



---

The Kitchen Cabinet and Andrew Jackson's Advisory System

Author(s): Richard B. Latner

Source: *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 65, No. 2 (Sep., 1978), pp. 367-388

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of Organization of American Historians

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1894085>

Accessed: 14-12-2019 23:46 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



*Organization of American Historians, Oxford University Press* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of American History*

# *The Kitchen Cabinet and Andrew Jackson's Advisory System*

RICHARD B. LATNER

---

FEW subjects in Jacksonian politics have been more frequently mentioned and less carefully analyzed than Andrew Jackson's kitchen cabinet. The reason is not hard to find. Influence and power, difficult enough to measure in the present, are particularly resistant to historical investigation. Data concerning confidential relationships are spotty and the interviewing of participants is synonymous with necromancy. The shadowy nature of presidential advising thus promotes the growth of legends that obscure the reality of political influence.<sup>1</sup>

By tradition, historians claim that the label "kitchen cabinet" was first applied derogatorily by Jackson's opposition, to describe an informal group of advisers who maintained great influence over the President, particularly on matters of party and patronage. Claude G. Bowers, in his popular study of Jackson's presidency, called "the small but loyal and sleepless group of the Kitchen Cabinet . . . the first of America's great practical politicians."<sup>2</sup> Leonard White's standard administrative account of the Jacksonian period reinforced this conventional view; according to him, Jackson's interest in politics and personality, rather than in administration, naturally prompted the appearance of "a group of personal advisers, primarily concerned with patronage and party manipulation."<sup>3</sup> References to the kitchen cabinet generally imply that the members worked together closely, shared similar political objectives, especially the promotion of Martin Van Buren's political fortunes, and attained their greatest influence in the

Richard B. Latner is associate professor of history in Newcomb College, Tulane University. The author acknowledges a summer grant from the Graduate School, Tulane University.

<sup>1</sup> On the kitchen cabinet, see Richard P. Longaker, "Was Jackson's Kitchen Cabinet a Cabinet?" *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLIV (June 1957), 94-108.

<sup>2</sup> Claude G. Bowers, *The Party Battles of the Jackson Period* (Boston, 1922), 144.

<sup>3</sup> Leonard D. White, *The Jacksonians: A Study in Administrative History, 1829-1861* (New York, 1954), 94-95. See also Marquis James, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (Indianapolis, 1938), 498; John Spencer Bassett, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1931), 540.

first two years of Jackson's presidency, when the Eaton affair prevented Jackson from calling upon his regular cabinet officers for counsel.<sup>4</sup>

This portrait of a tightly knit group of aides specializing in political manipulation, wire-working, and patronage, however, has not gone unchallenged. Twenty years ago, Richard P. Longaker subjected the "legend" of the kitchen cabinet to close scrutiny and raised serious objections to traditional accounts. Longaker denied that the kitchen cabinet was "an institutional entity," and argued instead that the term simply described an "amorphous advisory pattern," a "procedure, the random choice of a variety of advisers rather than a specific, organized body of men." To Longaker, the large number of alleged members (some of whom were also cabinet officers), as well as a lack of evidence of regular meetings, distinguished the kitchen cabinet from an authentic institution, such as the regular cabinet. "[T]here was no hierarchy of advisers, just as there was no institutionalized entity—a Kitchen Cabinet—meeting regularly with a firmly established membership," he concluded. "The evidence suggests that decisions were made by the President in a haphazard manner with the assistance of those who had his ear at a particular time and who could, in turn, convince him of the wisdom of their position. . . . a Kitchen Cabinet as a stable and regularized institution, did not exist." Longaker hoped to demonstrate that Jackson maintained a firm control over policy making during his presidency, and he found the idea of a kitchen cabinet incompatible with presidential leadership.<sup>5</sup>

Longaker's distinction between an informal advisory pattern and a regularized, institutional structure such as the cabinet has been echoed by other historians and political scientists.<sup>6</sup> But the concept of a kitchen cabinet as something more than a casual "procedure" or a legendary figment of the opposition's imagination persists. Lynn L. Marshall, for example, has recently suggested that Jackson's kitchen cabinet served as an early version of a national political committee, performing a variety of important non-cabinet functions, especially the construction of an efficient, extensive, and deeply rooted political party.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun* (3 vols., Indianapolis, 1944–1951), II, 25, 108; Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, 540; J. T. Adams and R. V. Coleman, eds., *Dictionary of American History* (5 vols., New York, 1940), III, 213; Richard B. Morris, ed., *Encyclopedia of American History* (New York, 1953), 163.

<sup>5</sup> Longaker, "Jackson's Kitchen Cabinet," 97, 100, 101, 107–08.

<sup>6</sup> Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *The Jacksonian Era: 1828–1848* (New York, 1959), 34; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson* (New York, 1966), 110; Louis W. Koenig, *The Invisible Presidency* (New York, 1950), 40.

<sup>7</sup> Lynn L. Marshall, "The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," *American Historical Review*, LXXII (Jan. 1967), 450–51.

Although White House advising during Jackson's presidency remains obscure, traditional historical methods can combine with selective conceptual borrowings from social sciences to help illuminate the advisory process. Since insight into presidential decision making is essential to a full understanding of presidential style and national politics, there is sufficient inducement to hazard an attempt.

The notion that Jackson would fall under the influence of a group of aides was widespread at the time of his election. Old Hickory was then sixty-two years old, in precarious health, and inexperienced in national politics. Indeed, John Quincy Adams and his supporters had made Jackson's lack of qualifications one of the major issues of their campaign, and Van Buren later recalled that many of Jackson's own supporters had latent misgivings "of his unfitness for the place." Such suspicions were doubtless responsible for the advice proffered by politicians like Van Buren that Jackson avoid controversial issues. "Our people do not like to see publications from candidates," he blandly explained.<sup>8</sup> While Jackson was by no means a passive spectator during the contest, his campaign was managed largely by a network of local, state, and national committees. Overseeing this rudimentary organization were the Washington central committee of twenty-four, which distributed election material printed at the center of government, and, especially, the Nashville central committee, which consisted of Jackson's closest personal friends and advisers, including John Overton, William B. Lewis, and John Eaton.<sup>9</sup>

The assumption that the newly elected President was impressionable had immediate political consequences. For one thing, it intensified the rivalry between the followers of Van Buren and John C. Calhoun for access to Jackson. The importance of being close by when the President reeled under the pressures of office or when his inexperience threw him into the hands of more skilled politicians seemed obvious. Members of the two factions eyed each other jealously, estimated their relative

<sup>8</sup> Robert V. Remini, *The Election of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1963), 192; John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1955), 64–68; Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, 396–97, 703; Martin Van Buren, *The Autobiography of Martin Van Buren*, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1918* (2 vols., Washington, 1920), II, 232, 244; Martin Van Buren to Andrew Jackson, Sept. 14, 1827, Martin Van Buren Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

<sup>9</sup> For a full discussion of the Jackson organization in 1828, see Remini, *Election of Jackson*, 51–120; James C. Curtis, *Andrew Jackson and the Search for Vindication* (Boston, 1976), 85–90.

strength, and, in the words of one Calhounite, vied for “the controlling influence in the Cabinet.”<sup>10</sup>

The President’s alleged vulnerability also helped to provoke the Eaton affair. When Jackson first arrived in Washington, he consulted primarily with his longtime Tennessee associates, Eaton, Lewis, and Senator Hugh Lawson White, but when he appointed Eaton as his secretary of war in order to “have near him a personal and confidential friend to whom he could embosom himself on all subjects,” the selection stirred considerable opposition.<sup>11</sup>

Historians are familiar with the story of Washington society’s snub of Eaton’s wife, the outspoken and allegedly wayward daughter of a local tavern keeper. While acknowledging the incident’s social dimensions, they have correctly emphasized its political source, particularly the fear of Calhounites that Eaton was using his influence to further Van Buren’s presidential aspirations. Less well-known is the participation by anti-tariff radicals and opponents of Van Buren who had no formal ties with Calhoun.

Both Eaton and Van Buren were popularly associated with the recently enacted tariff of 1828, and in the South, where the tariff was regarded as an abomination, their activity in sponsoring, promoting, and voting for the bill was duly noted. Consequently, to anti-tariff radicals, Eaton’s special relationship with Jackson and his apparent partiality for Van Buren’s political interests were doubly disturbing. Eaton’s presumed influence implied that Jackson would do nothing to bring about immediate tariff reform, while his attachment to Van Buren augured ill for future relief. The Eaton affair, then, was inspired by many considerations, but much of its energy derived from the suspicion that Jackson was a political novice, overly reliant on the advice of others, especially his Tennessee cronies. Eaton’s enemies hoped to remove this influence by compelling him to resign.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Duff Green to John Pope, Dec. 11, 1828, Duff Green Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Jonathan Degraff to Azariah Flagg, Dec. 21, 1828, Azariah Flagg Papers (New York Public Library); Alfred Balch to Van Buren, Nov. 27, 1828, Van Buren Papers; *U.S. Telegraph*, Jan. 20, 1829; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, XXXV (Nov. 22, 1828), 194.

<sup>11</sup> Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, 410; James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson* (3 vols., New York, 1883), III, 176; Charles Sellers, *James K. Polk: Jacksonian, 1795–1843* (Princeton, 1957), 137–42; Amos Kendall to Francis Blair, March 7, 1829, Blair-Lee Papers (Princeton University Library); “Letters of William T. Barry,” *William and Mary College Quarterly*, XIII (April 1905), 239.

<sup>12</sup> For the association of John Eaton and Van Buren with the Tariff of Abominations, see Robert Y. Hayne to Levi Woodbury, July 10, 1828, Levi Woodbury Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Richard K. Crallé, ed., *Works of John C. Calhoun* (6 vols., New York, 1854–1857), III, 50, 52–53; Green to John C. Calhoun, Aug. 1, 1830, Duff Green Papers (University of North Carolina); *U.S. Telegraph*, March 18, Aug. 23, 1831. See also Richard B. Latner, “The Eaton Affair Reconsidered,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XXXVI (Fall 1977), 330–51.

Until the winter of 1830–1831, the allegations of backstairs influence remained a distinctly minor theme in national politics. To be sure, opposition presses blamed the President's proscription and appointment policies on his inexperience and the advice of "bad counsellors" who made him "instrumental in gratifying their petty malignity, instead of consulting his true glory."<sup>13</sup> But in February 1831 Calhoun's publication of his correspondence with Jackson, concerning the Seminole invasion, first brought the issue before the public in full force. Calhoun directed his attack, not against Jackson, but against William Harris Crawford and Crawford's followers, now led by Van Buren. In an obvious reference to Van Buren, Calhoun labeled the affair "a base political intrigue, got up by those who regard your [Jackson's] reputation and the public interest much less than their own personal advancement."<sup>14</sup>

Calhoun's theme was immediately broadcast by Duff Green's *U.S. Telegraph*, a paper that had served as the Jackson administration's official organ until Green's partiality for Calhoun led to its replacement in December 1830 by Francis Blair's *Washington Globe*. Green referred to the alienation of Jackson from Calhoun as the product of a "conspiracy" inspired by Van Buren to serve his own political interests, and he accused the *Globe* of being "the organ of the plotters and contrivers of this affair, and not of the President." Green's editorials portrayed the projected downfall of Calhoun as a plot to advance Van Buren by undermining his major rival. At the same time, Green tried to distinguish the contrivers of the conspiracy from Jackson himself. He announced that he supported Calhoun, "not against Gen. Jackson, but against the conspirators," and he endorsed Jackson's reelection "as the surest means of defeating" Van Buren. He continued to hope that "the voice of truth" could be made to reach the President, and that Jackson would "soon see and understand the artifices which have been practised upon him. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

Although one historian has claimed that as early as March 1831, the term kitchen cabinet was applied to the "plotters" against Calhoun, the *Telegraph* never used that term.<sup>16</sup> Instead it tagged the conspirators with such labels as "Amos Kendall & Co.," and "Amos Kendall, Martin Van Buren, William B. Lewis, & Co." In accusing pro-Jackson

<sup>13</sup> *National Intelligencer*, May 13, March 26, 1829.

<sup>14</sup> *Niles' Weekly Register*, XL (March 5, 1831), 18.

<sup>15</sup> *U.S. Telegraph*, Feb. 26, 28, March 18, 1831. See also *ibid.*, March 14, 17, 1831.

<sup>16</sup> Marshall, "Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," 450n. A check of the editorials cited by Lynn Marshall reveals that the idea of a kitchen cabinet but not the phrase itself appeared in Green's newspaper.

newspapers of taking “their ORDERS” from Washington, for example, Green identified the culprits as “Mr. Van Buren, Major Lewis, and Mr. Kendall,” calling them “secret agents” who directed the attack against Calhoun.<sup>17</sup>

Jackson’s cabinet reorganization of April 1831, involving the dismissal of three secretaries who had participated in the rebuff of the Eatons, further embellished the picture of a White House where advisers manipulated the President. Former Secretary of the Navy John Branch, an anti-tariff radical and opponent of Van Buren, was the first of the dismissed cabinet members to charge that his downfall was due to “malign influences” promoting Van Buren’s ambitions; he complained bitterly that Van Buren “had become latterly the almost sole confidant and adviser” of Jackson. “How he obtained this influence might be a subject of curious and entertaining inquiry,” he darkly suggested. Green quickly seized upon the phrase “malign influence” as a suitable one for Van Buren and his allies, and claimed that this “irresponsible ‘malign influence’” had brought disillusionment to many of Jackson’s supporters. “That that influence does exist is corroborated by the positive assertion of Gov. Branch, and the unerring testimony of admitted facts,” Green contended. “That influence yet surrounds the President. It is beneath, but it controls the cabinet. It has dismissed able and faithful public ministers; it has corrupted a portion of the public press. . . .”<sup>18</sup>

Even after the cabinet reorganization, Green tried to distinguish between Jackson and his evil counselors, hoping for a reconciliation between the President and Calhoun. “There are many reasons . . . which dispose us to separate the President, himself, as much as possible from the intrigues passing around him,” Green explained to his readers; one reason was the plan of “Van Buren, Kendall, & Co.” to organize “a great *northern* confederacy upon . . . the high tariff policy.” Van Buren, he claimed, had established the *Globe* “to drive the South, and particularly the friends of Mr. Calhoun, into a position where they could not, consistently with a due regard to their own honor . . . support the re-election of Gen. Jackson.” The editor complained of efforts to brand him as disloyal to Jackson and denied that he was engaged in a war against the President. “Have we not endeavored to separate him from

<sup>17</sup> *U.S. Telegraph*, March 25, 1831. See also *ibid.*, March 21, 22, April 13, 14, 1831.

<sup>18</sup> John Branch to Alex. W. Mebane, Geo. B. Outlaw, &c., Aug. 20, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register*, XLI (Sept. 17, 1831), 38; Branch to Edmund B. Freeman, Aug. 22, 1831, *Washington Globe*, Aug. 31, 1831; Branch to Outlaw, Robt. C. Watson, &c., May 31, 1831, *Niles' Weekly Register*, XL (June 11, 1831), 253; *U.S. Telegraph*, June 2, 1831.

Eaton, Kendall, Lewis, Van Buren, & Co.?’’ he asked. ‘‘When these men have retreated behind him we have labored to pull them from their hiding place, and by separating him from them, leave him his character, his public services, and his popularity, for himself and his country.’’<sup>19</sup> Gradually, however, Green was compelled to accept as permanent the schism between Jackson and Calhoun. By the close of 1831, he conceded the impossibility of a reconciliation between the two men. ‘‘It is now too late,’’ he announced publicly in the *Telegraph*.<sup>20</sup>

The concept of a kitchen cabinet, then, was largely the work of alienated Jacksonians, particularly of Calhounites like Green. As portrayed in the *Telegraph*, the President was under the influence of a group of schemers, commanded by ‘‘the Kinderhook intriguer,’’ Van Buren, who served the New Yorker’s political interests. Van Buren’s faction had provoked conflict with Calhoun, established the *Globe*, undercut the *Telegraph*, organized a national convention to nominate Van Buren as Jackson’s running mate, and planned to leave the party in Van Buren’s hands after Jackson’s retirement. ‘‘Gen. Jackson is the nominal head, while Mr. Van Buren is the real head of the party,’’ Green declared after Van Buren’s nomination at the Democratic party’s Baltimore convention. ‘‘This party is under the effectual control of Kendall, Lewis, & Co., who are charged with the conscience of Gen. Jackson, and who control the affiliated presses through their organ and by their correspondence from this place,’’ he continued. In many respects, Green pictured the President’s advisers as a branch of Van Buren’s Albany Regency: ‘‘there is a regular regency established at this place, consisting of Lewis, Kendall, and several less prominent officers of the Government,’’ he asserted.<sup>21</sup>

The idea of a controlling influence in the White House received extensive circulation after the tumultuous cabinet upheaval in the spring of 1831. Henry Clay’s official organ, the *National Intelligencer*, borrowed Green’s label ‘‘Amos Kendall & Co.’’ for the ‘‘ruling party,’’ while leading Jacksonians reported ‘‘rumours . . . of the President’s being under the influence of certain persons who abuse & have his ear.’’ Alfred Balch, one-time member of the Nashville central committee, suggested to Jackson that if he wanted to scotch reports of a power behind the throne greater than the throne itself, then Lewis

<sup>19</sup> *U.S. Telegraph*, July 11, Oct. 6, 1831.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, Dec. 12, 1831. See also Green to Carter Beverly, July 8, 1831, Green Papers, University of North Carolina.

<sup>21</sup> *U.S. Telegraph*, April 27, May 29, April 11, 1832.



should move out of the White House and Kendall "should attend only to the duties of his office & let you wholly alone."<sup>22</sup>

Jackson, of course, vigorously denied such allegations. "In regard . . . to these complaints and others of a similar character founded on a pretended distrust of *influences* near or around me, I can only say that they spring from . . . [a] false view of my character," he wrote to one worried correspondent. And the *Globe* repudiated insinuations of Jackson's enfeeblement. "The President is, as the nation knows, amidst the able and accomplished counsellors who now surround him, what he was among the aids with whom he acted on the plains of New Orleans. He is, himself, the presiding genius that conducts the administration and directs the destiny of the Republic," Blair wrote reassuringly.<sup>23</sup>

Administration disclaimers proved futile, and references to "Amos Kendall & Co." or the "malign influence" continued unabated. By the spring of 1832, the concept of a kitchen cabinet was firmly established in the political dialogue of the day. The phrase itself, however, had not yet entered the public domain. Admittedly, one finds it mentioned on a few occasions in private correspondence. As early as the summer of 1831, for example, Blair assured his sister-in-law of the President's independence of both "the *kitchen* . . . [and] *parlor* cabinets." And a few months later, Nicholas Biddle, upon receiving an informant's opinion that "Blair, Lewis, Kendall & Co. . . . still rule the Chief Magistrate," acknowledged this "very melancholy" news, which confirmed his fear that "the kitchen . . . predominate[s] over the Parlor."<sup>24</sup> But the first public use of the phrase came in an editorial by Senator George Poindexter of Mississippi, which appeared in the *Telegraph* of March 27, 1832.

Poindexter, a Virginia-born, self-made man, had achieved meteoric success in Mississippi politics after arriving in Natchez in 1802 with neither friends nor resources. He had served both the territorial and state governments in prominent positions, and, in the summer of 1830, he capped his impressive accomplishments by filling a senate seat

<sup>22</sup> *National Intelligencer*, May 19, 1831; Thomas Ritchie to Van Buren, April 20, 21, 1831, Van Buren Papers; Balch to Jackson, July 21, 1831, Andrew Jackson Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

<sup>23</sup> John Spencer Bassett, ed., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson* (7 vols., Washington, 1926-1935), IV, 372; *Washington Globe*, Sept. 9, 1831.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas H. Clay, "Two Years with Old Hickory," *Atlantic Monthly*, LX (Aug. 1887), 198; Robert M. Gibbes to Nicholas Biddle, Dec. 11, 1831, Nicholas Biddle Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress). See also J. S. Barbour to James Barbour, March 25, 1832, James Barbour Papers (New York Public Library).

vacated by the sudden death of the incumbent.<sup>25</sup> Poindexter was, by reputation, a man of extraordinary abilities and talents. He was also, by reputation, a man of singular moral laxity. It was alleged that he had, among other things, killed an opponent in a duel by firing prematurely, fled ignobly from the battle of New Orleans, falsely accused his first wife of infidelity when divorcing her, disinherited their son, and given himself up to drinking, gambling, and general dissipation. The famous Methodist leader, William Winans, remarked that Poindexter “would have been . . . one of the greatest men I ever knew, had moral principles exercised control over his actions. But of this, I considered him *utterly* destitute. . . . Moral corruption and great talents rendered him a very dangerous man in Society. . . .” Van Buren recalled the “remarkably sinister expression of his countenance” at their first interview—the Mississippian was said to look a great deal like Clay—and noted that reports on the senator’s character differed “only in the degree of odium that was heaped upon it. . . .” Poindexter was one of the very few people with whom Van Buren could not establish friendly social relations, and at one time, as president of the Senate, he so feared Poindexter’s enmity that he carried a pair of loaded pistols.<sup>26</sup>

Politically, Poindexter had been a late arrival in the Jackson camp, having initially supported Adams’ administration. By 1828 he had moved into the Jackson ranks, but Jackson remained uncertain of his loyalty, and, when the new senator arrived in Washington in December 1830, the President predicted that it was only a matter of time before Poindexter went into open opposition.<sup>27</sup>

The prediction was accurate, but Poindexter did not desert the Democrats for Clay, Adams, or economic nationalism. Instead, he revealed himself to be an enthusiast for southern rights, an anti-tariff zealot, a friend of Calhoun and nullification, and a bitter foe of Van Buren. Although Poindexter first chose to fight Jackson over matters of patronage in Mississippi, these broader issues dictated his alienation from the President.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Biographical material on George Poindexter is found in Edwin Arthur Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi* (Chapel Hill, 1960), 44–45; and Allen Johnson and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (21 vols., New York, 1943), XV, 29–30.

<sup>26</sup> P. L. Rainwater, ed., “Notes on Southern Personalities,” *Journal of Southern History*, IV (May 1938), 226; Van Buren, *Autobiography*, II, 755, 761–62.

<sup>27</sup> Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi*, 46; Van Buren, *Autobiography*, II, 755.

<sup>28</sup> Miles, *Jacksonian Democracy in Mississippi*, 61–68. For Poindexter’s patronage battles with Jackson, see Edwin A. Miles, “Andrew Jackson and Senator George Poindexter,” *Journal of Southern History*, XXIV (Feb. 1958), 51–66.

In the spring of 1831, after Calhoun's publication of the Seminole correspondence, Poindexter privately complained that Jackson was "surrounded by a few favorites who controlled and directed all things," and that the President's policies were undermining the South and its "Virginia principles." His criticism of the administration thereafter became more frequent and venomous, and he participated conspicuously in the Senate's rejection of Van Buren's appointment as minister to England. He justified his vote in part by reminding his constituents that Van Buren was the man who had "fixed on them the tariff of 1828."<sup>29</sup>

Poindexter's break with the Jackson administration was therefore complete when in mid-March 1832, the *Telegraph* published a vitriolic attack on the *Globe*. It accused the *Globe* of employing a "trained band of letter writers, who lounge about the public offices, and live on the bounty of the government," to slander Poindexter and others for voting against Van Buren's confirmation. The *Globe* then accused Poindexter of writing the editorial and denounced him for engaging in personal and political warfare against the President. It was in the *Telegraph*'s response to Blair that the expression kitchen cabinet first appeared. "The President's press, edited under his own eye, by 'a pair of deserters from the Clay party,' and a few others, familiarly known by the appellation of the 'Kitchen Cabinet,' is made the common reservoir of all the petty slanders which find a place in the most degraded prints in the Union, on the majority of the Senate of the United States, and particular members of that body," the paper charged. It did not deny the *Globe*'s allegation that Poindexter was the author of recent editorials defending his vote against Van Buren and other presidential appointments.<sup>30</sup>

The novelty of the public use of the expression kitchen cabinet was immediately seized upon by Blair, who again charged Poindexter with attacking the President for being under the influence of a "*Kitchen Cabinet*." Making obvious reference to Poindexter's unsavory reputation, Blair continued: "This last elegant specimen of the honorable Senator's talent in giving names, might claim the merit of great originality, if certain anecdotes of his habits of life, did not give assurance that he borrowed the idea from scenes and associations quite familiar to him."<sup>31</sup> Blair identified Poindexter as the originator of the

<sup>29</sup> Charles H. Ambler, ed., *The Life and Diary of John Floyd: Governor of Virginia, an Apostle of Secession, and the Father of the Oregon Country* (Richmond, Va., 1918), 129–30; *Niles' Weekly Register*, XLI (Nov. 19, 1831), 222; *U.S. Telegraph*, April 21, 1832; *Washington Globe*, April 24, 1832.

<sup>30</sup> *U.S. Telegraph*, March 17, 27, 1832; *Washington Globe*, March 24, 1832.

<sup>31</sup> *Washington Globe*, March 29, 1832.

phrase on other occasions as well. In the fall of 1832, responding to opposition charges of irresponsible influences in the White House, the *Globe* asserted that such criticism gave "countenance to Poindexter's imputation of backstairs influence, which that *honest Elevé*, from one of the Old Dominion's sooty quarters, calls the kitchen cabinet." Blair claimed that it had been "those dark scenes" of Poindexter's private life, "which first suggested to . . . [him] the cant phrase of Kitchen Cabinet, as bringing up all that he remembered as most disgusting in his own course of life, to begrim [*sic*] the characters of those, whom his malice prompted him to degrade." Blair's attribution of responsibility to Poindexter was never denied.<sup>32</sup>

Since the expression had been used occasionally in private correspondence earlier than March 1832, it is apparent that Poindexter gave widespread circulation to an already extant phrase. But the importance of his contribution to the political lexicon was evident as the term began to appear more and more frequently in opposition newspapers, inspired, it would seem, by the heated presidential campaign of 1832 and by rumors of further actions against the Bank of the United States. By the summer of 1833, the *Globe* was bemoaning a state of affairs where "Nothing is thought of or talked of, but the 'Kitchen Cabinet' and the public deposits, stock-jobbers and malignant partisans, the solvency of the Bank and the Bankruptcy of the Treasury." By no means did the new phrase replace other labels, and references to the "IMPROPER" cabinet and to "Kendall and Co." continued. But after the spring of 1832, the cry of kitchen cabinet became part of the Jacksonian opposition's stock in trade.<sup>33</sup>

A description of the origin of the political expression "kitchen cabinet" says little, of course, about the reality that prompted its use. Were the estranged Jackson men like Green, Branch, and Poindexter, who did so much to popularize the idea, accurately portraying White

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, Sept. 8, 1832, Nov. 29, 1833.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, Aug. 9, 1833; *U.S. Telegraph*, Sept. 29, Oct. 6, 11, 15, 16, Nov. 1, 1832. The *National Intelligencer* first used the phrase on January 10, 1833, and acknowledged that it had appeared earlier in another press. See *National Intelligencer*, Jan. 10, Oct. 2, 1833. The only newspaper reference to the kitchen cabinet that this author has come across, which was written before Poindexter's essay in the *U.S. Telegraph* of March 27, 1832, appears in the *Charleston Courier*. On March 27, 1832, the *Courier* quoted an editorial referring to "the 'kitchen' influence" that had previously appeared in another newspaper. See *Charleston Courier*, March 27, 1832. The contention here, however, is not that the term was never used prior to Poindexter's editorial, but that he was responsible for making it prominent. For the continued use of other expressions in describing backstairs influences, see *National Intelligencer*, June 16, 1832, Jan. 4, 1833; *U.S. Telegraph*, Nov. 20, Dec. 27, 1832.

House politics? For the most part, Jacksonian editors, led by the *Globe*, denied the existence of a kitchen cabinet; only rarely did a Democratic journal affirm its authenticity.<sup>34</sup> But Democratic disclaimers were as self-serving as the opposition's contentions. It is therefore necessary to examine more closely Jackson's advisory system, not only better to comprehend the nature of the kitchen cabinet, but, more significantly, the centrality of Jackson to his own administration.

As depicted by the opposition, the kitchen cabinet did not exist. Scholars like Longaker are correct in repudiating the idea of an advisory group with a firm membership, a hierarchical structure, and set meetings. In terms of self-identification, rules of procedure, group interdependence, cohesiveness, and other attributes of an institution, the kitchen cabinet must be distinguished from the regular cabinet.<sup>35</sup> But such qualifications by no means rule out the existence of an entity that could be called a kitchen cabinet. Even the cabinet, an institution for Presidents to use (or not use) as they see fit, often fails to meet the rigid criteria for an institution.<sup>36</sup>

Rather than compare the kitchen cabinet with the regular cabinet, it would be more useful to conceptualize it as an early prototype of the President's White House staff, a group of personal aides providing the President with a variety of services. The staff includes policy advisers, lobbyists, liaison people, publicity experts, speech writers, and friends. Members are chosen to serve the President's needs and to talk his language. They share his perspective in overseeing the general direction of his administration, instead of the more limited perspective of department heads.<sup>37</sup> Some Presidents, like Dwight D. Eisenhower, have adopted a pyramidal advisory structure emphasizing order, efficiency, and specialization; others, like Franklin D. Roosevelt, have adopted a highly competitive organization of delegated responsibility and overlapping authority resembling a circle with the President at the center, surrounded by generalists used for specific assignments. Some have organized variants between these two models.<sup>38</sup> Certain White

<sup>34</sup> Washington *Globe*, Nov. 29, 1833, July 14, 1834; *National Intelligencer*, April 20, 1833, quoting the *Pennsylvanian*.

<sup>35</sup> Longaker, "Jackson's Kitchen Cabinet," 100; Richard F. Fenno, Jr., *The President's Cabinet: An Analysis in the Period from Wilson to Eisenhower* (Cambridge, 1959), 4–5.

<sup>36</sup> Fenno, *The President's Cabinet*, 5; Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency* (Washington, 1976), 206.

<sup>37</sup> Lester G. Seligman, "Presidential Leadership: The Inner Circle and Institutionalization," *Journal of Politics*, 18 (Aug. 1956), 413; Theodore C. Sorensen, *Decision-Making in the White House: The Olive Branch or the Arrows* (New York, 1963), 70–71. See also Matthew A. Crenson, *The Federal Machine: Beginnings of Bureaucracy in Jacksonian America* (Baltimore, 1975), 57–58.

<sup>38</sup> Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, 174–75; Richard T. Johnson, "Presidential Style," Aaron Wildavsky, ed., *Perspectives on the Presidency* (Boston, 1975), 263–66.

House aides have great authority, not only participating in policy making but also in issuing instructions to cabinet officers. Propinquity to the President becomes a determining consideration in establishing influence, as a cabinet member of the 1960s recognized when he reported his preference to return to government as a presidential assistant rather than as a department head.<sup>39</sup> Indicatively, warnings in the 1970s about “unelected, and unratified aides” who assumed “ever-growing” policy-making roles were anticipated by complaints about the power of Jackson’s kitchen cabinet.<sup>40</sup>

The analogy with the modern White House staff is, admittedly, imperfect. The modern presidential staff is a complex organization of more than 500 people that merges into the even larger and burgeoning network of the Executive office.<sup>41</sup> The Jackson White House was much more primitive, since Congress provided no funds for administrative aides or private secretaries until 1857.<sup>42</sup> More significantly, the inclusion of cabinet members, especially Van Buren, in the kitchen cabinet precludes a neat comparison. Nevertheless, there is a resemblance between the two organizations. Members of Jackson’s kitchen cabinet performed most of the functions of a modern staff, serving his personal and political needs. They also stirred resentments by encroaching on the traditional provinces of cabinet secretaries. The *National Intelligencer*, for example, condemned Jackson for removing the deposits “upon the wisdom of the Kitchen Cabinet, his Cabinet proper protesting against it in vain,” and chided him for having “other financial *counsellors* . . . than the Secretary of the Treasury.”<sup>43</sup> The kitchen cabinet was not the advance guard of the evolving Democratic party organization, as Marshall’s comparison with the national committee implies, but, rather, an agency of the President. It was a part of the enlargement of presidential power that occurred under Jackson, whose efforts to make the entire executive office—cabinet and non-cabinet—conform to his will continually elicited protests from tradition-bound observers.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Thomas E. Cronin, *The State of the Presidency* (Boston, 1975), 138; Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, 1–11, 160–62, 174–75; Koenig, *Invisible Presidency*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> Cronin, *State of the Presidency*, 138.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 118–40; Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, 158–62; Thomas E. Cronin and Sanford D. Greenberg, eds., *The Presidential Advisory System* (New York, 1969), xvii–xviii.

<sup>42</sup> White, *Jacksonians*, 82–83.

<sup>43</sup> *National Intelligencer*, Jan. 4, Oct. 2, 1833.

<sup>44</sup> Hezekiah Niles, for example, complained that even the language describing executive power changed during Jackson’s presidency: “The words first used . . . were ‘THE *administration*’—next ‘THIS *administration*’—then ‘MY *administration*’—and now it is with apparent gravity asserted, and claimed to be the true democracy, that *the president* is THE ‘GOVERNMENT.’” *Niles’ Weekly Register*, XLV (Nov. 30, 1833), 209. For Jackson’s expansion of presidential powers, see White, *Jacksonians*, 20–49; Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Bank War: A Study in the Growth of Presidential Power* (New York, 1967), 176–78; Ralph M. Goldman, *The Democratic Party in American Politics* (New York, 1966), 45–46.

Despite the prominence of the kitchen cabinet, evidence concerning its membership, structure, and functioning is sketchy. Green maintained that membership was subject to change and that the names of all except its most conspicuous participants were “known only to a few.” He never published a complete list. Opposition journals and politicians invariably mentioned Kendall, Lewis, and Blair among its members, but they also included the names of such relative obscurities as John Campbell, treasurer of the United States, Major Thomas L. Smith, register of the Treasury, and Elijah Hayward, commissioner of the General Land Office.<sup>45</sup> Longaker, who, after extensive study, found more than a dozen people associated with the kitchen cabinet, reasoned that the uncertainty about its membership was persuasive evidence of its nonexistence. Such skepticism seems exaggerated. Despite the impossibility of attaining a complete understanding of the network of presidential advising, a number of suggestions can be offered regarding this shadowy realm of power.<sup>46</sup>

At the beginning of his presidency, Jackson consulted primarily with his longtime Tennessee associates, Eaton, Lewis, and White. Politicians in Washington recognized the special access to the President of this inner group, and, in early 1829, Kendall, for example, referred to them as Jackson’s “immediate friends” and “principle friends.” But the Tennessee clique was ill-suited to Jackson’s political program. Except on the issue of Indian removal, where the experienced Eaton provided able assistance, Jackson’s early inner circle resisted his major decisions, especially his attack on the BUS and his commitment to limiting internal improvements expenditures. Gradually, during the first two years of his administration, they were displaced by Kendall, Blair, and Van Buren.<sup>47</sup>

Unlike the Tennesseans, the kitchen cabinet’s new inner circle was fully compatible with Jackson’s program. Of the three, Kendall and Blair shared the greatest influence. They were intimately involved with the issue that most concerned Jackson, the bank war. Their position as

<sup>45</sup> *U.S. Telegraph*, Aug. 2, 1833, March 25, April 13, 1831, Feb. 14, April 27, 1832; Branch to Andrew Jackson Donelson, May 8, 1831, Andrew Jackson Donelson Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); J. S. Barbour to James Barbour, June 27, 1832, Barbour Papers.

<sup>46</sup> Longaker, “Jackson’s Kitchen Cabinet,” 97–98, 100. “Institutions,” Harold J. Laski has noted, “are living things, and they do not easily yield their secrets to the printed word. Predominantly, that is not because they are in themselves mysterious. It is rather because they change with changes in the environment within which they operate, and partly because they differ, from one moment to the other, in terms of the men who operate them.” Harold J. Laski, *The American Presidency, An Interpretation* (New York, 1940), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, 410; Sellers, *James K. Polk*, 137; Kendall to John Pope, Jan. 11, 1829, Blair-Lee Papers; William Stickney, ed., *Autobiography of Amos Kendall* (Boston, 1872), 281.

administration propagandists and directors of the official Jackson newspaper brought them into frequent and confidential communication with him on numerous issues. And it would seem that personal and psychological considerations also mattered. Like Jackson, Kendall and Blair were westerners, outsiders to the Washington community, and somewhat ill at ease with the capital's social set. Lacking independent political backing, they tied their fortunes exclusively to the President and regarded him with almost filial devotion. This Jackson found congenial, since he habitually preferred to command subordinates and to exercise parental authority.<sup>48</sup>

The urbane Van Buren, by contrast, was skilled in navigating the turbulent waters of Washington's social and political world. He also possessed his own political base and presidential ambitions. Temperamentally cautious, he was unlike the doctrinaire and zealous Kentuckians who shared Jackson's flair for the dramatic and conclusive stroke. Thus, even though Van Buren exerted considerable influence and always retained Jackson's personal trust and affection, his contribution was somewhat eclipsed by that of Jackson's western advisers, Kendall and Blair.<sup>49</sup>

While Jackson's inner circle was composed of those intimates whom he regularly consulted on a variety of major decisions, there also existed an outer circle of less influential kitchen cabinet advisers, aides who contributed little to decision making, but who performed personal, political, and administrative chores. They gathered information on the political climate, occasionally intervened in local party matters to help loyal Jacksonian candidates, assisted in establishing local Jackson newspapers, and advised Jackson on appointments and removals.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Billy Gratz to Blair, May 31, 1831, Blair Family Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Amos Kendall, "Anecdotes of General Jackson," *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, XI (Sept. 1842), 273-74; Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, IV, 79, 309; Kendall to Gideon Welles, April 1, 1831, Gideon Welles Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Clay, "Two Years with Old Hickory," 192; Kendall to Blair, Oct. 29, 1830, Blair-Lee Papers; William C. Rives to wife, Dec. 4, 1836, William C. Rives Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); Bassett, *Life of Jackson*, 540, 705. Jackson's desire to control events is sensitively rendered in Curtis, *Andrew Jackson and the Search for Vindication*, ix-x, 11-12, 82, 144. For a discussion of the relative influence of Kendall, Blair, and Van Buren, see Richard B. Latner, "A New Look at Jacksonian Politics," *Journal of American History*, LXI (March 1975), 943-69.

<sup>49</sup> Nathaniel Niles to Rives, July 23, 1833, Rives Papers; Clay, "Two Years with Old Hickory," 193.

<sup>50</sup> George M. Dallas to Samuel Ingham, May 15, 1831, George M. Dallas Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia); James K. Polk to Donelson, April 28, 1835, Donelson Papers; William B. Lewis to Blair, Aug. 23, 1832, J. S. Barbour to Blair, Nov. 9, 1831, T. Bland to Blair, July 2, 1835, Thomas P. Moore to Blair, Sept. 4, 1833, Blair-Lee Papers; Lewis to Jackson, Aug. 20, 1834, Jackson Papers; Lewis to Blair, May 17, 1831, Blair-Lee Papers; *U.S. Telegraph*, Aug. 13, 1831.



Of those in this outer circle, Andrew Jackson Donelson and Lewis had the greatest access to Jackson. Donelson, the President's nephew, served as his private secretary, drafting letters, notes, and presidential messages, and could be relied upon to keep a confidence. Lewis, in Van Buren's words, was "an intimate personal friend" of the President, and, unlike Eaton, he remained in Washington after the cabinet reorganization of 1831, where he attended to party and patronage matters. But Lewis acted only at Jackson's direction, and his diminished position in the administration was evident when he moved out of the White House in early 1832.<sup>51</sup>

No enumeration of all kitchen cabinet members can be offered with great confidence. On some matters, Jackson consulted with such men as Postmaster General William T. Barry, Isaac Hill, James A. Hamilton, Reuben M. Whitney, and, at least at the beginning of his administration, Green, sufficiently often to make them occasional and peripheral members of the kitchen cabinet. But there is no evidence that they performed services for Jackson with the regularity of Donelson, who lived at the White House throughout Jackson's presidency, and Lewis, who lived there for most of Jackson's first term.<sup>52</sup> Hill, for example, is generally accorded great influence, and there is evidence that he was consulted by Jackson on certain New England appointments; but on a major issue such as the removal of the deposits, Hill was kept in the dark until after Jackson made his decision. Similarly, Green found the political footing treacherous even in the early days of the administration. He quarreled incessantly with cabinet members and was unable to exert much influence on patronage or policy. "Some of those who have the confidence of the President are jealous of my influence and seek for opportunities to mortify my pride," he lamented.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, IV, 247–48, 252–54; Van Buren to Lewis, Jan. 17, 1856, Jackson-Lewis Papers (New York Public Library); Lewis to Allen A. Hall, July 12, 1837, *ibid.*; Van Buren to Benjamin F. Butler, June 1835, Benjamin F. Butler Papers (Princeton University Library); James, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, 579. Donelson's assistance in drafting presidential messages is apparent from a study of those papers. See, for example, Presidential Messages, First Annual Message, Jackson Papers.

<sup>52</sup> Green to Worden Pope, Aug. 15, 1829, Green Papers, Library of Congress; *Niles' Weekly Register*, XXXVII (Oct. 10, 1829), 97–98; *ibid.*, XLII (June 16, 1832), 292; Jeremiah Mason to Daniel Webster, Feb. 8, 1830, Daniel Webster Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress); John Niven, *Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy* (New York, 1973), 69–70; James A. Hamilton, *Reminiscences of James A. Hamilton* (New York, 1869), 212, 250; Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, IV, 347; "Letters of William T. Barry," *William and Mary College Quarterly*, XIV (April 1906), 231, 232, 239–40; Dallas to George M. Wolf, March 31, 1835, George M. Wolf Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia); [W. J. Duane] *Narrative and Correspondence Concerning the Removal of the Deposits and Occurrences Connected Therewith* (Philadelphia, 1838), 57.

<sup>53</sup> Welles to Isaac Hill, March 25, 1829, Isaac Hill Papers (New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord); Hill to A. A. Burk, Nov. 16, 1833, New Hampshire Whig Papers (Harvard University);

The difficulty in identifying the kitchen cabinet's composition precisely attests to the flexibility of Jackson's advisory system. Jackson brought new men, Roger B. Taney, for example, into his confidence when circumstances warranted, and freely consulted old friends like John Coffee and acquaintances like Whitney. Not only was there movement between the inner and outer circles of the kitchen cabinet, but Jackson also continued to seek counsel elsewhere, whether from cabinet members or friends and associates outside of government. Thus, while certain men, especially Kendall, Blair, and Van Buren, maintained a constant influence in the administration, they never monopolized access to the President, and the kitchen cabinet, though a central feature of Jackson's White House, was not the only element in his advisory system.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, schematically, the whole White House advisory network resembled a series of interlocking circles surrounding Jackson, who stood at the center. Cabinet members, government officials, members of Congress, friends, and, on occasion, acquaintances moved in complex patterns around the President. Cabinet members, like Van Buren and Taney, could find themselves alongside minor officials and non-officeholders, like Kendall and Blair, or members of Congress, like Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, within Jackson's inner circle. Disagreement with Jackson's program could lead to exclusion from the inner circle, as happened with Lewis, whose resistance to Jackson's bank war and friendship with conservative Democrats led one cabinet member to remark in January 1834 that Lewis was "not now called of the Kitchen Cabinet." Moreover, functions were not clearly differentiated and specialized, and members of the kitchen cabinet's inner circle often worked with members of its outer ring in performing political chores.<sup>55</sup>

Francis O. Smith to Blair, July 11, 1834, Blair-Lee Papers; Hill to unknown correspondent, Aug. 15, 1833, New Hampshire Whig Papers; Green to Ninian Edwards, Aug. 19, 1829, Green Papers, Library of Congress; Green to Worden Pope, Aug. 15, 1829, *ibid.*; Green to Calhoun, Aug. 1, 1830, Green Papers, University of North Carolina; Green to Jas. Callan, Jan. 24, 1830, Green Papers, Library of Congress; Kendall to Blair, March 14, 1829, Oct. 2, 1830, Blair-Lee Papers; Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, IV, 156.

<sup>54</sup> "Letters of Andrew Jackson to Roger Brooke Taney," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, IV (Dec. 1909), 303, 304, 305; Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, IV, 309-10, 400-02; John M. McFaul and Frank Otto Gatell, "The Outcast Insider: Reuben M. Whitney and the Bank War," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, XCI (April 1967), 120-24; Kendall to unknown correspondent, April 10, 1831, Welles Papers; Clay, "Two Years with Old Hickory," 192; *Washington Globe*, Nov. 16, 1835; Kendall to Jackson, Dec. 3, 1831, Blair-Lee Papers.

<sup>55</sup> [Thomas Hart Benton] *Thirty Years' View or A History of the Working of the American Government for Thirty Years, From 1820 to 1850* (2 vols., New York, 1854), I, 678; Levi Woodbury, "Sundry Exercises or Moral Self-examinations, Resolutions, and Intimate Memoranda, January 19, 1823-March 9, 1834," Jan. 10, 1834, Box 29, Woodbury Papers; Jackson to Kendall, n.d. [Sept.-Oct. 1833?], Andrew DeCoppett Collection (Princeton University Library); Richard H. Wilde to Gulian Verplanck, May 1, 1834, Gulian Verplanck Papers (New-York Historical Society, New York City); Reuben M. Whitney to Blair, Aug. 16, 1833, Blair-Lee Papers.

An observation about contemporary White House practice seems equally applicable to that of Jackson's day: "The orbits of advisers . . . that revolve around the President do not, like the heavenly bodies, follow a fixed and settled course."<sup>56</sup>

To recognize the presence of a proto-White House staff alongside other advisory resources by no means diminishes Jackson's centrality to his administration. Not only did status and influence depend primarily upon agreement with Jackson, but a flexible and interlocking system of advising demanded a dominant President if decisions were to be made. The picture that emerges is not that of an inexperienced and vacillating executive, prone to manipulation by those who gained his confidence. Rather, it is that of an astute and skillful President, who consulted widely on matters of policy and politics and who reached beyond formal institutions for assistance.<sup>57</sup>

Jackson's confidant and editor, Blair, affirmed the President's predominant authority in his administration. "Whenever anything involves what he conceives the *permanent interest* of the country, his patriotism becomes an all-absorbing feeling, and neither *kitchen* nor *parlor* cabinets can move him," Blair asserted. Kendall's conclusion was the same. "They talk of a Kitchen Cabinet, etc.," he explained to James Gordon Bennett. "There are a few of us who have always agreed with the President in relation to the Bank and other essential points of policy, and therefore they charge us with having an influence over him! Fools!! They can not beat the President out of his long-cherished opinions, and his firmness they charge to our influence!" For Jackson to be manipulated by others was out of character for a man who had always reserved to himself the final determination and responsibility for a decision. "I should loath myself did any act of mine afford the slightest colour for the insinuation that I follow blindly the judgment of any friend in the discharge of my proper duties . . .," he assured one supporter.<sup>58</sup>

While Jackson's reliance on a kitchen cabinet is often attributed to the divisiveness of his first cabinet, it can more usefully be explained by his style of leadership. To be sure, the Eaton affair so polarized Jackson's secretaries that they rarely met, and he generally consulted them separately when making or implementing policy. But recent scholarship

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, "Presidential Style," 262.

<sup>57</sup> Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, 175; Johnson, "Presidential Style," 296.

<sup>58</sup> Clay, "Two Years with Old Hickory," 198; Frederic Hudson, *Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872* (New York, 1873), 448; Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, IV, 372. See also *Washington Globe*, March 12, 1831.

has demonstrated conclusively that after the spring of 1831, when Jackson refashioned his cabinet, it assembled regularly once a week, first on Saturdays, later on Tuesdays. During crises, such as the removal of the deposits, it met every day.<sup>59</sup> Despite its ceremonial rehabilitation, however, the cabinet never became the focus of presidential decision making. It advised and deliberated on major policy questions, but the more important the issue to Jackson, the more he used it only as a strategic means of gaining public support for a predetermined policy. According to Blair, Jackson would "sacrifice his own predilections, and indeed his determinations, in regard to appointments, to the preferences of his secretaries," but when "important principles are concerned . . . he is inexorable." Years later, Blair summarized Jackson's procedure for the benefit of Abraham Lincoln: "Leading measures resolved on, the cabinet should be accommodated to them & those who hoped for any thing as party men would follow in the wake. . . ."<sup>60</sup>

Jackson's presidential style derived in part from his military experience. As a general, Jackson had rarely summoned councils, preferring instead to consult his aides informally, to hear them out, and to make his own judgment. His military reputation preceded him to Washington, and even before inauguration day, Kendall reported his expectation that Jackson would continue his former method of seeking advice but never submitting anything to the decision of a council. The persistent influence of Jackson's military career was evident throughout his presidency in his distaste for cabinet sessions, leading one cabinet member to comment in 1834 that Jackson "shuns consulting all, as he is so military & dislikes councils of . . . cabinet." Jackson always preferred to concentrate power in his own hands, to reserve final decisions and responsibility for himself, and to control and dominate his surroundings.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>59</sup> James C. Curtis, "Andrew Jackson and His Cabinet: Some New Evidence," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, XXVII (Summer 1968), 157-64; *U.S. Telegraph*, Nov. 28, 1831; Edward Livingston to James Barbour, n.d. [1831], Barbour Papers; Jackson to Kendall, n.d., Amos Kendall Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston); Mahlon Dickerson, Diary, 1832-1845, Mahlon Dickerson Papers (New Jersey Historical Society, Newark); Reginald C. McGrane, ed., *The Correspondence of Nicholas Biddle dealing with National Affairs: 1807-1844* (New York, 1919), 223.

<sup>60</sup> Clay, "Two Years with Old Hickory," 197-98; Blair to [Abraham Lincoln], n.d., Blair-Lee Papers. See also Stickney, *Autobiography of Amos Kendall*, 635; *Washington Globe*, March 12, Sept. 9, 1831; Benton, *Thirty Years' View*, I, 678. James C. Curtis argues that Jackson occasionally polled his cabinet, but the evidence is not conclusive. See Curtis, "Andrew Jackson and His Cabinet," 161.

<sup>61</sup> Albert Somit, "Andrew Jackson as Administrator," *Public Administration Review*, VIII (Summer 1948), 188-89, 194; Kendall to Blair, Feb. 14, 1829, Blair-Lee Papers; Stickney, *Autobiography of Amos Kendall*, 635; Woodbury, "Sundry Exercises," Jan. 10, 1834, Woodbury Papers.

Moreover, Jackson's temperament and psychology fostered this system of informal advising. Jackson placed an unusual emphasis on qualities like personal loyalty and devotion in relationships with people. His suspicion of human nature made his confidence hard to gain, for he was ever alert to the danger of deceit and betrayal; but once his trust was granted, he withdrew it reluctantly.<sup>62</sup> Jackson related his high standards of friendship to the lessons taught by the vicissitudes of his early life. "I have been Tossed upon the waves of fortune from youth[h]ood, I have experienced prosperity and adversity," he once explained. "It was this that gave me a knowledge of human nature. . . . [Y]ou will find many, professedly, friends . . . in many Instances these professions are made with a view to obtain your confidence that it may be betrayed. To guard against such impositions there is but one safe rule—have apparent confidence in all, but never make a confidant of any untill [*sic*] you have proven him worthy of it." On another occasion, he similarly recalled that "The best lesson learnt me in my youth, was to . . . treat all with complacency, but make confidants [*sic*] of but few."<sup>63</sup> Thus, although cabinet members might obtain Jackson's confidence as individuals, he would not easily confide in an institution composed of so many strangers and political aspirants. Instead, he would, in Kendall's words, seek advice "from those who he thinks able to give it, whether they are Heads of Departments or not."<sup>64</sup>

There were, of course, liabilities to Jackson's system. Inevitably, cabinet members resented the influence of advisers who, though formally of lower status and authority, had special access and made substantial contributions to programmatic and political decisions. Consequently, Jackson's White House was the scene of constant infighting between competing groups seeking to persuade the President to a course of action. Treasury secretary William Duane, who was eventually dismissed for refusing to carry out Jackson's command to remove the deposits, was mortified to learn from Kendall, Whitney, and probably Blair what he was expected to do. "I had heard rumours of the existence of an influence, at Washington, unknown to the constitution and to the country; and the conviction, that they were well founded, now became irresistible," Duane announced in his published defense; "I knew that four of the six members of the last cabinet, and that four of the six members of the present cabinet, opposed a removal of the deposits [*sic*];

<sup>62</sup> Curtis, *Andrew Jackson and the Search for Vindication*, 31, 79.

<sup>63</sup> Bassett, *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, III, 130, 270.

<sup>64</sup> Kendall to Blair, Feb. 14, 1829, Blair-Lee Papers.

and yet their exertions were nullified by individuals, whose intercourse with the President was clandestine.”<sup>65</sup>

Other cabinet members had similar difficulties. Louis McLane, a conservative Democrat who owed his prominence largely to Van Buren’s continuing solicitude, bitterly complained of Blair’s efforts to undercut his support of the Bank. In early 1832, he vented his anger in an unsuccessful attempt at a palace revolution to force Blair from the *Globe*. When Blair in turn accused some cabinet officers of failing to provide him with the patronage needed to ensure the paper’s financial security, Jackson pointedly reminded his cabinet of its needs.<sup>66</sup>

Inevitably, too, there was friction among members of the outer circle of aides, like Lewis, and presidential favorites, like Blair, as well as among members of the inner circle themselves, particularly between Kendall and Blair, on the one hand, and Van Buren, on the other.<sup>67</sup> Rumors of such clashes were eagerly seized upon by the opposition as evidence of the administration’s impending collapse, and the *Globe* was compelled to issue public denials of any division among the President’s counselors. The situation doubtless irritated and frustrated Jackson, who does not seem to have relished the competitive atmosphere congenial to Roosevelt, but it is apparent that he preferred to rely on his flexible advisory system rather than on the formal cabinet or a more hierarchical arrangement of official and unofficial aides.<sup>68</sup>

Jackson’s reliance on a kitchen cabinet is particularly noteworthy in light of other research on his administrative ideas and practices. As Albert Somit has argued, in administrative matters, Jackson preferred neatness and order. Concentration of authority, hierarchical structures with clear-cut chains of command, strict accountability, limited administrative discretion, and the efficient organization of activities by function were fundamental considerations in his military and administrative practices.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, to a surprising extent, Jacksonian

<sup>65</sup> [Duane] *Narrative and Correspondence Concerning the Removal of the Deposits*, 9–10.

<sup>66</sup> Blair to [Secretary of the Navy], Nov. 1831, Blair-Lee Papers; Blair to Livingston, June 18, 1832, June 21 [1832], *ibid.*; Blair to Jackson, n.d. [1832], with endorsement by Jackson, Jackson Papers; Louis McLane to Van Buren, Dec. 14, 1831, Van Buren Papers; Lewis to Blair, July 24, 1833, Blair-Lee Papers. For a discussion of McLane’s intrigue, see Latner, “A New Look at Jacksonian Politics,” 953–54.

<sup>67</sup> Lewis to Blair, Aug. 12, 1830 [1832?], Blair-Lee Papers; Blair to Van Buren, Aug. 17, 1833, Van Buren Papers. For a more extended discussion of the differences between Van Buren and Kendall and Blair, see Latner, “A New Look at Jacksonian Politics,” 951–66.

<sup>68</sup> *Washington Globe*, Jan. 16, Nov. 29, 1833, March 21, July 14, 1834; *U.S. Telegraph*, March 20, 1834.

<sup>69</sup> Somit, “Andrew Jackson as Administrator,” 189–93; Albert Somit, “The Political and Administrative Ideas of Andrew Jackson” (doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1947), 119–26, 226.

administrative policy stimulated the process of bureaucratization that increasingly marked government organization in the nineteenth century. According to Matthew Crenson, a significant shift in administrative priorities occurred during Jackson's presidency from an initial emphasis on traditional notions of personal organization, unity of command, and the maxim that good men make good administration, to a bureaucratic form of government with impersonal rules, elaborate systems of checks and balances, and explicitly defined jurisdictions.<sup>70</sup>

The kitchen cabinet, however, only partially conforms to this newly emerging picture of the Jacksonian administrative model. Jackson's advisory network was too informal, personal, and flexible to fit neatly into a bureaucratic administrative structure. The paradox of such an informal institution coexisting with an increasingly bureaucratized civil service is clear, and it shows the persistence of Jackson's own commitment to an old-fashioned and personal system of governing even as he placed his stamp of approval on the administrative reorganization plans of his cabinet officers. But however incompatible with other administrative goals, the appearance of a close-knit, informal group of aides within a flexible advisory system was consonant with Jackson's determination to direct his administration and to make himself the center of the decision-making process.

<sup>70</sup> Crenson, *Federal Machine*, 1–10, 49–54, 57–62, 70–71, 158–74.