To George Bancroft, January 30, 1845
As regards the composition of my cabinet, I have received suggestions from many of my friends, but have kept my own counsel and am wholly uncommitted.... When I reach Washington I will survey the whole ground, and make such selections, as in my judgment will be proper, & such as I hope may satisfy the country.

From William C. Bouck, February 18, 1845
It is more than suspected, that a deep design is maturing to organize a Northern party, amalgamating democrat Opposed to annexation with Whigs but I sincerely hope this is not so. The prudent democracy of the North and South, have hitherto in a Spirit of forbearance, preserved the union. If this connection is broken, there is too much reason to fear the consequences.

To Martin Van Buren, March 1, 1845
I am fully sensible that I came into the office, not only at an earlier period of life than any of my predecessors, but perhaps, with less of the public confidence in advance than any of them. This being the case, I have thought it not only important, but perhaps indispensable to compose my cabinet of men, who had a public reputation throughout the Union, and who would give weight of character to the administration, the moment they were announced.

From Andrew J. Donelson, March 18, 1845
The great measures of your administration are now the reduction of the Tariff of 42, and the occupation of Oregon, after the annexation of Texas. Your action in other respects will be rather preventive than positive, persuading the people to be content with the simple and legitimate operation of the Government, and to avoid all the schemes of the whigs in regard to the Bank, distribution &c, which are but modes of robbing labor and benefitting capital.

From Abijah Mann, Jr., April 21, 1845
Your task is most difficult and if you can succeed in retaining the support of the northern democracy for two years you will under the circumstances deserve and gain a political immortality next to miraculous.

To Henry Horn, May 13, 1845
My rule is, to proscribe no part of the Democracy, to know no cliques, but as far as possible to harmonize and unite the whole party.

From Sam Houston, June 8, 1845
In deep sorrow I address you this hasty note. At 6 o'clock this evening Gen. Jackson departed this life. He retained his faculties to the last hour. I lament that I was denied the satisfaction of seeing him in his last moments.
Correspondence of
JAMES K. POLK
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WAYNE CUTLER, Editor
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All of the political considerations that made possible the nomination and election of James K. Polk visited the Union's new leader in the formation of his cabinet and the distribution of his patronage. Among the numerous factions within the Democracy, Polk commanded at best the second-hand loyalty of his party's discordant leadership. The distrust of national political and economic consolidation that once had bonded state party alliances and displaced sectional conflicts no longer operated with such force as to maintain anything more than a nominal adhesion to the new administration.

Indeed, the friends of both Martin Van Buren and John C. Calhoun declined any close association with Polk and justified their distance on grounds that the new president had been made the tool of a rival leader. To be certain, personal disappointments in the 1844 nomination process and hopeful expectations for the 1848 presidential race fanned the fires of factional division; but those same piques and ambitions might have burned far less wildly had there been no shifting of policy positions on protection and expansion.

Prior to his inaugural Polk received an avalanche of advice on forming his cabinet and distributing the patronage. No one laid out Polk's situation more clearly than Van Buren, whose letter of February 15, 1845, would apply as prophetically to himself as to Polk. The active partisan may combine ostensibly to promote the common cause but generally has a separate interest in view. During the election campaign party men mask their differences; yet when the contest ends and the victory is won, "each is thrown back upon his individual concern & as the objects of all cannot but be gratified rivalry & contention take the place of harmony & we witness such scenes as you are now in the midst of. If the battle is lost all private aspirations are concealed, & harmony reigns in the losing Party."

With little more than two weeks remaining before the new president's oath taking, Van Buren's lecture on political economy bespoke the same air of diffidence that had characterized his earlier letters.

From Calhoun's point of view the fact that Polk could not retain him as his secretary of state demonstrated the measure of Van Buren's influence over the new administration. Nor did the South's chief spokesman for the New Democracy expect to remain in the cabinet; as for taking an appointment as min...

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