and cowardly declaration and the senator knows it to be so." King answered ominously, "Mr. President, I have no reply to make—none whatever. But Mr. Clay deserves a *response*." King then wrote out a challenge to a duel and had

another senator deliver it to Clay, who belatedly realized what trouble his hasty words had unleashed. As Clay and King selected seconds and prepared for the imminent encounter, the Senate sergeant at arms arrested both men and turned them over to a civil authority. Clay posted a five-thousand-dollar bond as assurance that he would keep the peace, "and particularly towards William R. King." Each wanted the matter behind him, but King insisted on "an unequivocal apology." On March 14, 1841, Clay apologized and noted that he would have been wiser to have kept quiet despite the intensity of his feelings against Blair. King then gave his own apology, after which Clay walked to King's desk and said sweetly, "King, give us a pinch of your snuff." King rose and both men shook hands as applause engulfed the chamber.<sup>18</sup>

### **Vice-Presidential Ambitions**

In the late 1830s, as a leading southern moderate among long-serving, middle-aged senators, William King attracted attention within the Democratic party as a prospective vice-presidential candidate for the 1840 election. As early as 1838, dissatisfaction with Vice President Richard M. Johnson for his negative impact on the 1836 race and his scandalous personal life<sup>19</sup> caused party leaders to begin the search for a strong second-term running mate for President Martin Van Buren. King was a natural contender, having been on the national political stage for a quarter century and having routinely substituted for Johnson during the vice president's frequent absences from the Senate chamber. He enjoyed significant support in the electorally important state of Pennsylvania, thanks to his roommate and close ally Senator James Buchanan. Buchanan wished to thwart the 1844 presidential ambitions of both Senator Thomas Hart Benton and Secretary of State John Forsyth by blocking their paths to the vice-presidency in 1840. (In the closeness of their relationship in the years after 1834, King and Buchanan—both lifelong bachelors—became known as the "Siamese twins."<sup>20</sup>) King assured Buchanan that in return for the Pennsylvanian's help in obtaining the vice-presidency in 1840, he would refuse to run for the presidency in 1844, thus clearing the way for Buchanan. The Pennsylvania senator agreed to King's plan and circulated his name among leading Democratic newspaper editors. The anticipated renomination of President Van Buren, a New Yorker, required balancing by a southerner such as King. By the start of 1840, however, King's vice-presidential chances had evaporated because he was unable to generate support from Democratic leaders in the influential states of North Carolina and Pennsylvania. At the party's national convention in Baltimore, a motion to give the second spot to King failed to draw serious interest and party leaders decided to leave the vice-presidential selection to the individual state party organizations.<sup>21</sup>

In 1842, King's name again surfaced as a vice-presidential contender for the 1844 Democratic ticket. Supporters of a presidential bid by South Carolina's John C. Calhoun tried without success to dissuade King, as there would be room for no more than one southerner on a national slate. But by late 1843, the stronger candidacy of former President Van Buren smothered Calhoun's aspirations. For Van Buren's running mate, the names most frequently mentioned were James K. Polk and William King. King's supporters argued that, as a Jacksonian and resident of a southern state loyal to the Democratic party (a slap at Polk's Whig-inclined Tennessee), he deserved the vice-presidency.<sup>22</sup> However, in a repeat of his troubles four years earlier, King was unable to attract serious support in the electorally rich eastern states, so that his candidacy had lost its vitality by the eve of the 1844 Baltimore convention. Meanwhile, Van Buren had destroyed his own chances of becoming the presidential nominee with his announcement of opposition to the annexation of Texas. King hoped that party leaders would fill that void by selecting Buchanan, in which case he would again offer himself for the second spot on the grounds that his presence would help secure essential electoral votes from the wavering state of North Carolina.

On April 9, 1844, President Tyler ended King's preconvention maneuvering by appointing him minister to France. Throughout 1843 and into early 1844, angry with Tyler's policies, the Senate had rejected many of his nominations to major judicial, cabinet, and diplomatic posts. Among these was the appointment as minister to France of Virginia Representative Henry A. Wise, described by a modern historian as a "high-strung, tobacco-chewing extrovert."<sup>23</sup> As a result, this sensitive post had remained vacant for eighteen months until Tyler selected King, one of the Senate's most popular members. Easily confirmed, King left for Paris and soon succeeded in his central mission: to keep France from interfering with U.S. plans to annex Texas.<sup>24</sup>

From Paris, King kept actively in touch with national and Alabama political developments. In April 1846 he wrote his friend James Buchanan, now his boss as secretary of state, "Most sincerely do I wish that we had both remained in the Senate."<sup>25</sup> King therefore decided to run for his old Senate seat, then occupied by political rival and fellow

Democrat Dixon H. Lewis. Desiring to return in time to influence the Alabama legislature's election, he left for the United States in November 1846. In a three-way race that included Whig leader Arthur Hopkins, the legislature took seventeen ballots during December 1847 but failed to make a selection. Throughout this hotly contested battle between unionist and states' rights forces—a battle that one modern historian of Alabama labeled "probably the most significant senatorial election in the antebellum period"—states rights' candidate Lewis led, followed by Hopkins and then unionist King. On the eighteenth ballot, in the only election defeat of his public career, King withdrew and the seat went to Lewis.<sup>26</sup> King, however, did not have to wait long to fulfill his senatorial ambitions. Within seven months, Alabama's other Senate seat became vacant when President Polk named Arthur Bagby minister to Russia. On July 1, 1848, the governor appointed King to fill the eight months remaining in Bagby's term. Later that year, in a close race with his nemesis Arthur Hopkins, King won a full term.<sup>27</sup>

### **Compromiser in 1850**

The national mood had darkened during King's four-year absence from the Senate. He told James Buchanan that he had doubts about the wisdom of returning in those troubled days. "A seat in the Senate is, I assure you, far from being desirable to me; bringing with it as it does at this particular time especially, great responsibility, great labor, and no little anxiety."<sup>28</sup> Characteristically, King tried to calm the brewing storm. He urged northern senators to resist intensifying pressures to introduce antislavery petitions. "I speak as a senator who has been here many years, and as one always anxious to see the members of this body preserve that decorum and kindness toward each other which secures to the body the respect in which it is held throughout the country and the world."<sup>29</sup> He supported the spirit, if not always the specifics, of Henry Clay's compromise measures. He opposed admitting California without the seasoning period of territorial status and he believed that Congress had "about as much constitutional power to prohibit slavery from going into the Territories of the United States as we have power to pass an act carrying slavery there." He believed that abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia would be unfair to the slaveholders in adjacent states, but he supported abolition of the slave trade there.

As the regional positions hardened in the tumultuous early months of 1850, King lamented the "banefull spirit of party" that in dividing the South encouraged northern extremists. In April, King's seniority and moderate views earned him a place as one of two southern Democratic representatives on the Senate's Select Committee of Thirteen, appointed to review Henry Clay's compromise resolutions regarding territories and slavery. With a majority of the committee's members, he agreed that slavery was a "rightful" subject for legislative attention, but only in the legislatures of states and not of territories. Thus, King took the view of southern conservatives that the Constitution protected owners in their control of slave property until a territory became a state.<sup>30</sup> At home, he met bitter opposition from a faction of "Southern Rights" secessionists who argued that his voting record better reflected the interests of Massachusetts, but an equally large group of supporters praised his support for compromise, union, and peace. He counseled patience, optimistically expecting the North to respect southern rights, but warning that if that section's actions jeopardized those rights—both constitutional and material—all southern men should "hurl defiance at the fanatical crew, and unitedly determine to defend their rights at every hazard and every sacrifice."<sup>31</sup>

### **Arbiter of Decorum**

The Senate chamber in 1850 was frequently jammed to capacity as the major debates on slavery in the territories drew large crowds of House members, reporters, and the general public eager to get a glimpse of the likes of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, Thomas Hart Benton, Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, Sam Houston of Texas, and others of the nation's most notable public figures. As a frequent presiding officer, King regularly acted to restore decorum. In this electrically charged environment, he took every opportunity to remind other senators of his need for their support "to put down the least movement toward disorder, or the slightest indulgence in personal remarks."<sup>32</sup> In May, while Vice President Millard Fillmore was presiding, a senator won adoption of a routine resolution to admit a local newspaper reporter to the Senate floor. Dissatisfied with such flagrant circumvention of the Senate's floor access rules, another member suggested referring the matter to a committee. Several senators proposed that the presiding officer be allowed to issue each member one admission permit to award as he saw fit. According to the proposal, with a guest waiting at the chamber's entrance, the host senator would go to the dais and request his ticket from the vice president. New Jersey Senator William Dayton predicted there would be few takers. "All the multitudinous persons who hang around the Capitol will not have the face to ask Senators to go to the Vice President

and formally get the permit to allow them to come on the floor every day." Others laughed at the dilemma of a senator having to decide between male and female guests and the idea of such a system that would have sixty senatorial guests contending with sixty senators and several hundred House members for floor space in such cramped quarters. Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi sounded the most realistic note: "It is utterly impossible to attempt to admit all who desire to come on the floor. . . . The evil can only be remedied by an enlarged chamber." As the member most identified with Senate decorum and tradition, King brought the debate to a close by moving to refer the matter to a special committee, knowing that another committee would soon propose the construction of new Senate and House chambers, each with ample public galleries.<sup>33</sup>

### **Finally Vice President**

On July 10, 1850, Zachary Taylor's death placed Millard Fillmore in the White House and left the vice-presidency vacant. On July 11, the solemn Senate set aside the practice of having each party offer a nomination for the president pro tempore's post and unanimously selected King for the vacancy. This otherwise routine act took on special significance, for King would be in effect the acting vice president of the United States. King addressed the Senate in the tone of a vice president offering an inaugural oration. Noting the unusual bipartisan support for his election, King vowed to enforce the Senate's rules "mildly, but firmly, and I trust impartially. . . . Should I err, I look to my brother Senators, in a spirit of kindness, to correct my errors."<sup>34</sup> Continuing in the fashion of former Vice President Fillmore, King worked hard to calm the angry seas that swelled with increasing violence on the Senate floor. King's long quest for the vice-presidency had resumed immediately after he returned from France in 1846. However, his failure that year to regain his Senate seat, coupled with deep ideological divisions within the Alabama Democratic party, denied him the support necessary to launch a vigorous national campaign. At the 1848 national convention in Baltimore, following the nomination of Michigan's Lewis Cass for the presidency, King's was among a half-dozen names placed before the delegates. On the first ballot, he came in third. On the second ballot, the convention selected Kentucky's General William O. Butler, a veteran of the War of 1812 and the Mexican War.<sup>35</sup> In January 1852, the Alabama state Democratic convention endorsed the Compromise of 1850 and directed the state's national convention delegates to support King for either the presidency or vice-presidency. At the jam-packed, tumultuous Baltimore convention, delegates selected Franklin Pierce on the forty-ninth ballot. In a peace gesture to the Buchanan wing of the party, Pierce's supporters allowed Buchanan's allies to fill the second position, knowing that they would select King. On the second ballot, with only minor opposition, King finally captured his prize.<sup>36</sup> During the ensuing campaign, King's tuberculosis, which he believed he had contracted while in Paris, denied him the active behind-the-scenes role that he might otherwise have played, although he worked hard to assure his region's voters that New Hampshire's Pierce was a "northern man with southern principles." King's deteriorating physical condition clouded the victory that came in November; Pierce's unwillingness to consult the vice-president-elect on cabinet appointments deepened his malaise.

In November, King began to suffer from a worsening cough. A month later, he described himself as looking like a skeleton and told friends he doubted that he would ever recover. On December 20, two weeks into the short December-March congressional session, King resigned his Senate seat and made plans to regain his health away from wintertime Washington.<sup>37</sup> On January 17, 1853, King left for the more salutary climate of Cuba, by way of Key West, Florida; he reached Havana in early February. Soon realizing that he would be unable to return to Washington in time for the March 4, 1853, inauguration, King requested that Congress permit him to take his oath in Cuba.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, for the only time in this nation's history, Congress passed legislation allowing the vice-president-elect to be sworn in outside the country. On March 24, 1853, near Matanzas, a seaport town sixty miles east of Havana, the gravely ill statesman, too feeble to stand unaided, became the nation's thirteenth vice president. Deciding that he would make every effort to return to the United States, King set sail for Mobile on April 6. He reached his Alabama plantation on April 17, but his struggle was at an end. The sixty-seven-year-old King died there the following day. An opposition newspaper praised his "purity and patriotism" and concluded, "[t]hrough not, perhaps, brilliant, he was better—sensible, honest, never running into ultraism, but in the contests between the State and the federal government, maintaining the true conservative medium, so necessary to the preservation of the constitution, the rights of the States and the Republic."<sup>39</sup>

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Notes:

1. U.S., Congress, Senate, *Journal*, 33d Cong., 1st sess., p. 25.

2. On taking office as president pro tempore in January 1837, King offered the following observations about the Senate and the role of its presiding officer. They are similar in tone and formulation to those that Vice President Aaron Burr uttered on March 2, 1805.

The Senate of the United States, gentlemen, is, from its very organization, the great conservative body in this republic. Here is the strong citadel of liberty. To this body the intelligent and the virtuous, throughout our wide-spread country, look with confidence for an unwavering and unflinching resistance to the encroachments of power on the one hand, and the effervescence of popular excitement on the other. Unawed and unswayed, it should firmly maintain the constitution in its purity, and present an impregnable barrier against every attack on that sacred instrument, come it from what quarter it may. The demon of faction should find no abiding place in this chamber, but every heart and every head should be wholly occupied in advancing the general welfare, and preserving, unimpaired, the national honor. To insure success, gentlemen, in the discharge of our high duties, we must command the confidence and receive the support of the people. Calm deliberation, courtesy toward each other, order and decorum in debate, will go far, very far, to inspire that confidence and command that support. It becomes my duty, gentlemen, to banish (if practicable) from this hall all personal altercation; to check, at once, every remark of a character personally offensive; to preserve order, and promote harmony....I earnestly solicit your co-operation, gentlemen, in aiding my efforts promptly to put down every species of disorder. (U.S., Congress, Senate, *Register of Debates in Congress*, 24th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 618-19.

3. As early as 1824, King regularly served as the chairman of the Committee of the Whole, a long-since-abandoned parliamentary form by which the full Senate could expedite its proceedings. (John Milton Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1955, p. 81.) Prior to 1890, the Senate elected its president pro tempore only when the vice president was away from the chamber. Election to that post during the Senate's first century was generally considered an acknowledgment of the Senate's respect for the individual's judicious temperament. In later years, the Senate designated a permanent president pro tempore for each Congress, usually the senior member of the majority party. (U.S., Congress, Senate *The Senate, 1789-1989: Addresses on the History of the United States Senate*, by Robert C. Byrd, S.Doc. 100-20, 100th Cong., 1st sess., vol. 2, 1991, Chapter 6; vol. 4, *Historical Statistics*, 1993, pp. 647-53.)

4. U.S., Congress, Senate, *Congressional Globe*, 33d Cong., 1st sess., pp. 19-21. See also U.S., Congress, *Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. William R. King, of Alabama, Vice President of the United States, Delivered in the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, Eighth of December, 1853* (Washington, 1854), pp. 8-13, 37. Representative Sampson Harris (D-AL) also commented that King lacked "many of those great attributes of mind, which dazzle and lead captive the admiring throng..." (p. 37) and the *National Intelligencer* began its obituary, "Not endowed with shining talents, though of excellent sense..." (April 20, 1853).

5. *Congressional Globe*, 33d Cong., 1st sess., p. 20.

6. Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," pp. 3-5, 11-12.

7. No book-length biography of King exists. John Milton Martin, the only modern-era scholar to have given King's career serious consideration, prepared a 1955 doctoral dissertation ("William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," University of North Carolina) and articles in the early 1960s on King's role as a "Jacksonian Senator" and his multiple quests for the vice-presidency. Biographies of King's leading contemporaries and histories of nineteenth-century Alabama political life give him only passing reference. A small unorganized collection of his personal papers survives at the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery. Incomplete records at the University of North Carolina have led to conflicting accounts of his stay there. An error-ridden biographical article by E.S.W. Dameron in that institution's *University Magazine* (March 1905, p. 317-22) credits him with graduating in 1803, but notes that the "ravages of a century have despoiled his Alma Mater of all account of his college life." Others have accepted that information, including Thomas M. Owen in *History of Alabama and Dictionary of Alabama Biography*, vol. 3 (Chicago, 1921), p. 983, and Roy F. Nichols in "William Rufus Devane King," *Dictionary of American Biography* (vol. 10, p. 406). John M. Martin, King's only reliable modern biographer, disagrees, indicating that he withdrew in 1804, "William R. King and the Compromise of 1850," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 39 (October 1962): 500. In his University of North Carolina doctoral dissertation (pp. 20-22), Martin explores the matter in greater detail and concludes that King felt he was sufficiently prepared to

begin his legal studies.

8. By the time the Twelfth Congress convened on November 4, 1811, King had reached the required age of twenty-five. In those early years both houses of Congress occasionally ignored the minimum age requirement, which was generally applied at the time the oath of office was administered rather than on the date of election.

9. Martin, "William R. King and the Compromise of 1850," p. 500; Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," Chapter 2.

10. Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," pp. 61-65. King took the name "Selma" from the poem by James Macpherson, "the Song of Selma." Virginia O. Foscue, *Place Names in Alabama* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1989), pp. 26-27, 125; Writers' Program, Alabama, *Alabama: A Guide to the Deep South* (WPA American Guide Series) (New York, 1941), pp. 47-50, 237-38.

11. The major documentary record of his Senate service is found in the quasi-official proceedings of Congress, the *Annals of Congress* (1811-1816; 1819-1824), the *Register of Debates in Congress* (1824-1838), and the *Congressional Globe* (1833-1853). Yet even this record is spare, as King made few substantive speeches, preferring to preside rather than to debate. He never married or had children, thus there were no direct heirs with a vested interest in preserving a useful record of his service.

12. Roy Nichols and Jeannette Nichols, "Election of 1852," in *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., vol. 2 (New York, 1971), p. 942; John Updike, *Memories of the Ford Administration* (New York, 1992), pp. 227, 233.

13. *Congressional Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., p. 21.

14. John M. Martin, "William R. King: Jacksonian Senator," *The Alabama Review* 18 (October 1965): 243-45.

15. Martin, "William R. King: Jacksonian Senator," pp. 247-51; Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," p. 77.

16. Martin, "William R. King: Jacksonian Senator," pp. 253, 256.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 262.

18. This story is derived from the account presented in Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York, 1991), p. 574. Remini consulted many sources beyond the quasi-official *Congressional Globe* (26th Cong., 2d sess., pp. 245, 247-249, 256-257), which was reported in the third person and without the detail that Remini located in contemporary newspapers, letters, and diary accounts. See also Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," pp. 183-86.

19. See Chapter 9, "Richard Mentor Johnson," pp. 12-15.

20. Philip Shriver Klein, *President James Buchanan* (University Park, PA, 1962), p. 111; Novelist John Updike, in *Memories of the Ford Administration* (pp. 227-41), speculates at length on the nature of the intimacy between King and Buchanan.

21. John M. Martin, "William R. King and the Vice Presidency," *The Alabama Review* 16 (January 1963): 35-40; Klein, pp. 131-32.

22. Martin, "William R. King and the Vice Presidency," pp. 43-44.

23. John Niven, *John C. Calhoun and the Price of Union* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1988), p. 260.

24. St. George Leakin Sioussat, "John Caldwell Calhoun," in *American Secretaries of State and Their Diplomacy*, ed. Samuel Flagg Bemis, vol. 5 (New York, 1928), pp. 164-65, 169, 208, 300; Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," Chapter 7.

25. Letter of April 30, 1846, quoted in Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," p. 268.

26. William Warren Rogers, et al., *Alabama: The History of a Deep South State* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1994), p. 155.

27. Martin, "William Rufus King: Southern Moderate," pp. 274-81, 290-91, 300-303.

28. Martin, "William R. King and the Compromise of 1850," p. 501.

29. *Congressional Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., p. 342.

30. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union*, pp. 746-47.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Congressional Globe*, 31st Cong., 1st sess., p. 915.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 1054-55.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 1370.

35. Martin, "William R. King and the Vice Presidency," pp. 46-49.

36. *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections, 3d ed.* (Washington, DC, 1994), p. 43.

37. *Congressional Globe*, 32d Cong., 2d sess., p. 89.

38. In King's absence, Senator Lewis Cass, as the Senate's oldest member, administered the oath of office to newly



elected senators. President Franklin Pierce made no reference to his absent running mate during his inaugural address. Congress approved the necessary legislation on March 2, 1853. (*Congressional Globe*, 32d Cong., 2d sess., *Appendix*, p. 341.)  
39. *Daily [Montgomery] Alabama Journal*, April 20, 1853.