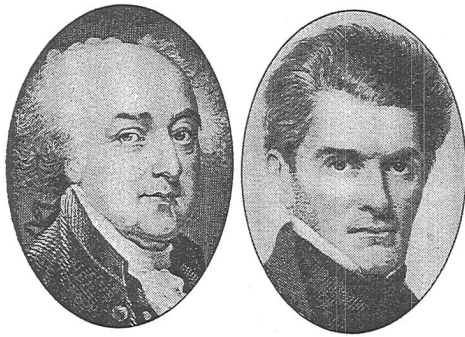


# The No. 2 Blues Is an Old Song

The current, barely concealed antagonism between President Nixon and Vice President Agnew is a reminder that the nation's top two officials seldom get along. That is not the way it was supposed to be. The founding fathers not only expected them to work closely in tandem, they worried about it. During the debates at the Constitutional Convention, Elbridge Gerry, who would become Vice President in 1813, complained: "The close intimacy that must subsist between the President and Vice President makes the relationship absolutely improper." To which Gouverneur Morris replied: "The Vice President then will be the first heir apparent that ever loved his father."

As it turned out, little love has been lost over the years. Only rarely have the two officials been the best of friends. Fairly typical was Thomas Jefferson's description of his No. 2 man, Aaron Burr: "A crooked gun or other per-



JOHN ADAMS & JOHN C. CALHOUN

verted instrument, whose aim or shot you could never be sure of." Or Hubert Humphrey's relations with his No. 1 man, Lyndon Johnson: "The only time I saw Johnson was when he ran out of people to chew on and raised hell with me."

The Vice President is usually picked because he differs from the President—ideologically, geographically, generationally. He may appeal to constituencies where the President is weakest; thus his behavior and outlook will be at variance with the President's. By its nature, the relationship encourages a rather intense rivalry. No President is likely to feel altogether comfortable with the man a heartbeat away from the job he usually covets; and only if the President dies does the Veep fulfill his real function. As John Adams acknowledged when he became Vice President: "I am nothing, but I may be everything." Some Presidents are truly surprised when they discover that their Veep has built up a political following of his own. "Think of it—Charley Fairbanks!" exclaimed Theodore Roosevelt on learning that his Vice President had a shot at the presidential nomination. "I never dreamt of such a thing!"

Originally, the Vice President was conceived as the second man most qualified to be President. John Adams, the first man to be elected to the office, filled that role. But he was also picked because he came from Massachusetts, while George Washington was a Virginian. Thus, even at the outset, the No. 2 man was selected at least partly to provide political balance for the No. 1. Washington did his best to get the job off to a good start by giving Adams many political responsibilities.

Cordiality, however, did not survive that first Administration. When Adams succeeded Washington, Thomas Jefferson, the leader of the opposition Republican Party, became Vice President. A split within the dominant Federalist Party caused Jefferson to come in second in the balloting for President in the Electoral College. Thus he was au-



PRESIDENT EISENHOWER & NIXON  
*Little love lost.*

tomatically named Vice President. This mixup could not be repeated after 1804 when the Twelfth Amendment was passed providing that the two offices had to be distinguished on the ballot.

Jefferson thought that the office should further his party's interests and, incidentally, his own. On Inauguration Eve, Adams asked his Vice President to go to revolutionary France to try to patch up relations with the U.S. Jefferson declined, partly on the grounds that he was not going to bail out a political opponent even if he happened to be President. From that point on, the two talked only when they had to.

Jefferson soon had his comeuppance. When he in turn stood for the highest office, Vice-Presidential Candidate Aaron Burr received an equal number of votes in the Electoral College, and the election was thrown into the House of Representatives. Burr eventually lost, but he continued to intrigue against the President until he killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. Indicted for mur-

der (though not convicted), he quickly lost his political influence.

When James Madison was inaugurated in 1809, his running mate, George Clinton, did not even show up. Nor was he much missed. Arriving in Washington several weeks later, he proceeded to attack most of Madison's policies. Equally disloyal was John C. Calhoun, the strident voice of the slave owners, who served under two Presidents. He managed to make life miserable for that indomitable Yankee John Quincy Adams by sabotaging his legislation in the Senate. But when he tried the same tactics with President Andrew Jackson, he was foiled. A classic encounter occurred at a Jefferson Day dinner when the President proposed a blunt toast: "To the Union—it must be preserved." His hand shaking, States-Righter Calhoun offered a limp rejoinder: "To the Union—next to our liberties most dear."

**Not Honorable.** President James A. Garfield and his running mate Chester A. Arthur quarreled over patronage to such an extent that the angry Vice President dashed off a letter to the *New York Herald*: "Garfield has not been



AARON BURR & THOMAS JEFFERSON

square nor honorable nor truthful. It's a hard thing to say of a President of the U.S., but it's only the truth." When Vice President James Sherman was requested by President William Howard Taft to stay in touch with the Speaker of the House, he responded: "I am the Vice President, and acting as a messenger boy is not part of the duties of the Vice President." Known as an "excellent average man," Vice President Thomas Marshall did not assume presidential responsibilities when Woodrow Wilson fell gravely ill. Instead, Wilson's wife Edith took over the Executive Branch, becoming, *de facto*, the first woman President. Shut off from the sickbed, consulted on nothing, Marshall took his usurpation gracefully. "I could throw this country into civil war," he confided, "but I won't."

Franklin Roosevelt did his best to get along with Vice President John Nance Garner, the former House Speaker who had broken the deadlock at the 1932 Democratic Convention and thrown the nomination to F.D.R. Initially helpful in getting New Deal legislation passed by Congress, Garner grew increasingly hostile to F.D.R.'s policies until the exasperated President

complained: "Jack is very much opposed to the spending program, tax program and relief program. He seems to be pretty much against everything."

President Eisenhower gave Richard Nixon more responsibility than any Vice President had shouldered before. Nixon ran party affairs, served as chief liaison with Congress, chaired Cabinet and National Security Council meetings in Ike's absence. But the relationship got off to a shaky start when it was revealed that a group of California businessmen had contributed to a secret fund to help defray Nixon's expenses. Ike visibly cooled toward his running mate until Nixon won overwhelming public support with his famed Checkers speech. Over the years the two did not often meet socially, and Eisenhower let slip a number of less than flattering remarks about his Veep. Asked what decisions Nixon was responsible for in the Administration, Ike replied: "If you give me a week, I might think of one. I don't remember."

**Bad Slip.** Not all No. 2 men have felt abused by their boss. Abraham Lincoln applied his "malice toward none, charity for all" even to Vice Presidents. The nation was scandalized when Vice President Andrew Johnson turned up drunk on Inauguration Day, 1865, and delivered an incoherent harangue that ran longer than the President's sober address. Said Lincoln: "I have known Andy Johnson for many years. He made a bad slip the other day, but you need not be scared. Andy ain't a drunkard."

One of the reasons for the perennial tension and animosity between the top two officials is the fact that the Vice President has so little to do. John Adams pronounced the post the "most insignificant office that ever the invention of man contrived or his imagination conceived." Ever since, political analysts have been trying to figure out how to improve it. Most of them echo the founding fathers' belief that he should be the man most qualified to take over the presidency. But how to achieve that in a job, as Political Scientist Clinton Rossiter once put it, "suspended in a constitutional limbo between executive and legislature, and in a political limbo between obscurity and glory?" A Vice Presidential Selection Commission of the Democratic Party is holding hearings in all 50 states to try to devise a more effective way of picking the second in command. Over the years, suggestions have varied from a separate primary or ballot for the Veep to abolishing the office altogether and letting an elder statesman be named as successor if the President dies. Former Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy has suggested stripping the Vice President of all routine political chores and treating him "much as a crown prince is treated in a monarchy. He should be trained in the arts of government." It would seem that just about everybody is agreed that the No. 2 man is not a fraction of what he should be, and the President treats him accordingly.