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# RUTHERFORD B. HAYES AND THE POLITICS OF DISCORD

FRANK P. VAZZANO

KEEN STUDENTS OF THE GILDED AGE recognize that the bitter partisanship surrounding the presidency of George W. Bush presents nothing new in American politics. Unfortunately, comparatively few others do. This article examines the question of the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio, who won office in 1876 in much the same fashion as did Bush in 2000, that is, with fewer popular votes than his Democratic opponent. Hayes' opponent was Samuel Jones Tilden, the governor of New York and, like Hayes, a reformer. A deceptively dull campaign preceded the most controversial election in American history when three Southern states, Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina, submitted dual sets of votes, one for each candidate. Questions also arose about Oregon's vote because a Republican office holder there served as an elector—in violation of the U.S. Constitution.

Hayes won the disputed votes of all four states after a congressionally appointed Electoral Commission of fifteen men—eight of them Republicans—declared for the Republican candidate. However, the controversy over the partisan decision generated four years of enmity on the part of the Democrats and even some Republicans who questioned Hayes' legitimacy when he failed to do their bidding. Even so, the new president carried through on significant pieces of his campaign platform and bequeathed to Republicans a party sufficiently united to win the next presidential election. Surprisingly, the quiet Ohioan became a more forceful president than had been assumed.

Hayes, however, had no easy time of it. The blatantly partisan voting of the Electoral Commission (eight to seven on each contested state) led the Democrats to cry foul.<sup>1</sup> Threats of Hayes' assassination and the possibility of a congressional filibuster to prevent an official counting of the returns swept the capital.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Lawyers for each candidate argued their case before the commissioners in February 1877. After deliberating on each state, the Electoral Commission ruled Florida for Hayes on 9 February, Louisiana on 16 February, Oregon on 23 February, and South Carolina on 27 February. Ari Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes: Warrior and President* (Lawrence, Kans.: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 287–88, 291, 293.
2. Charles Richard Williams, *The Life of Rutherford B. Hayes: Nineteenth President of the United States*, 2 vols. (Boston, Mass., and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1914), 2: 1–3.

Against the potentially disastrous backdrop of a presidential interregnum, worried politicians on both sides, in a series of negotiations ending at Washington, D.C.'s Wormley House Hotel, frantically sought a compromise. With Hayes' sanction, some supporters, notably fellow Ohioans James A. Garfield, John Sherman, and Stanley Matthews, met in February 1877 with moderate Southern leaders, including Kentucky's John Young Brown and Georgia's John B. Gordon. Hayes' men asked what concessions they would have to make to ensure his inauguration. The Southerners' frank reply: Withdraw federal troops from the last two "reconstructed" states, Louisiana and South Carolina, appoint a Southerner to Hayes' cabinet, and ensure internal improvements for the war-torn South. With the bargain struck, on 5 March 1877 (4 March fell on a Sunday) Rutherford B. Hayes became the nineteenth president of the United States.<sup>3</sup>

With no overarching peril to divert the public's attention, Hayes' disputed election led to a presidency under constant siege. Confronted from the beginning by a Democratic majority in the House of Representatives and by several U.S. senators who refused to accept his leadership, Hayes found little support for nearly every issue during his single term. Although a loyal Republican, political jealousies, coupled with considerable Northern antipathy toward his plan for post-Civil War reconciliation with the South, frequently left Hayes without a party. Many Republicans agreed with South Carolina's ousted carpetbag governor, Daniel H. Chamberlain, who complained in 1877 that Hayes had betrayed his party and ought to be "driven over, neck, heels and boots, to the Democracy . . ."<sup>4</sup> In addition, patronage-loving Republicans known as Stalwarts, many of them Northerners who had earlier supported the harsh reconstruction of the South, hated the president for trying to reform a scandal-ridden civil service. They considered Hayes' tenure as an unfortunate interlude and assiduously plotted the 1880 re-election of the more tractable Ulysses S. Grant.<sup>5</sup>

Hayes, however, could not claim innocence in all of this. While not as bombastic as some of his more vocal foes, he was nonetheless an ambitious and astute politician in his own right. For instance, when the Ohio Republican Caucus unanimously nominated him for a third gubernatorial term in 1875, he proudly

3. C. Vann Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction: The Compromise of 1877 and the End of Reconstruction* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1966), 166–203.
4. Daniel H. Chamberlain to William E. Chandler, 27 December 1877, William E. Chandler Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
5. Allan Peskin, "Stalwarts and Half-Breeds," in *Historical Dictionary of the Gilded Age*, ed. Leonard Schlup and James G. Ryan (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 466.

noted it as a “feather I would like to wear.” The honor especially pleased him because it provided an opportunity to do what no one in Ohio had ever done before—become a third-term governor.<sup>6</sup> As a possible presidential candidate in 1876, Hayes had no reservations about personally ensuring that the Ohio delegation would stay solidly in line at the convention in Cincinnati.<sup>7</sup> In addition, he encouraged his Republican surrogates to “speak” for him at the Wormley Hotel negotiations that resulted in the “Compromise of 1877.”<sup>8</sup>

The end of Reconstruction and its national distractions allowed Gilded Age politicians to take advantage of lingering sectional and partisan divisions to create personal fiefdoms where the reform-minded Hayes was unwelcome. No one did so better than Roscoe Conkling, the flamboyant Stalwart senator from the state of New York. Conkling, one of the nation’s most powerful politicians, had entered his third term in the Senate by 1877. Capitalizing on his friendship with President Grant, he won control of nearly all New York federal patronage and despised what he called Hayes’ “snivel service” reform. When Hayes tried to reform the New York custom house in Conkling’s home state, he made a life-long enemy of the Stalwart senator, a price that the president willingly paid in order to appease the reformers clamoring for an honest government after the scandals on Grant’s watch.

Equally imperious and even more popular than Conkling was the Plumed Knight, James G. Blaine of Maine. New to the Senate in 1877 after a brilliant but scandal-tainted career in the House, Blaine tried to further his ambitions at Hayes’ expense. The acknowledged leader of the Half-Breeds, an anti-Grant Republican faction that paid lip service to reform, he, like Conkling, engaged in a four-year crusade against the Hayes administration.

Blaine and Conkling might have claimed that their antagonism toward the president was impersonal, but prior events demonstrated the contrary. Both wanted the presidential nomination in 1876 and thought that the Republican convention’s compromise selection of Hayes denied them an office that they more rightly deserved and could have more capably administered. Neither ever disguised his feelings after Hayes assumed office. In Blaine’s case, Hayes bore at least partial responsibility for his fellow Republican’s animus. Conkling’s intractability,

6. T. Harry Williams, ed., *Hayes: The Diary of a President, 1875–1881, Covering the Disputed Election, The End of Reconstruction, and the Beginning of Civil Service* (New York: D. MacKay Co., 1964), 2.

7. Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes*, 261.

8. Keith Ian Polakoff, *The Politics of Inertia: The Election of 1876 and the End of Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 310–12.

however, arose from his personality. The slightest affront might turn him into an implacable foe, and once that happened he could not be won over.

The House of Representatives also contained its share of men who disliked Hayes primarily because of his tarnished claim to the presidency. Democratic Speaker Samuel J. Randall, for one, could never forgive the blatantly partisan voting of the Republican-controlled Electoral Commission that gave Hayes his office. Even so, Randall was moderate compared to Kentucky Democrat Joseph S. C. Blackburn who swore that had he been speaker of the House in 1877 Hayes would never have been president.<sup>9</sup> Not even Hayes' promises of a benign policy toward the South and the Democracy tempered the passions of the angry Kentuckian.

The Democrats, incensed by what they considered a stolen election and driven by their own partisanship, predictably opposed a Republican administration despite the promises in the eleventh-hour Wormley House bargain that ensured Hayes' installation. Incongruously though, Hayes encountered fierce opposition from his fellow Republicans in both houses of Congress. Still bearing traces of its Whiggish origins, the Republican Party, wary of presidential power, frequently acted to check it in the two decades before Hayes took office. Not even Lincoln blazed an easy path through Congress, and stubborn self-righteousness on the part of Andrew Johnson generated some of the greatest animosity ever between the executive and legislative branches. Despite Ulysses S. Grant's attempts to rehabilitate the presidency, by the time Hayes was inaugurated in 1877, some national lawmakers had grown accustomed to virtually unchecked power.<sup>10</sup> When Hayes refused to acquiesce to their demands, he alienated some of the most powerful men in the U.S. government. This proved particularly true when he tried to abide by the civil service reform plank in the Republican party's 1876 platform. When Hayes acted on it, the spoilsmen turned on him. Reform seemed acceptable as a campaign issue, but to powerful Republicans it had to give way to the practical business of running the country as they saw fit. However, Hayes, during his inaugural address, had promised civil service reform, and in the heady atmosphere

9. Watt P. Marchman, ed., "The 'Memoirs' of Thomas Donaldson," *Hayes Historical Journal* 2 (Spring–Fall 1979): 192.

10. On Grant's reasonably adroit handling of the presidency, see Charles W. Calhoun, "Reimagining the 'Lost Men' of the Gilded Age: Perspectives on the Late Nineteenth Century Presidents," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1 (July 2002): 231–38; Frank J. Scatturo, *President Grant Reconsidered* (New York: University Press of America, 1998), 10–13; Brooks D. Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861–1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 252–63.

of the moment earnestly believed that “he serves his party best who serves his country best.”<sup>11</sup>

Hayes’ persistence earned him the grudging respect of the spoilsmen. They eagerly attacked him publicly, but in their inner counsels they nurtured a deference that demonstrated their fear of pushing too far. Green B. Raum, a loyal hack of the Illinois spoilsman John A. Logan, constantly tried to conciliate Hayes. Later, attempting to justify his behavior to his patron, he wrote, “It is not well to make an issue with the President.”<sup>12</sup>

Such respect certainly would have come more easily if Hayes had acquired the flair and the penchant for the dramatic that his enemies like Conkling and Blaine possessed as a seeming birthright. Still, the gifts that allowed Conkling and Blaine to dominate the political scene rendered them ineffective as statesmen. For everyone they impressed by their magniloquence, they equally repelled another. As critics they were superb, but, too preoccupied with their own constant posturing, they failed to do anything constructive. In contrast, Hayes appeared Lincolnesque, often deliberately reticent, and stood convinced that moderation would provide the key to his and his party’s success.<sup>13</sup> While the oratory of Blaine and Conkling captivated many Americans, Republicans entrusted Hayes with the party’s standard in 1876. That his success generated the wrath of his windy foes mattered little to Hayes. Carl Schurz, Hayes’ secretary of the interior, happily noted that Blaine’s animosity actually enhanced the president’s prestige.<sup>14</sup>

Early on, Hayes signaled that his presidency would not become “business as usual” as he resisted the congressional oligarchs who gratuitously offered their favorites for cabinet posts. Immune to their importuning and in partial fulfillment of his promise of Southern reconciliation, Hayes initially considered former Confederate General Joseph E. Johnston for secretary of war, but Johnston’s popularity among Confederate veterans made him too inflammatory for Northern tastes. After consulting General William T. Sherman, Hayes abandoned thoughts of appointing Johnston.<sup>15</sup> Determined to name a Southerner to his cabinet even if it cost him party support, he chose David M. Key of Tennessee as postmaster

11. Williams, *Life of Hayes*, 2:8–9.

12. Green B. Raum to John A. Logan, 28 May 1880, John A. Logan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

13. T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 126.

14. Carl Schurz to Henry Cabot Lodge, 6 April 1878, Carl Schurz Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

15. T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 81–82 n.

general. Although Key had been a life-long Democrat and a Confederate general, he acted not as an incorrigible rebel and on that account might seem acceptable to many Northerners.<sup>16</sup>

If Key's nomination stirred Republicans who still mentally fought the Civil War, Hayes' choice of Carl Schurz as secretary of the interior sent shock waves through old guard Republican ranks. Schurz had immigrated to the United States after the failed German revolutions of 1848 and immediately became a champion of liberal and reform politics. Although a Republican, he nevertheless alienated staunch partisans with his constant attacks against the political corruption he saw virtually everywhere under Grant. More visionary than practical, he prompted the universal hatred of Stalwart Republicans. Not surprisingly, Schurz wanted the Hayes administration to promote reform and reconciliation. To that end, he had advocated the retention of Benjamin Bristow, Grant's treasury secretary who had dismantled the notorious Whiskey Ring in 1875, and the naming of a Southern Democrat to Hayes' cabinet. When word of Schurz's own nomination began to circulate, the rumor spread that the Republican Senate would contest his appointment.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, Hayes' selection of William M. Evarts of New York as secretary of state rankled party Stalwarts. It mattered not that Evarts had proved his Republicanism by arguing for Hayes before the 1877 Electoral Commission, had served brilliantly as chief counsel for the United States in a successful prosecution of the *Alabama* claims at Geneva in 1872, and had prior cabinet service as attorney general in the closing months of Andrew Johnson's administration; he was *persona non grata* to Roscoe Conkling. Not only was Evarts generally disapproving of Stalwartism, he had also openly opposed Conkling's New York political machine. Senator Conkling hoped for a cabinet appointment himself or, absent that, the postmaster generalship for his factotum, Thomas C. Platt.<sup>18</sup> When Evarts' nomination was assured, Conkling, furious that he had not been consulted on the appointment of a New Yorker to the cabinet, pressed for Platt's selection, knowing that two places would not be given to one state.<sup>19</sup> Hayes, chosen over Conkling at the Republican national convention in 1876, now added insult to

16. Williams, *Life of Hayes*, 2:21.

17. Carl Schurz, *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz*, 3 vols. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1908), 3: 373–76.

18. H. J. Eckenrode, *Rutherford B. Hayes: Statesman of Reunion* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1930), 244; Hoogenboom *Rutherford B. Hayes*, 296.

19. *New York Tribune*, 5 March 1877.

injury by ignoring him on the appointment of a man from his own state. After this “inexcusable” slight, Conkling never spoke to Hayes again.<sup>20</sup>

Hayes’ treasury appointment generated the least objection among conservative Republicans, for the president chose from the old guard Senator John Sherman of Ohio. In nominating Sherman, however, Hayes provoked a few diehard reformers. Sherman, an acknowledged financial wizard who had served on the Senate Finance Committee, was too closely associated with the Republican machine to satisfy party liberals. But if Hayes had any political debts to pay, he owed a large one to Sherman who had worked hard for his nomination at Cincinnati and then as a visiting statesman in Louisiana during the disputed presidential count. At first, Sherman demurred over a cabinet position, being quite content to remain in the U.S. Senate where he had been since 1861. Finally, after Hayes made an especially urgent appeal on 19 February 1877, he decided to accept the nomination as secretary of the treasury.<sup>21</sup>

Now liberals objected. They saw Sherman’s appointment as a continuation of Grantism and a serious blow against reform. They criticized him for waffling on sound money and for his tendency to vote expediently to enhance his own political fortunes. Even his personal integrity was questioned.<sup>22</sup> Schurz tried to pressure Hayes into naming Bristow to the treasury instead, but the president-elect stood firm.<sup>23</sup> His commitment to Sherman proved as strong as any he had, including the naming of a Southerner to the cabinet.

Hayes also slighted Senate oligarch Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania. Cameron wanted the president to reappoint his son, J. Don, as secretary of war, a position he had held during the closing months of Grant’s second term. When Hayes refused, the elder Cameron became so angry with Hayes that he resigned his Senate seat,

20. Charles Richard Williams, ed., *Diary and Letters of Rutherford B. Hayes*, 4 vols. (Columbus: The Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1925), 4: 385. Evarts also had little love lost for Conkling. A distinguished English lawyer, while dining with Evarts, commented on Conkling’s superb oratory and suggested that he must indeed be among America’s leading jurists. Evarts snapped, “I never saw Mr. Conkling in court.” Chauncey Depew, *My Memories of Eighty Years* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1922), 103.

21. John Sherman, *Recollections of Forty Years in the House, Senate and Cabinet* (Chicago: The Werner Co., 1895), 461.

22. For example, see Burke A. Hinsdale to James A. Garfield, 28 February 1877, in *Garfield-Hinsdale Letters: Correspondence Between James A. Garfield and Burke Aaron Hinsdale*, ed. Mary L. Hinsdale (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1949), 364–65.

23. Schurz, *Reminiscences*, 374.



thereby clearing the way for the Pennsylvania legislature to name his son to the post in 1877. Hayes also refused the “sympathy” appointment of John A. Logan, the Illinois senator recently unseated by former Supreme Court Justice David Davis.<sup>24</sup> Instead, he chose George W. McCrary of Iowa for the war department. McCrary, opposed only by a small group of Western legislators who disapproved of his mining speculations, was innocuous enough so that his appointment upset only the Camerons.<sup>25</sup>

Of all of Hayes’ critics, James G. Blaine proved most vindictive. Despite his dislike of the president, Blaine initially appeared friendly, hoping for rewards by having his protégé, Maine Congressman William P. Frye, appointed as postmaster general. However, Hayes ignored Blaine’s wishes, believing that granting political favors was the wrong way to win friends and future support.<sup>26</sup> Undeterred, Blaine called on Congressman James A. Garfield and asked him to try to persuade his fellow Ohioan Hayes to go along with the request. However, Garfield was committed to a wait-and-see policy on the new administration and, as he later lamented, he had little influence on Hayes in his own requests for presidential favors.<sup>27</sup>

Not everyone sided with Hayes against Blaine. Senator George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts told Hayes that it seemed wise to allow the powerful Blaine to name a cabinet member because the fledgling administration could use his support.<sup>28</sup> Hayes rejected Hoar’s advice, having concluded that Blaine’s irksome persistence stemmed more from ego and petulance than from legitimate concern about the cabinet. Hayes earlier had made a conciliatory overture to Blaine by offering the attorney generalship to Maine’s Eugene Hale, and only after Hale declined did he bypass Blaine’s state. Any insult that Blaine purported to suffer was more the result of a personal pique than a geographical slight to Maine.<sup>29</sup> After Hayes failed to bow to Blaine, the *New York Times* noted that Blaine had

24. Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes*, 296, 302.

25. A. A. Sargent, Newton Booth, et al., to Rutherford B. Hayes, 6 March 1877, Rutherford B. Hayes Papers, Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center, Fremont, Ohio.

26. T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 80.

27. James A. Garfield, “Diary,” 4 March 1877, 15 December 1877, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., microfilm copy in Hayes Presidential Center.

28. George F. Hoar, *Autobiography of Seventy Years*, 2 vols. (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1903), 2: 8–9.

29. Williams, *Life of Hayes*, 2:22.

discovered that Hayes, and not he, had become president.<sup>30</sup> But Hayes could have nominated the uncontroversial Frye and appeased Blaine, who had enthusiastically campaigned for Hayes in 1876 while Conkling deliberately did nothing.

Hayes quickly learned how dangerous an angry Blaine could be. Only a day after Hayes' inauguration, Blaine opened an anti-Hayes campaign on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Without referring to his failed cabinet requests, the Maine senator raised the issue of Hayes' disputed claim to the presidency by linking the legality of the administration to the retention of the displaced carpetbag regime in Louisiana, where no one knew whether the Democrats or the Republicans had legitimately captured the governorship. Blaine argued that if Louisianans had honestly elected Hayes, so too had they rightfully chosen Republican gubernatorial candidate Stephen B. Packard over Democrat Francis T. Nicholls. If Packard's claim was not recognized and sustained, Hayes' title to his office was also illegitimate.<sup>31</sup> Ohio Democrat Allen G. Thurman countered Blaine by claiming that the outcome of the presidential election in Louisiana had no bearing on any other contest.<sup>32</sup> Thurman's argument blunted neither the direction nor the purpose of Blaine's attack. Disgruntled first by Hayes' success and his own defeat at Cincinnati and then by his failure to dictate a cabinet seat, Blaine early on declared war on the Hayes administration.<sup>33</sup>

Blaine continued his attack the next day when Hayes sent his cabinet nominations to the Senate for confirmation. Widespread newspaper speculation and rampant capital gossip had diminished much of the suspense over the president's choices, but an anxious air nonetheless surrounded the formal announcements because Hayes might surprise the senators with an unexpected nomination. At 2:15 on the afternoon of 7 March before a packed gallery, Hayes' private secretary William K. Rogers strode across the Senate floor and handed a sealed package containing the cabinet list to the vice president to be read.<sup>34</sup>

Evarts was offered first and Blaine, refusing to rubberstamp the appointment as the Senate had always done for earlier administrations, moved that the New Yorker's name be sent to the Committee on Foreign Relations for consideration.

30. *New York Times*, 10 March 1877.

31. *Congressional Record*, 45th Cong., special senate sess., 1877, Washington, D.C., Part 6: 15–16.

32. *Ibid.*, 16.

33. Williams, *Life of Hayes*, 2:16.

34. *New York Times*, 8 March 1877.

Conkling, irate because of the president's obvious independence, called for a similar committee action on Schurz's nomination. Under the leadership of these two Hayes opponents and with the concurrence of other senators, the remaining nominations were also referred to specific committees.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, the Senate openly rebelled against the new administration. Moving for a committee referral, Blaine and Conkling exercised their constitutional advice and consent powers, but never before had U.S. senators so broadly challenged a president's appointment powers. Certainly, the nominations of Schurz, Key, and Evarts were controversial, but the Blaine and Conkling-led insurrection proved unexpected.<sup>36</sup> The president could, of course, have anticipated the opposition of the Democrats and a few dissident Republicans, but so large an angry groundswell stunned him. With tradition and courtesy discarded, even John Sherman felt the mean sting of the august body he had just left. Hayes learned the cost of his independence. It took Blaine and Conkling only moments to show what would happen to a president seemingly determined to antagonize his own partisans by nominating so many cabinet officers offensive to them.<sup>37</sup>

Hayes refused to yield. He could have compromised, acceding to senatorial wishes on some of his appointments, but he had an advantage in the contest. He could wait until the Senate session adjourned, name his cabinet in the interim, and force the Senate to undo his accomplishment, a difficult task indeed. That proved unnecessary, however, because the president's senatorial foes had misjudged the tenor of the country. Newspaper editors, political and veteran's groups, literary lights James Russell Lowell, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Charles Eliot Norton, Harvard University President Charles W. Eliot, and the public at large rushed to support the president against the bullying Senate.<sup>38</sup>

35. *Journal of the Proceedings of the United States Senate*, 45th Cong., executive sess., special sess., 7 March 1877, 3–4; *New York Tribune*, 8 March 1877.

36. *New York Tribune*, 7 March 1877.

37. In October 1877, Hayes noted in his diary that his critics believed that only Sherman, Thompson, McCrary, and Attorney General Charles Devens were true Republicans. Evarts and Schurz were "disorganizers, doctrinaires, and Liberals" while Key was obviously a "Democrat." T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 100.

38. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 March 1877; *Chicago Tribune*, 8 and 10 March 1877; *National Republican*, 9 March 1877; James L. Marvin to Rutherford B. Hayes, 9 March 1877; Sanford Bell to Hayes, 9 March 1877; James Russell Lowell, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Charles Eliot Norton, and Charles W. Eliot to Hayes, 9 March 1877, all in Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center. Also J. B. Drake to Hayes, 9 March 1877; N. Summerbell to Hayes, 10 March 1877; C. M. Hawley to Hayes, 11 March 1877; W. W. Kimball to Hayes, 11 March 1877, all in Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center.

Unwilling to flout the popular onslaught, the Senate retreated and decided to confirm Hayes' nominees. Sherman became the first confirmed without committee approval. The others reported favorably out of committee. Indiana's Oliver Morton and California's Aaron Sargent called an immediate vote, resulting in the confirmation of all.<sup>39</sup> Conkling refused to support Evarts but instead of voting no merely abstained on the New Yorker.<sup>40</sup>

Hayes had passed his first test with flying colors and, heartened by his early success against the old régime, set out to treat the presidency as a moral stewardship. He showed this in a small way by his personal and public temperance (at the urging of his wife, "Lemonade Lucy," White House social functions ceased to serve liquor) and to a greater extent in his civil service reform program and his opposition to cheap money and to the racist-inspired exclusion of Chinese immigrants to the United States. He obviously linked morality and honest public service. When Hayes in 1878 vetoed the Bland-Allison Act, a measure that would have flooded the nation with millions of unneeded silver dollars, he did so because his conscience would not allow him to foist upon Americans cheap money and runaway inflation. The president's veto was overridden, but he believed that he had done his best to resist self-serving Western silver interests that cared nothing about the nation's fiscal welfare. In the matter of Chinese exclusion, Hayes vetoed an 1879 bill that would have unilaterally abrogated the Burlingame Treaty of 1868. Without the treaty there would be no free flow of people between the two countries, and Chinese immigrants would be denied the full protection of American law.<sup>41</sup> California legislators, alarmed by the growing numbers of Chinese on the west coast and pushing hard for restriction, disregarded the implications of a unilateral abrogation of a treaty. However, Hayes held the nation's diplomatic word sacrosanct, and it seemed unconscionable that Western congressmen acted so willingly to break an international pledge made in good faith. Westerners, angry because they felt that the president callously ignored the dangers of a "Mongol" invasion of the Pacific slope, called him "Missey Hayes" and even burned him in effigy. All that scarcely bothered the president because he believed that his critics had merely surrendered to their baser instincts, some of which he

39. *Senate Journal*, 45th Cong., special exec. sess., 10 March 1877, 9–13.

40. *New York Times*, 11 March 1877.

41. William M. Malloy, comp., *Treaties, Conventions, International Acts, Protocols and Agreements Between the United States of America and Other Powers, 1776–1909*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1910), 235–36.

privately shared.<sup>42</sup> Yet, on the veto, he grew certain that he was right and his opponents wrong.

Hayes was stubborn and consequently deserved some of the animus of those who did not share his opinions. But he grew accustomed to the abuse generated by his unpopular stands on cheap money and Chinese exclusion. “The best people,” he believed, recognized the wisdom of his course; he did not have to cater to a misguided public just to popularize his administration.<sup>43</sup> He felt the same about Republican Party chiefs. He knew his controversial approach to the office would cost him their support, but with less than a year left in his term he noted proudly that they no longer tried to dictate presidential policy.<sup>44</sup> Congressional oligarchs had believed that they could tell a supposedly weak president what to do and what not to do, but Hayes had disabused them of that notion.

Unfortunately, Hayes’ disputed election perpetually burdened him. Democrats were expected to dwell on the issue, but the president’s own partisans at times resurrected the cries of fraud when he refused to toe the party line. Conkling, for example, always referred to him as “His Fraudulency” and “Rutherfraud.”<sup>45</sup> However, his personal enemies were not the only ones to resurrect the controversial election when Hayes’ policies displeased them. Angry Republicans in the West excoriated Hayes as a fraud after the veto of the Chinese exclusion bill, and when he called the Bland-Allison bill “dishonest,” New York Democratic Congressman Samuel S. Cox snarled, “It was a charge of fraud by a fraud.”<sup>46</sup> After overriding Hayes’ silver veto, Joseph S. C. Blackburn told a reporter that the president was lucky that his objection had not been sustained because if it had, “the rafters and timbers of the White House would have toppled about him.”<sup>47</sup> Had Hayes’ claim to the presidency been unclouded, his detractors could never have been so disdainful. Samuel J. Randall had written *New York Sun* editor Charles A. Dana in 1877 that Hayes was a fraudulent president and “the American people should

42. Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *A History of the United States Since the Civil War*, 4 vols. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1931), 4: 288; T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 192. This entry is misdated 28 February 1879. Hayes did not veto the Chinese exclusion bill until 1 March 1879.

43. T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 123.

44. *Ibid.*, 286–87.

45. For example, see Hoogenboom *Rutherford B. Hayes*, 324.

46. *Washington Post*, 1 March 1878.

47. *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 1 March 1878.

not be allowed to forget that fact.”<sup>48</sup> Constantly bombarded with such screech, many Americans openly questioned the president’s legitimacy. However, despite incessant criticism and scarcely veiled threats such as Blackburn’s, Hayes, a publicly avowed one-term president, persevered and defended his office far more effectively than had many of his predecessors and most of his nineteenth-century successors.<sup>49</sup>

The animosity of many congressmen toward the president grew so commonplace that after a while it became almost predictable. Even so, the contest between these legislators and the executive escalated as Hayes headed into the middle of his term. In 1878, Montgomery Blair, scion of a storied Maryland political family and Abraham Lincoln’s first postmaster general, incensed over what he believed was a usurpation of the presidency, started a movement to undo the work of the 1877 Electoral Commission that had given Hayes the election. To Blair, the commission’s decision was an “act of public treason” that he never failed to rant about to anyone who would listen.<sup>50</sup> In January 1878, while a member of the Maryland state legislature, Blair began agitating for a reinvestigation of the disputed election. At his urging, the Maryland legislature passed a resolution calling for the U.S. Supreme Court to review the Electoral Commission’s decision with the

48. Samuel J. Randall to Charles A. Dana, 30 June 1877, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center. Although Randall never attacked Hayes with the vehemence of some members of the president’s own party, he nonetheless denounced the election of 1876 as “the presidential outrage.” Randall to John S. Cunningham, 3 July 1877, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center.

49. Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes*, 2. Historians have generally ignored Hayes’ presidential strength and influence, but this may well be attributed to their lack of information about him. In a 1968 presidential evaluation poll of 571 random members of the Organization of American Historians, respondents knew less about only John Tyler, Chester A. Arthur, Zachary Taylor, Benjamin Harrison, Millard Fillmore, and Franklin Pierce. Gary M. Maranell, “The Evaluation of Presidents: An Extension of the Schlesinger Polls,” *The Journal of American History* 57 (June 1970): 112. Historians who have made careful studies of the presidency, however, have been far more gracious toward Hayes. For example, Thomas A. Bailey in *Presidential Greatness: The Image and the Man From George Washington to the Present* (New York: Appleton-Century, 1966) contends that Hayes is not really appreciated and must be regarded as one of the strong presidents for reviving the prestige and influence of the office (297). Clinton Rossiter in *The American Presidency* (New York: New American Library, 1960) calls Hayes a “vastly underrated [p]resident” whose struggles against a snarling Congress have been overlooked. Although Rossiter does not classify Hayes with his presidential greats, namely, Washington, Lincoln, Wilson, Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, and Jefferson, he does feel that Hayes was at least the equal of Cleveland, Polk, Eisenhower, John Adams, and Andrew Johnson (105–06).

50. Montgomery Blair to Samuel M. Shaw, 29 September 1877; Blair to Samuel J. Tilden, 25 November 1877; Blair to E. A. Bennett, 22 April 1878; Blair to Charles A. Dana, 15 May 1878, all in Blair Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

expectation that the court would nullify the judgment and install Samuel Jones Tilden, Hayes' defeated Democratic foe, in the presidency.<sup>51</sup> Blair's action demonstrated that party affiliation alone had not generated the opposition to Hayes. Some were ready to challenge his very right to govern.

In April 1878, Thomas Swann of Maryland introduced Blair's resolution into the House of Representatives, hoping that the U.S. Congress might force the Supreme Court to move quickly on the matter. Democrats and Republicans alike immediately recognized the seriousness of Swann's proposal, not only for what it potentially portended for the sitting president but also for the destructive political forces it might unleash for years to come. Given that gravity, Swann's proposal reposed in the House Committee on the Judiciary, too incendiary for even the fiercest Hayes hater to move it ahead.

Swann's challenge might have died aborning had it not been for two related and almost simultaneous events. On 23 March 1878, Samuel B. McLin, a member of the Florida returning board that certified the state's ballots in 1876, signed an affidavit claiming that vote tampering had given the state and the election to Hayes.<sup>52</sup> On the heels of this revelation, James E. Anderson, an election supervisor in East Feliciana, one of Louisiana's largest parishes, signed his own affidavit attesting that the discarding of 2,100 Tilden votes had given Hayes his majority. Anderson also claimed that in West Feliciana, a Democratic majority of 700 votes had become a Republican majority of 500 with the knowledge of the parish's election supervisor.<sup>53</sup>

Armed with the startling Florida and Louisiana disclosures, New York Democrat Clarkson N. Potter introduced a resolution into the House of Representatives calling for an investigation of the claims. Republicans, antipathetic to Hayes but still concerned about the new peril to their party and perhaps to the government itself, simply refused to vote on the measure. The lack of a quorum blocked the Democrats, at least temporarily. Finally, on 17 May they mustered enough support to pass Potter's proposal 146 to 2 with 143 worried Republicans and wary Democrats not voting, likely because they recognized the

51. William E. Smith, *The Francis Preston Blair Family in Politics*, 2 vols. (New York: MacMillan Company, 1933), 2: 486.

52. *House Miscellaneous Document no. 31*, 45th Cong., 3d sess., vol. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1879), 100.

53. Harry Barnard, *Rutherford B. Hayes and His America* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1954), 465–66; *Atlanta Daily Constitution*, 4 June 1878.

revolutionary precedent of removing a president through a process other than impeachment.<sup>54</sup>

Hayes, already accustomed but not insensitive to cries of fraud, wondered if the inquiry to come might reverse the decision that had made him president. Clearly concerned, perhaps not so certain of Republican innocence in 1876 and eager to declare his own for posterity, he noted in his diary on 19 May 1878, "I neither knew nor suspected fraud on our side."<sup>55</sup> For the first time in his struggles with his numerous foes, his hands were tied; he could do nothing but let this latest attack proceed.

A commission of eleven, seven Democrats and four Republicans, chaired by Potter, began the investigation on 1 June 1878 in Washington. The first witness, East Feliciana election supervisor James E. Anderson, over the next several days testified that Hayes' secretary of the treasury, John Sherman, while one of the visiting statesmen in Louisiana, had encouraged Anderson to discard Tilden ballots supposedly extorted by Democratic intimidators in East Feliciana. In return, Sherman had assured Anderson that a victorious Hayes would control federal patronage and reward loyal Republicans.<sup>56</sup>

Anderson's initially stunning accusations, including some of similar vote tampering in West Feliciana, quickly proved false. In his own confusing testimony before the commission, Sherman at first said that he did not recall meeting Anderson but then admitted seeing him in New Orleans while Louisiana's vote was in doubt. Rather than denying that he promised Anderson a job in a Hayes administration, he testified that he did not "believe" he had.<sup>57</sup> His statement hardly supplied the firm denial that Hayes had hoped for and at least temporarily hurt the president by giving potential weight to Anderson's charges. Republican apologists later argued that Sherman's "wriggling" merely typified a man once and always a very cautious politician.<sup>58</sup> Very quickly, however, inconsistencies in Anderson's testimony and his reputation as a notorious barroom drunk stripped him of the last of a rapidly diminishing credibility.<sup>59</sup>

54. *Congressional Record*, 45th Cong., 2d sess., 1878, Washington, D.C., Part 7:3529.

55. T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 142.

56. *House Miscellaneous Document no. 31*, 45th Cong., 3d sess., vol. 1 (Washington, D.C., 1879), 1–10.

57. *Ibid.*, 16.

58. *The Nation* 27 (1 August 1878): 61.

59. *New York Herald*, 5 June 1878.



As most of the Potter Commission listened to the Louisiana testimony in Washington, a subcommittee traveled to Jacksonville, Florida to investigate Samuel B. McLin's charges. Testifying on 8 June 1878, McLin repeated his claim that Edward F. Noyes, one of the Republican visiting statesmen to Florida during the disputed count and now Hayes' minister to France, had assured him that a Republican administration in Washington would not forget its loyal supporters. Interpreting this as an invitation to throw Florida's votes to Hayes, McLin destroyed the returns from several precincts that had gone to Tilden. Rationalizing his misdeed, McLin said that he had tampered with the ballots because Florida Democrats had intimidated Republican voters, especially blacks, to such an extent that he had only righted an egregious wrong.<sup>60</sup> That Hayes had appointed McLin as associate justice of the New Mexico Territory shortly after the inauguration suggested that perhaps he had been rewarded for his "loyalty."

The refutation of McLin's allegations, however, came when Noyes arrived from France to testify in late June. He admitted that he had talked to McLin shortly after the 1876 election but had merely told him to do his job honestly and fairly. Noyes revealed that when Florida declared for Hayes, McLin complained to him that he and his family were no longer safe because white Redeemers constantly threatened Republican civil servants. Sympathetic, Noyes had, in a letter to Hayes' private secretary, recommended McLin for a job.<sup>61</sup> Hayes responded with the New Mexico judgeship, a temporary post. The appointment ended when the Senate refused to confirm McLin. He was let go after a few months and was bitter because of it.<sup>62</sup>

The revelation that McLin was just one more disappointed office seeker, coupled with Noyes' unquestionable probity, nullified the last of Hayes' prime accusers. Although an ordeal for the president, nothing came of the Potter investigation. Through it all, though, he remained composed despite the storm about him. He was buoyed, too, by the assurance that two of his bitterest enemies, Roscoe Conkling and Congressman Benjamin F. Butler, the Civil War's "Beast of New Orleans" and the ardent persecutor of Andrew Johnson, had instigated the

60. *House Misc. Doc. no. 31*, 2: 100–01, 99.

61. *Ibid.*, 497–98; Edward F. Noyes to William K. Rogers, 7 May 1877, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center.

62. *House Misc. Doc. no. 31*, 2: 117; Samuel B. McLin to William E. Chandler, 26 June 1877, Chandler Papers, Library of Congress.

inquiry.<sup>63</sup> Before Potter introduced his resolution in May, Conkling, Butler, and several Democrats had met at Butler's Washington home where Conkling claimed he had enough evidence of fraud in 1876 to send Hayes packing from the White House in ninety days. Potter, although reluctant, introduced a resolution calling for the reopening of the election question.<sup>64</sup> Relieved that Conkling's vindictiveness had prompted the investigation, Hayes ignored the matter. If he had retaliated with mud slinging of his own, the issue would have been viewed as just another personal duel, and he refused to dignify Conkling's slander by stooping to counterattack the spiteful New Yorker.<sup>65</sup> It was better to make no public comment about the assault on his legitimacy; the Potter investigation was merely one more reminder that the controversy over his election would never be laid to rest.

The Potter inquiry rallied the Republicans and hurt the Democrats. At the height of the investigation, an observant congressional clerk, George Bullock, discovered hundreds of coded telegrams linking Tilden's nephew, William T. Pelton, with an attempt to buy the votes of Florida and South Carolina in 1876. The "Cipher Dispatches," as the cryptic telegrams came to be known, embarrassed not only the Democratic Party but also Tilden, whose nephew conducted his nefarious business while living in his uncle's Gramercy Park mansion in New York. Tilden protested his innocence before the Potter Committee on 8 February 1879, but only the staunchest partisans believed him. One of Hayes' friends summarized it best as he wrote the president, "when [Tilden] called God to witness, I suspended my judgment til the witness should appear."<sup>66</sup> Hayes breathed more easily, too, when the House of Representatives in June 1878 passed two resolutions denying any congress or court the power to reverse the decision of the Forty-Fourth Congress that had given him the presidency.<sup>67</sup>

Hayes scarcely had time to relax because in early 1879 he faced the sternest challenge to his presidential power when he became embroiled in a congressional struggle that resurrected Civil War passions in legislative chambers. The contest began when Democrats in the Forty-Fifth and Forty-Sixth Congresses tried to

63. James Tanner to Rutherford B. Hayes, 25 July 1878, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center; T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 152.

64. C. R. Williams, *Diary*, 3:484.

65. Rutherford B. Hayes to James Tanner, 26 July 1878, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center.

66. William Johnson to Rutherford B. Hayes, 1 March 1879, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center.

67. Williams, *Life of Hayes*, 2:156 and 156n.

repeal old Radical Reconstruction measures calling for the presence of federal troops at polling places, supervision of elections by U.S. marshals and their deputies and test oaths for Southern jurors. To accomplish their goal, congressional Democrats attached repeal riders to appropriation bills for the army and the three branches of the government. Since the money bills could not pass without a concomitant acceptance of the riders, the Democrats thought they could force the president's approval through the need to meet federal payrolls.

Hayes demonstrated his distaste for the Democrats' plan and tactics in a series of vetoes. Between 19 April 1879 and 15 June 1880, he sent seven vetoes to Congress, each of them denouncing the Democrats' attempt to negate the president's constitutional role in the legislative process. The generally placid Hayes grew openly angry that the Democrats would shut down the government unless he complied with their demands. For the first time, Republicans supported the president *en masse* and none of his vetoes were overridden.

The Democrats' tactics appeared somewhat curious since Hayes' installation had ushered in a more conciliatory policy toward the Democratic Party and the South. Besides withdrawing federal troops from Louisiana and South Carolina, Hayes had named the Tennessean Key as postmaster general. Additionally, early in his administration, the president made a good will tour throughout the South, a gesture well-received by Southerners and liberal Republicans.<sup>68</sup> However, the president's conciliatory program had limits, as the riders struggle proved. Equally evident, Southerners and Democratic congressmen proved unwilling to continue in the role of repentant prodigals.

By 1879, after numerous reports of fraud in Southern elections, Hayes concluded that the federal statutes had to remain in force because the Democratic Party was still suspect. Understandably, his enthusiasm for reconciliation waned. Although he never mentioned the party by name, in his third rider veto he explained that massive fraud by New York state Democrats in 1868 proved what would happen if the party of secession continued unrestrained by the federal government. In that 1868 balloting, according to the findings of a congressional investigating committee, 25,000 fraudulent votes were cast in New York City alone. Hayes thought that this travesty justified the use of election supervisors in both the North and the South.<sup>69</sup> Also influenced by accounts, whether true or not, of Southern conspiracies to disfranchise black voters, Hayes felt that there existed

68. Hoogenboom, *Rutherford B. Hayes*, 317; Woodward, *Reunion and Reaction*, 228–29.

69. *Congressional Record*, 46th Cong., 1st sess., 1879, Washington, D.C., Part 9: 1710.

sufficient evidence to warrant the retention of the election laws.<sup>70</sup> Persistent Democratic use of the rider strategy as an instrument of repeal further illustrated to Hayes the need for a statutory restriction of a party bent on usurpation of the executive's constitutional powers.

Hayes' stand against the coercive riders demonstrated his tenacity. While the Democrats controlled both chambers, he withstood one of the fiercest congressional assaults that any president had ever faced. His iron stand won Republican support and admiration for the first time since he had become president. Even his arch enemies, Conkling and Blaine, closed ranks to back him in the struggle that dragged on until mid-June 1880.

The Republican national convention of 1880 and the ensuing presidential election brought Hayes' term to a gratifying close. His Stalwart and Half-Breed enemies, who came to Chicago ready to carry away the prize, found themselves rejected by their own party. Instead of turning to the Conkling-backed Grant or the dynamic Blaine, Republicans nominated James A. Garfield, the administration's most loyal congressional supporter. By choosing Garfield, the convention at least tacitly endorsed the administration that he had so ably defended and at the same time rejected its two foremost detractors. As *Harper's Weekly* noted, Garfield's victory in November not only vindicated the oft-reviled Hayes administration but also demonstrated that Americans did not want a change in course.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the abuse he had suffered, Hayes left office with the Republican Party more united than before he swore the presidential oath in 1877. Liberals, who had bolted the party in 1872 and run their own candidate, Horace Greeley, for president, remained suspicious of orthodox Republicanism in 1876. Hayes' impeccable conduct in office enticed them back into the ranks. With their confidence restored, no rift emerged in 1880. The same was true of Stalwarts and Half-Breeds. With little love lost between the leaders of the two factions, Conkling and Blaine, each group fought to control the party. The resulting internecine warfare had divided the Republicans. Hayes, by serving neither faction, alienated both. The sacrifice, however, proved worthwhile. Because Hayes was everybody's target, the divisions between Stalwarts and Half-Breeds, although never disappearing, blurred sufficiently to ease tensions that might have threatened the party's presidential chances in 1880.

70. T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 48, 170.

71. 12 March 1881, 25: 162. John Sherman was Hayes' first choice, but he was delighted by Garfield's nomination, saying that it was "altogether good" and that there was "much personal gratification in it." T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 278.

As Hayes prepared to leave office in 1881, he finally began to get his due. A minority of critics remained. Grant, for instance, refused to attend Garfield's inauguration because he did not fancy "hobknobing"[sic] with any members of the outgoing administration.<sup>72</sup> Another detractor, Robert G. Ingersoll, who immortalized James G. Blaine with his "Plumed Knight" sobriquet, was overheard to say at the inauguration ceremony, "this is the first time in my experience that I have ever seen rejoicing in Washington because an administration is going out."<sup>73</sup> However, a less jaundiced observer, Chauncey Depew, a New York railroad lawyer and a frequent Hayes critic, grudgingly acknowledged that Republicans owed the retiring president a great deal for their success in 1880.<sup>74</sup>

A similar sentiment flowed from the press, not all of which had originally approved of Hayes' controversial presidency. The *New York Herald*, however, declared that Hayes could retire with well-deserved dignity since any criticism of his administration was insignificant. If anything, he could have pushed harder for civil service reform.<sup>75</sup> E. L. Godkin, editorializing from the pages of *The Nation*, agreed but justified Hayes' minor shortcomings on the grounds that a reformer, like a clergyman, "cannot afford a single lapse from virtue. He has to be a reformer first, last and all the time."<sup>76</sup> That proved impossible, and Hayes should feel no shame because he had occasionally fallen from grace.

Whitelaw Reid, editor of the *New York Tribune*, who in early 1878 had worried about the president's Republicanism, wrote with especial graciousness about the retiring administration.<sup>77</sup> On Hayes' last day in office he commented, "No Republican has cause to bow his head for shame as he reviews the work of Hayes' administration."<sup>78</sup> In an aside clearly intended for the likes of Conkling and other Republicans who considered intimidation and chicanery as indispensable parts of their political repertoires, Reid praised the Hayes administration for

72. Ulysses S. Grant to John A. Logan, 28 February 1881, Logan Papers, Library of Congress.

73. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 4 March 1881.

74. Depew, *My Memories*, 102.

75. Williams, *Life of Hayes*, 2:14–15; *New York Herald*, 1 March 1881.

76. *The Nation* 32 (3 March 1881): 144.

77. In March Reid had written Hayes confidant William Henry Smith that Hayes had succumbed to the influence of the idealistic Carl Schurz, whose loyalties to the Republican party were always suspect. Whitelaw Reid to William Henry Smith, 7 March 1878, Hayes Papers, Hayes Presidential Center.

78. *New York Tribune*, 4 March 1881.

its “freedom from demagoguery and political trickery.”<sup>79</sup> Reid’s well known pro-Hayes sympathies inspired his panegyric. However, the less partisan *New York Times* placed an appropriate capstone on Hayes’ term when it observed, “It will be remembered as eminently respectable and on the whole distinguished for peace, prosperity and progress.”<sup>80</sup>

All the praise may have had a degree of truth, but other possible interpretations of Hayes’ presidency arose. The party unity of 1880 was short-lived. Republicans of various stripes quit their infighting only long enough to elect Garfield. Within weeks of the twentieth president’s inauguration, Garfield became embroiled in his own patronage dispute with Roscoe Conkling and enmired in a mess not of his own making, the Star Route mail scandal. His assassination (barely six months into his term) at the hands of deranged office-seeker Charles Guiteau demonstrated that the tranquility of 4 March 1881 was temporary.

Hayes also proved less than a devoted civil service reformer. Certainly he cleaned up Conkling’s New York custom house, but that was a spectacular battle intended to show his seriousness about reform. At other times he ignored similar civil service abuses elsewhere. Privately, Hayes deplored the forced political “contributions” (usually 2 percent of their salaries) that many federal employees had to make to keep their jobs, but when Carl Schurz urged him in 1876 to take a public stand against such assessments, he refused.<sup>81</sup> Of course, in an election year, Republicans, including Hayes, needed such money to conduct their campaigns.

Hayes, although personally honest, could be two-faced when dealing with others if politics dictated. For instance, when James G. Blaine fainted on the front steps of a Washington church shortly before the Republican national convention in June, Hayes wrote his rival, “I have just read with deepest emotions and sorrow the account of your illness. My eyes are almost blinded with tears as I write.” Blaine’s fainting spell, Hayes added, affected him as much as did Lincoln’s death.<sup>82</sup>

Evidently, Hayes’ grief had a short life because two days later he wrote an Ohio supporter that under no circumstances would he run for vice president on a ticket headed by a “man [Blaine] whose record as an upright public man is to be

79. Ibid.

80. Ibid., 2 March 1881.

81. Polakoff, *Politics of Inertia*, 136–39.

82. Ibid., 52–53.

in question—to be defended from the beginning to the end.”<sup>83</sup> Hayes would never have refused second place on a ticket with the Great Emancipator but wanted nothing to do with the Plumed Knight. His hyperbolic outpouring of sympathy to Blaine in June appeared at best insincere and at worst blatantly hypocritical.

To expect better from Hayes, however, would ask too much. He was, after all, human and consequently flawed, sometimes very much so. On balance, however, he proved a decent, even if an unspectacular man who came to the presidency under the darkest of clouds. No matter what he did in office, fully half the country and more found fault with it because of his disputed election. Perhaps the wisest thing he did was to declare from the beginning that he wanted a single term. He had enjoyed his six years as Ohio’s governor in the 1860s and mid-1870s and thought that the presidency might be much the same. He was mistaken. Halfway through his presidential term, he confided to his diary that he was “tired of this life of bondage, responsibility and toil” and “wish[ed] it were at an end.” With only two months left in office, he wrote, “[I] begin to long for home and freedom, more and more as the time draws nearer.”<sup>84</sup> Given his four stormy years in the White House, the presidency was understandably a burden, and he walked away from it gladly and without regret.

83. Quoted in *ibid.*, 56.

84. T. H. Williams, *Hayes Diary*, 227, 304.