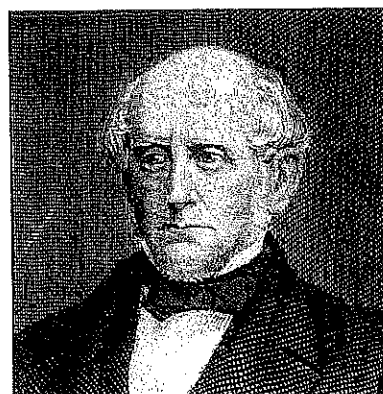


Charles Francis Adams

1807–1886



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Charles Francis Adams was the son of President John Quincy Adams. A politician and diplomat, he helped form the antislavery Free Soil Party, and was influential in keeping Britain neutral during the U.S. Civil War.



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As you read the biography below, think about why Charles Francis Adams opposed the expansion of slavery. Why do you think he worked so hard to keep the British neutral during the Civil War?

When Texas became an independent nation, it moved one step closer to becoming part of the United States. The debate over Texas statehood was heated. Many Americans, in the spirit of manifest destiny, supported annexing Texas. Texas, though, allowed slavery. As a new slave state, it would tip the balance of power in Congress. Charles Francis Adams believed the movement to annex Texas was part of a conspiracy to expand slavery and increase the influence of slave-holding states in government. Adams helped lead the movement opposing Texas annexation.

Charles Francis was born in 1807 in Boston, Massachusetts. He was the son of President John Quincy Adams and the grandson of President John Adams. Adams graduated from Harvard University in 1825 and practiced law in Boston. Adams married in 1829 and devoted himself to literature and study, writing on historical topics. He edited and published the letters and papers of his grandparents, Abigail and John Adams.

In 1832 Adams decided to take an active role in Massachusetts politics. He had always believed that slavery was protected by the Constitution. His position changed when pro-slavery forces in the state tried to deny free speech to abolitionists and prevent his father from presenting antislavery petitions to Congress. Adams became convinced that slavery was a threat to constitutional rights. When the Republic of Texas sought statehood in 1837, Adams stood opposed, believing that pro-slavery forces were trying to gain power. Because of his antislavery views, Massachusetts Whigs asked Adams to run for the state House of Representatives. Adams was elected in 1840 and served until 1843. He then served two years in the state senate.

A Push for Reform**Literature**

they are contented, and that their masters are kind. The slaveholders have been known to send in spies among their slaves, to **ascertain** their views and feelings in regard to their condition. The frequency of this has had the effect to establish among the slaves the maxim, that a still tongue makes a wise head. They suppress the truth rather than take the consequences of telling it, and in so doing prove themselves a part of the human family. If they have any thing to say of their masters, it is generally in their masters' favor, especially when speaking to an untried man. I have been frequently asked, when a slave, if I had a kind master, and do not remember ever to have given a negative answer; nor did I, in pursuing this course, consider myself as uttering what was absolutely false; for I always measured the kindness of my master by the standard of kindness set up among slaveholders around us. Moreover, slaves are like other people, and imbibe prejudices quite common to others. They think their own better than that of others. Many, under the influence of this prejudice, think their own masters are better than the masters of other slaves; and this, too, in some cases, when the very reverse is true. Indeed, it is not uncommon for slaves even to fall out and quarrel among themselves about the relative goodness of their masters, each contending for the superior goodness of his own over that of the others. At the very same time, they mutually **execrate** their masters when viewed separately. It was so on our plantation. When Colonel Lloyd's slaves met the slaves of Jacob Jepson, they seldom parted without a quarrel about their masters; Colonel Lloyd's slaves contending that he was the richest, and Mr. Jepson's slaves that he was the smartest, and most of a man. Colonel Lloyd's slaves would boast his ability to buy and sell Jacob Jepson. Mr. Jepson's slaves would boast his ability to whip Colonel Lloyd. These quarrels would almost always end in a fight between the parties, and those that whipped were supposed to have gained the point at issue. They seemed to think that the greatness of their masters was transferable to themselves. It was considered as being bad enough to be a slave; but to be a poor man's slave was deemed a disgrace indeed!

ANALYZING LITERATURE

1. **Main Idea** Why did slaves say, "a still tongue makes a wise head"?

2. **Critical Thinking: Analysis** What did slaves gain from quarreling with other slaves about their masters?

Expansion Leads to Conflict**Biography**

Adams eventually broke with the Whigs. He believed the party needed to take a stronger stand against the expansion of slavery. In 1848 Adams joined with others who shared this view to form the Free-Soil Party. Adams chaired the party's first convention and was nominated as the party's candidate for vice president. Adams campaigned with presidential candidate Martin Van Buren on a platform of "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men." They were soundly defeated in the election of 1848.

In 1858 Adams ran for Congress as a Republican and was elected. During his second term, he was named Minister of England by President Lincoln. From 1861 to 1868, he served as ambassador to Great Britain, working to maintain British neutrality during the Civil War. Adams resigned from his post in 1868 and returned to America. British newspapers and political leaders praised his service.

In 1872 friends convinced Adams to seek the Republican nomination for president. Adams was barely defeated. In 1876 he was again unsuccessful as a candidate for governor of Massachusetts. In later years, Adams served as an overseer of Harvard University. He revised the two-volume biography of John Adams and finished the *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848*. Charles Francis Adams died in Boston in 1886.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Define** What was the Free-Soil Party?

2. **Draw Conclusions** Why was British neutrality important during the Civil War?

ACTIVITY

Charles Francis Adams came from a family of powerful and influential Americans. Read excerpts from the writings of John Adams, Abigail Adams, or John Quincy Adams. Select one to read to the class. Then discuss how the values of his father and grandparents are reflected in the life of Charles Francis Adams.

James Buchanan Considers the Annexation of Texas



ABOUT THE SOURCE Texans declared their independence from Mexico in March 1836 and became an independent republic after defeating the Mexican army. Texans then wanted to join the United States. Americans were divided over the issue. Some politicians liked the idea of expanding U.S. territory. However, many northern leaders objected because slavery was legal in Texas. They feared that annexing the republic would increase the political power of the slave states. In 1844 James Buchanan, senator from Pennsylvania, wrote a letter to Edward Gazzam about the Texas issue. Gazzam was also a politician from Pennsylvania.



*As you read note Buchanan's opinions about the annexation of Texas. The following word may be new to you: **dominion**. You may want to use a dictionary to look it up.*

Washington

February 3, 1844

I have thought of writing to you for some days on an important subject; but have been prevented by pressing business. It is highly probable that the question of the admission of Texas into the Union may force itself or rather be forced upon the consideration of Congress before the close of the present session. In my judgment it would be far better for this Country that Texas should remain an independent State if this were possible. But suppose that this cannot be & that it should be satisfactorily established that we must either admit it or see it pass under the **dominion** of Great Britain; - what ought then to be done? This is the question & a very grave question it is. It may be a choice of evils; but which is the least? I should be very glad, if, at your leisure, you would favor me with your views upon this subject as well as inform me, what, in your opinion, would be the wishes of the people of Western Pennsylvania. Can any evils which might result from its admission be equal to those which would most probably result from having Great Britain our neighbors along our Southwestern frontier?

Source: The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, The Collection, New York Historical Society