HISTORIANS examining the presidency of James Buchanan have generally faulted the handling of an initial problem of his administration, that of distributing the federal patronage. According to Buchanan's most recent biographer, Philip Klein, the President underestimated the intensity of the wild scramble for public office. Buchanan, in the words of Roy F. Nichols, "had the initial weakness of overconfidence" in dealing with his task. Compounding this initial overconfidence, historians agree, was the fact that Buchanan was out of touch with his times, unaware or comprehending of the tremendous changes, particularly the growing force of metropolitan centers, that had occurred since the days of his political prime. Moreover, Buchanan selected no Cabinet representative from the cities to help him understand complexities that metropolitan officeholding would have to reflect.

Because of initial overconfidence and lack of comprehension, the President and his cabinet committed a second error. In Nichols's words, "in their first confident hours as administrators, they devised a formula to be announced as the rationale of their actions." This publicly-proclaimed formula was a variation on the old Jacksonian policy of "rotation in office," called the "rule of rotation." Historians disagree somewhat as to the rule's defini-
Nichols stated the rule this way: "all officeholders against whom no charges were pending might serve out their four-year terms. Then the principle of rotation in office would go into effect, and the Buchanan men would garner the fruits of their labors." Allan Nevins draped the undefined "charges" of Nichols, but declared that the Pierce appointees would go out when their four years expired "unless a Senator or other power specifically interposed." Klein agreed that the four-year rule would apply, but pointed out that Buchanan broadened its application greatly by informally extending the four-year rule to diplomatic appointees, who officially held their commissions on indefinite tenure. Additionally, according to Klein, Buchanan determined to leave Pierce's 1855 and 1856 appointees undisturbed in order to have the rewards of office spread across his own entire presidential term.2

Implementation of the "rule of rotation" showed the initial errors. According to Nichols "it soon became apparent that the situation was too complex to be comprehended in a formula." To show the complexity of the situation, historians cite cases all using New York City as a prime example. There is general agreement with Allan Nevins's statement that the city appointments were "wretched," that they left nearly every political faction in the city "dissatisfied," and that they horrified the powerful editor of the New York Herald, James Gordon Bennett, and made Mayor Fernando Wood bitterly resentful.3 But the greatest difficulty with the policy came in applying it to the South. Because of the opposition of Southern politicians, and Buchanan's subservience to them, again in Nichols's words, it "soon was obvious that rotation would not be applied [in the South] nor was it politically expedient to pretend to apply it." Northern politicians quickly observed that there was one rule for the South and another for the remainder of the country, according to historians. This discrimination, together with what Nichols called the administration's "instinctive sympathy" for conservative Democratic factions, aroused the politicians' resentment. In the cynical phrase of former Secretary of State William

2 Nichols, Disruption, 92-93; Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Lincoln (New York, 1950), II, 129-130; Klein, Buchanan, 279-280.
3 Nichols, Disruption, 93-96; Klein, Buchanan, 280-281; Nevins, Emergence, II, 130.
L. Marcy, the sectional application of rotation was "a noble illustration of [Buchanan's] election being a triumph over sectionalism." Particularly resentful were such Northerners as Senators David Broderick of California and Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, whose "temper" was not improved by the knowledge that the Illinois Democracy's "ranks must be reformed while Southern organizations remained undisturbed." By implication, the later troubles of the Buchanan Administration grew from these early errors in patronage distribution.

Scholarly discussions summarized above share certain common assumptions and raise questions about Buchanan's patronage policies. First, there is the assumption that the "rule of rotation" was primarily the inspiration of Buchanan and his cabinet. Second, it is assumed that the announced rule was absolute with respect to Pierce appointees, or nearly so. Third, departures from this absolute rule to reflect a complex society caused difficulty for the administration. Finally, it is assumed that failure to apply the rule to the South created antagonism toward the President among Northern politicos. These assumptions raise questions of the causation, definition, application and evaluation of the patronage policies of the Buchanan Administration.

As proclaimed by Andrew Jackson and practiced by his successors, "rotation in office" assumed either total identification of two succeeding presidential administrations or total opposition. The latter condition was in fact the case for twenty years after Martin Van Buren's election in 1836. "Rotation in office" became an accepted political practice. In 1857, as the scholars of Buchanan's Administration have pointed out, a unique situation arose when Democrat James Buchanan succeeded Democrat Franklin Pierce. The two men had been competitors for the Democratic nomination, a situation which had never been faced by any previous President. Circumstances which produced this...
situation were directly involved in the patronage policies which the Buchanan Administration practiced.

Franklin Pierce had led the national Democracy to an 1852 electoral victory so overwhelming as to contribute to the destruction of the Whig party. By endorsing the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, the Pierce Administration helped to revolutionize Northern politics, creating a new sectional party more threatening to the Democracy than the Whigs had ever been. Coupled with this was a zealous enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 that inflamed Northern opinion. Consequently, in 1854 Democrats were swept out of Northern congressional and gubernatorial seats. To check this erosion of popular strength in the North that was fast making their own party sectional, Democratic leaders agreed that the organizational apparatus of the party needed strengthening. In this area also Pierce had fallen down. Pierce had appointed to office men whose reputations were not such as to promote the public's confidence and elicit its vote. As one Wisconsin politician wrote, "we have been cursed with a gang of outlaws in this State, and men of no character slip into office under Democratic Administrations." The result was that "our party is struck down and our principles lost sight of." A Minnesotan declared it necessary that "the [land office] Register should be a popular man in order that the Democratic party may prosper." Problems of party erosion could be laid at Pierce's door. The effect of Pierce's mismanagement, both of policy and personnel, could be lessened by removing vestiges of the previous administration from its successor.

Moreover, Pierce had used federal patronage as a weapon prior to the 1856 Democratic National Convention at Cincinnati in attempting to weaken Buchanan's hold on the Pennsylvania delegation. A number of federal officeholders attended the convention as Pierce delegates. When Pierce finally withdrew, his

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6 Stanley W. Campbell, The Slave Catchers: Enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850-1860 (Chapel Hill, 1970), is the most recent study. Morgan L. Martin to George W. Jones, Madison, May 7, 1858, Applications for Land Office Registers and Receivers (LOR&R), Wisconsin-Menasha, Papers of Samuel Ryan, records of the Interior Department, Record Group (RG) 48, National Archives (NA). A. T. McKee to James Buchanan, Minneapolis, August 1, 1858, LOR&R, Minnesota—Forest City, Papers of A. C. Smith, RG 48, NA. N. G. Upham to James Buchanan, Concord, November 27, 1856; John Appleton to Buchanan, Salem, Massachusetts, February 7, 1857, James Buchanan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP).
supporters shifted to Stephen A. Douglas rather than to Buchanan. Following the convention, charges were made that federal officeholders were not wholeheartedly supporting the Democratic ticket. For such men the remedy was simple: because "he and his deputies were a dead weight on the party during the whole canvass" a New York official should feel "the Democratic principle of Rotation in office." This personal political rivalry heightened the pressure on the new chief executive to ignore Pierce's Democracy and rotate his supporters out of office.

There was much general Democratic support for adoption of rotation by Buchanan. Knox County, Indiana, Democrats passed resolutions favoring rotation, as did those of Berks County, Pennsylvania. Cleveland Democrats stated that "the Democracy of Ohio are strongly in favor of rotation in office believing that it is necessary to preserve the integrity and fidelity of the party." An Indiana editor summed up these feelings by declaring that Pierce's appointments had been disastrous to the interests, unity and strength of the Democratic party and that rotation by Buchanan "would perhaps be the only [policy] that would reinstate the party in the confidence of its own members and of the public." Buchanan wrote privately to a friend: "I cannot mistake the strong current of public opinion in favor of changing public functionaries both abroad & at home." 


9 John B. Hall and 219 others to ?, Evansville, April 17, 1857, containing newspaper clipping concerning Knox County; John B. Hall to Graham N. Fitch, Evansville, April 21, 1857; Surveyors of Customs Applications (SCA), Indiana, Papers of Charles Denby, Records of the Treasury Department, RG 56, NA. The [Philadelphia Daily] Press, August 6, 1858. William Abbey and R. A. Davidson to James Buchanan, Washington, March 21, 1857, CCA, Ohio—Cleveland, Papers of Benjamin Harrington, RG 56, NA. H. S. McGannon to Buchanan, LaFayette, December 22, 1856, enclosing clipping from the Indiana Daily American, December 19, 1856, Buchanan Papers, HSP. For later evidence of support for rotation see John Hogan to Buchanan, St. Louis, January 28, 1858, Justice Department Recommendations (JDR), Missouri, 1853-1865, Papers of George L. Pollard, Records of the Justice Department, and Albert H. Tracy to Israel T. Hatch, Buffalo, January 7, 1858, JDR, New York--Northern, 1857-1861, Papers of Francis
The new administration had yet another major reason to make a sweeping replacement of Pierce officeholders with its own men. One Massachusetts politician wrote the President that he should appoint to office men "whose opinions and principles are . . . shown to be in strict harmony with those of the administration—in other words . . . the men and principles of the administration should be identical." Men watched the appointments to see what course a new administration would follow. Leaving Pierce's appointees in office would be, in effect, to underwrite all the policies of the discredited Pierce Administration.

There were also forces working against total rotation. Not all of Pierce's appointees supported him for renomination. An absolute or "iron rule" of rotation would remove Buchanan supporters from the attorneyships of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and the marshalship of Indiana. In the 1856 contest sizable campaign funds were raised by many federal officeholders, especially to carry Pennsylvania for the Democracy. Men who provided the "sinews of war" felt that they had strong claims to reappointment. Automatically denying these claims could be disastrous to the party in future campaigns.

An equally important restraint on absolute rotation was Buchanan's interpretation of the election of 1856 and the goals it established for his administration. His selection was the triumph of nationalism over sectionalism. The great object of his administration, Buchanan wrote, would be "to arrest, if possible, the agitation of the slavery question at the North & to destroy


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sectional parties.” To achieve this object, he wrote another correspondent, “in all appointments to office I shall endeavor to select the best & most efficient individuals to aid me.” An absolute rule of rotation would exclude some individuals from the President’s consideration in achieving this ambitious project.\(^\text{11}\)

Finally, there was the question of the South. Southern states, staunch supporters of Pierce at Cincinnati, had given Buchanan thirty-three percent of his popular but sixty-four percent of his electoral college victory in 1856. Senator Benjamin Fitzpatrick of Alabama wrote that Southern Senators had not “desired the application of this principle” of rotation to their states. This presented exactly Buchanan’s original dilemma in dealing with patronage. A Buchanan confidant wrote: “any elongation” of the Pierce Administration “would be bitterly disliked by the free States,” while “the old friends of Pierce are those who now chiefly constitute the South, and whom it is certainly desirable to conciliate.” Any response to the Northern public and party pressure for rotation would have to accommodate the South without giving the appearance in the North “of being held in mortmain by a deceased Administration.”\(^\text{12}\)

The patronage policy of Buchanan’s Administration which evolved in response to these factors was grounded in Buchanan’s appreciation of difficulties he would face. He informed an old friend in the diplomatic service that “the pressure for office will be nearly as great, as though I had succeeded a Whig administration.” Buchanan, from his previous service in Polk’s cabinet and his efforts on behalf of Pennsylvania friends at the opening of Pierce’s Administration, was well aware of the tremendous pressure for office at the opening of any Presidential term. He took immediate steps to reduce these pressures. Customarily, diplomatic officials with indefinite tenure offered their resignations when a new President took office. Buchanan, by extending to diplomatic service the four-year term mandated for domestic

\(^{11}\) Klein, Buchanan, 257-262. James Buchanan to John Y. Mason, Wheatland, December 29, 1856; Buchanan to Fernando Wood, Wheatland, December 1, 1856, Buchanan Papers, HSP.

officeholders, would ease pressure for immediate acceptance of resignations and appointments to fill the vacancies. The same policy would generally be followed at home, permitting incumbents to fill out their commissions before seeking new appointees. Such a policy domestically would well accord with the warning of a Philadelphian to select appointees carefully, for “the success of our party in the City and State will be largely affected, pro or con, by the character & standing of your appointees, among the citizens & mass of the Democracy.” Delaying application for patronage until commissions expired would allow the administration time to examine the “character & standing of those who might become representatives of administration principles."

What policy would be followed when commissions expired? This question was of immediate importance. Commissions of numerous officers expired very soon after Buchanan took office. A large number of these officials came from large northern urban centers. The administration quickly evolved some ground rules for dealing with them. Attorney-General Jeremiah S. Black, speaking for the President, set forth three classes of cases with which the administration expected to deal. First, there would be incumbents “whose fearless fidelity to the Constitution and laws in the face of danger and temptation” had been so outstanding that the President would “feel it his duty to express his approbation of their conduct either by a reappointment or in some other way still more emphatic.” Second, some incumbents’ “superior qualifications” might be so apparent “as to put all competition out of the question.” Finally, in some localities “the

public wish" in favor of the incumbents' retention might be so strong that no change would be made. In other cases the general rule which the President would follow would be "to put all applicants whether they be at the time in or out of office on a dead level and leave the contest between them to be decided by other considerations." A clerk in one Washington department described this policy as not of automatic but of selective rotation; "the incumbent will not be reappointed as a matter of course, but must stand his chance with other applicants." He might have added that neither would the incumbent be removed "as a matter of course."

Buchanan's policy of selective rotation offered the new administration several advantages in dealing with problems of patronage distribution. By systematically but eventually opening most federal offices to new applicants, Buchanan was assured of the greatest number of rewards for faithful party and personal service. At the same time, by not automatically proscribing incumbents, all elements in the party would exert themselves for party success, since a strong claim to office sprang from engineering victory at the polls. Secondly, selective rotation would give the administration more flexibility in dealing with changing and unanticipated political conditions in coming years of the presidential term. And finally, selective rotation would give the administration time to examine the party's situation in several states. Buchanan could obtain evaluations of local party leaders about the advantages which rotation or maintenance of incumbent federal officers would mean for the party. Where necessary, he could strengthen the party by infusing new blood into federal service. Selective rotation was designed to minimize liabilities inherent in the spoils system and inherited by Bu-


chanan from Pierce, while maximizing assets of the system and the Pierce inheritance.

Selective rotation, as explained by Black, could allay the Pierce appointees' fears of automatic removal. The "other considerations" that could be expected to cover many of their activities remained tantalizingly undefined, particularly with reference to working for Pierce in 1856. Buchanan apparently made no statements on this matter. Neither did he repudiate the policy expressed by his henchman, James C. VanDyke. Van Dyke, federal district attorney for eastern Pennsylvania under both Pierce and Buchanan, told an inquisitive Marylander that the new President could not "in justice either to the party or [himself] retain such as during the last nominating campaign has acted in active opposition to the public sentiment of the country." Officials who vigorously put their loyalty to Pierce above their loyalty to party could not expect to find as much favor at Buchanan's hands as his own loyal supporters.16

This fact was strikingly illustrated by the case which prompted Attorney-General Black's exposition of administration patronage policy, the case of the United States District Attorney for Massachusetts, Benjamin F. Hallett. Appointments of federal legal officers were of the most sensitive nature in the antebellum decade. With these officials lay responsibility for enforcing the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which some Southern states proclaimed as the sine qua non of their continued presence in the Union. The most celebrated case under this law was that of a Virginia slave, Anthony Burns, who was returned to his owner in 1854 through the activities of Hallett and federal marshal Watson Freeman. Burns's rendition became a cause célèbre because it required 1100 troops to remove Burns from Boston. It also resulted in the indictment of Wendell Phillips, Theodore Parker, and other abolitionists for treason. In 1857, when rotation was first rumored, Virginia Senator R. M. T. Hunter persuaded eighteen of his Southern senatorial colleagues to petition the President for the reappointment of the two Massachusetts legal officers. Hunter and his colleagues were joined by Burns's former owner and other Virginia Democratic leaders in a plea

to reappoint these “men at the North who in the face of prejudice do her justice” and whom “the South loves.” District Attorney Hallett, on whom most Southern attention focused, seemed clearly to fall into Black’s category of incumbents “whose fearless fidelity to the Constitution and laws in the face of danger and temptation” should be rewarded by reappointment. Moreover, Black had further declared that if the evidence showed Hallett and Freeman to fall within “either of these [three] conditions” outlined above, “they will have everything to expect and nothing to fear.” 17 Yet on the day following Black’s letter Hallett was replaced by Charles Levi Woodbury. The reasons for the change were politically personal. Woodbury had been one of Buchanan’s New England lieutenants at Cincinnati, Hallett had supported Pierce. 18 The “Constitution and laws” took a back seat to building a strong Buchanan organization in New England.

The Hallett case was important also for showing that at the outset of his administration Buchanan was prepared to set aside the advice of eighty percent of the Southern Democrats who would have to approve his appointments, and in a sensitive area vital to Southern interests. This trend continued. Later in the year the district attorneys for northern and southern Ohio, a state where the Fugitive Slave Law was also an explosive political issue, were replaced by men who had been notably active in the radical anti-Southern Free Soil party of 1848. Furthermore, Buchanan refused to completely give in to the desires of Southern Congressmen that selective rotation not be applied to their states. In the first session of the Thirty-Fifth Congress (which had to approve the appointments made in 1857) Bu-

chanan sent to the Senate 272 nominations for Southern states and 431 for the North. Of the southern nominations 58 (18%) were for vacancies created by removal or expiration of commission (where the incumbent was not reappointed), compared with 165 (38%) for the same categories of northern appointments. There was a difference in the application of selective rotation to the North and to the South. It was a difference of degree and not of kind.

Appointment figures indicate that the administration's primary focus during the first nine months of its term was on the North. It was on these states that most historical attention has focused. Application of selective rotation in the North varied. In general the handling of appointments fell into three rough groupings, depending on the condition of the Democratic party in a given state. Where the strength of the party was illustrated by the election of congressmen and senators, the tendency was to follow their wishes within their states, invoking rotation where it would be to the advantage of the local party. Thus in Illinois, divided between the Republican north and the Democratic south, rotation was applied sectionally to the northern area in the hopes that this would improve the party situation. Dis-

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20 In the four Republican northern Congressional districts, six new appointments to offices at the presidential level were made while only two reappointments were permitted. In the five Democratic Southern districts, only one new appointment was made to replace a man rotated to a higher position, while four reappointments were permitted. Register of Officers and Agents, Civil, Military and Naval, in the Service of the United States, on the Thirtieth September, 1857 . . . (Washington, 1857), 328-349. A random selection of the changes in post offices below the presidential level shows similar results. In Winnebago County, in the Republican first congressional district, six of seventeen postmasters were changed; in St. Clair County, in the Democratic eighth district, only two of sixteen were changed. D. D. T. Leech, *Post Office Directory . . . Containing the
tribution of patronage was managed far differently in those states where the party's situation appeared critical. In those states even past political favors gave way to a thorough overhaul of the federal appointments. A case in point was Michigan.

The Wolverine Democracy had sent to the 1856 Democratic National Convention a delegation headed by Senator Charles E. Stuart and pledged to Buchanan. Although other states placed in nomination Lewis Cass, Michigan's Democratic elder statesman, the Michigan delegation never wavered in its support for Buchanan. Unlike some other “critical” northern states, the 1856 election did not bring improvement to the Michigan Democracy. The party lost its last congressional seat to the Republicans, and a solidly Republican legislature turned Cass out of the Senate. Stuart remained the only elected party spokesman at the national capitol. Buchanan saved Cass by making him Secretary of State. Stuart was informed that all federal officeholders at the presidential level must give way to new men. Stuart would be responsible for sending new names to the departments. Despite the apparent need of the Michigan Democracy for fresh blood at the local leadership level, the application of an “iron rule” of rotation in a pro-Buchanan state was jarring. Stuart soon expressed his feelings. To Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson, Stuart complained of “unkindness” in appointment matters. Even more revealing were the Senator's comments to his colleague, Stephen A. Douglas. Stuart conceded there was a “strong feeling” among many men “of the great strength of this administration.” While he expressed hope these opinions were correct, Stuart declared “at the same time I am forced to the opposite conclusion by past & passing events.” So early in the presidential term, the “past & passing events” could have been little else than the implementation of selective rotation. In Ohio the condition of the party was not so critical in

Names of the Post Offices and Post Masters . . . on the 1st of July, 1856 . . . (Washington, 1856), 40-49. Only Roy F. Nichols seems to have noticed that rotation could actually work to the advantage of state Democratic leaders as in Illinois. Nichols, Disruption, 100.

22 Cincinnati Proceedings, 4-9, 39-45. Floyd B. Streeter, Political Parties in Michigan, 1837-1860 (Lansing, 1918), 245-247. Charles E. Stuart to James Buchanan, np, nd [endorsed March 26, 1857], Buchanan Papers, HSP. Of the twenty-one Presidentially-appointed offices filled in 1857, only the post office at Jackson was retained by the incumbent.

23 Charles E. Stuart to Jacob Thompson, St. Paul, Minnesota, May 17, 1857; Robert McClelland to Thompson, Detroit, May 2, 1857, LOR&R,
terms of congressmen. Since it had gone Republican on the presidential ballot, selective rotation was applied in a similar way. In Cleveland rotation was not invoked, leaving in office a customs collector and postmaster belonging to that party faction opposed to Buchanan at Cincinnati. In Toledo and Sandusky incumbents were rotated out to bring in new members of the same anti-Buchanan faction. Buchanan's pre-convention northern Ohio friends remained without a major office to show for their loyalty. The handling of the Ohio and Michigan patronage was dissatisfying to Buchanan's friends in those states. It was also revealing. Just as he would not follow slavishly Southern wishes in patronage matters, Buchanan refused to subordinate power at the polls to pre-election friendships.

A third class of cases was illustrated by California politics. The story of David C. Broderick's rise to political prominence, his challenge to the pro-Southern wing of the party known locally as "the Chivalry," and his extraction from his colleague William M. Gwin of a pledge not to interfere in patronage selections, has been too frequently told to bear repetition. Historians generally agree that Buchanan's refusal to abide by this pledge and his securing "informal advice" from Gwin on patronage matters converted Broderick from friend into bitter foe. Broderick's wrath smoldered as he saw Gwin bask in administration sunshine. That Gwin gave Broderick a pledge of


Nichols, Disruption, 101-102. Nevins, Emergence, I, 132-133. The best and most recent account of the Broderick-Gwin controversy is to be found in David Alden Williams, "David C. Broderick: A Political Portrait".
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abstinence on patronage matters is incontrovertible. That this pledge gave Broderick exclusive control of California patronage is incorrect. Broderick's demands did not reflect the realities of California politics. The Chivalry was actually a loose collection of Democratic factions. They were united only by dislike of Broderick, and never behind a single leader, least of all Gwin. Although Broderick could claim pre-convention support for Buchanan, the party apparatus which delivered the state to Buchanan at the polls was Chivalry-dominated, as was the electoral ticket. The two retiring Congressmen were Chivalry leaders. One of them, James W. Denver, would remain in Washington as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. The two Congressmen-elect were also Chivalry leaders. Moreover, in 1855 when the Chivalry and the Broderick forces had run separate slates for state offices, the Chivalry's ticket outpolled Broderick's by almost four to one. Broderick's own senatorial election came about only because one of the Chivalry factions supported him, in return for a supposed promise of Broderick's support for the other senatorial seat, a promise on which Broderick immediately reneged. In every political indicator agreed that the Buchanan Administration would tie itself to a minority faction of the California Democracy if it were to follow only the wishes of David C. Broderick in patronage matters.

In distributing patronage Buchanan and his advisers made nearly a clean sweep of California incumbents. Then followed the letter of Gwin's renunciation. Buchanan divided the offices among all the remaining factions of the California Democracy. Broderick's share was not small. His major supporter, ex-governor John Bigler, was made Minister to Chile, while other Bigler lieutenants got the superintendency of the San Francisco mint and the Sacramento post office. Broderick's legislative leader was made

(San Marino, 1969), 143-170, which is an extension of his doctoral dissertation, "The Political Career of David C. Broderick" (University of Southern California, 1964). My citations will be to the dissertation.

naval officer at San Francisco. Other Broderick supporters became the customs collectors at San Diego and Stockton.\textsuperscript{26} The remainder of the offices were divided among the Chivalry factions with Congressman Charles L. Scott emerging as a major voice in patronage matters.\textsuperscript{27} Selective rotation to achieve an even-handed sharing of the spoils may have enraged Broderick and eventually turned him against the administration. But it was not because that patronage distribution worked to the advantage of William M. Gwin.

In New York, where a similar case of extreme party factionalism existed, a similar policy of selective rotation was invoked to reflect factional strength. The growing influence of New York City was realized by the administration. It was also recognized as part of the broader picture of state politics. In the state as a whole, the party divided broadly into two wings, called "Hards" and "Softs." Each wing had its upstate and city contingents. The Hard strength was concentrated in the metropolis while the Softs dominated upstate. City politics were further complicated by the struggle between Fernando Wood and his opponents at Tammany Hall. The result was a factionalization of city politics that even local observers found difficult to understand. When city appointments were announced, it was found that of the ten major city officers, seven had been replaced, giving the Hards a seven-to-three majority. Equally important, as the \textit{New York Herald} remarked, "every one of these


\textsuperscript{27} The rise of Scott is illustrated in, among other things, C. L. Scott and five others to James Buchanan, np, nd, LOR&R, California—Marysville, Papers of E. O. F. Hastings; D. C. Broderick to Buchanan, Washington, March 11, 1857, LOR&R, California—Marysville, Papers of Herndon Barrett; C. L. Scott and four others to Buchanan, March 9, 1857; Charles Lindley to William M. Gwin, Marysville, July 17, 1857, and endorsed by Gwin, LOR&R, California—Marysville, Papers of Charles Lindley; J. C. McKibben to James W. Denver, Sacramento, July 16, 1857; McKibben to Buchanan, July 16, 1857; LOR&R, California—Marysville, Papers of C. A. Keyser, RG 48, NA. Gwin's endorsement indicates he was still abiding by the pledge he had given Broderick.
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appointees is a representative man of some distinct political or social class.”

This invocation of selective rotation to reflect Hard dominance of city politics, and to give each Hard faction a share of the offices, was designed to achieve a major goal of the Buchanan Administration. The weakened condition of the New York Democracy had long been ascribed to internal feuding. Buchanan set out to bring this feuding to an end. The New York Herald remarked before the announcement that appointments would be closely observed so that politicians could begin to “study out the political policy of the administration regarding the breaches and internal divisions of the Democratic party, and the remedy thought best to apply for reproducing unity and strength.” Buchanan’s remedy was to forget the old divisions and the old feuds, look to the present, and reunify the party into a single non-factionalized organization, especially in the city. The new presidential appointees received orders to stop the feuding and unite equitably in the Tammany Hall organization. Reinforcing these orders, the President’s editorial voice, the Washington Union, asserted that by its New York appointments the Administration showed it considered the old terms Hard and Soft to be meaningless. The President, the Union concluded in an apt summary of the goal of selective rotation in New York, by his “acts and appointments,” clearly “recognizes the democratic party, and not cliques or divisions.”


29 Henry Wickoff to James Buchanan, New York, July 22, 1857; George N. Sanders to Buchanan, New York, July 26, 1857; Daniel E. Sickles to
Buchanan's policy of party unification, to be achieved through selective rotation, was enthusiastically endorsed by upstate New York leaders. They were heartedly tired of the city's debilitating feuds. At the party's fall convention, upstate leaders assisted by federal officeholders forced the three contesting city delegations to merge and to carry their union back to the city for the campaign. Thus reunified, the Empire State Democracy won a spectacular success in November, 1857. Backing a state ticket evenly divided between Hards and Softs, the Democracy turned a Buchanan loss in 1856 into a Democratic victory. The Democratic state ticket swept into office, and the party gained ten seats in the upper and twenty-seven in the lower house of the state legislature. State Democratic spokesmen were quick to point to the reason for success. The New York Herald remarked that, in contrast to Pierce's "miserable spoils policy," which had cost him his popularity within a year after taking office, Buchanan, by a "straight-forward and honest policy" in regard to all the matters of his administration, had helped the "reunited democracy" regain their former ascendancy.  

New York was not an isolated positive response to the policy of selective rotation. The new federal district attorney of Michigan wrote that Buchanan's appointments had convinced "the Masses" of the party that "all is right." From his native state, where the President's patronage problems were compounded by his personal connection with the state and a plethora of candidates, Senator William Bigler wrote that "whilst we have some grumbling among the disappointed, I have never heard so little, nor has it been so moderate." An even more emphatic endorsement came as a result of the 1857 Pennsylvania state elections. The Democrats succeeded in electing their guber-
natorial ticket and enough new senators and assemblymen to give their party a firm control of both houses of the legislature. Following that election, Mayor Richard Vaux of Philadelphia wrote to the President that "Penna. [sic] has endorsed your policy your appointments and your devotion to the Union."^{21}

Selective rotation was not everywhere successful in achieving the unity and revitalization which Buchanan sought. Observers reported after the Ohio Democratic state convention that the surface unity of the party was a mask; "the inside is a burning volcano." Senator John R. Thomson of New Jersey, who backed Buchanan at Cincinnati, reported "a very strong feeling—and a growing one I assure you" among the President's supporters that "Buchanan never sticks to his friends" in patronage matters. The pro-Buchanan wing of the Ohio and Michigan Democracy echoed this charge. Although selective rotation was not so widely applied in the South, the policy caused resentment there also. So astute a political observer as Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois wrote in the summer of 1857 that Southern attacks upon the administration's Kansas policy and officials was caused by "the dissatisfaction felt by the formation of the Cabinet and the distribution of the patronage."^{22}

A major reason for this dissatisfaction with selective rotation may have been the public misunderstanding of the policy. In public the administration did little to clarify policy. Only in private letters did Buchanan express his views on the desirability of this policy. Attorney General Black spoke for the President in his reply to Southern Senators concerning reappointment of incumbents. These private statements remained private. There was no authoritative public statement of the policy. This left selective rotation open to a variety of interpretations by the

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general public. From Buchanan’s inaugural pledge not to seek re-election many newspapers inferred the existence of a rule of rotation, and believed that the rule was absolute. The results when this rule was not invoked were illustrated by one of the upstate New York appointments. A customs collector who had assisted in sending Pierce delegates to Cincinnati was reappointed largely because he had also raised a significant sum for the presidential canvass in Pennsylvania. Upon learning of the reappointment, the local Democratic editor publicly warned Washington authorities “that making fish of one & flesh of another” would bring Buchanan into the same political disrepute Pierce had suffered for “violating thus early in its history . . . a distinct pledge given after mature deliberation in favor of rotation in office.” That the editor was wrong was never brought to public attention by the administration.

Evidence indicates that Buchanan’s policy of selective rotation was a systematic effort, developed in response to public expectation, to deal with a well-recognized, initial problem faced by every incoming President. The policy was ground in awareness of the magnitude and complexity of the problem faced. The policy recognized certain peculiar political problems of metropolitanism as another facet of the larger problem of state party difficulties. Implementation of the policy on a national basis brought some reform of party ranks in both North and South. The goal of the policy was revitalization and reunification of the party structure, a goal which Buchanan and his cabinet sought in many cases by building on demonstrated political strength, rather than on past political friendships. Adequate

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33 New York Herald, March 11, 17, 1857. Samuel H. Paine to Elijah Ward, Port Covington, April 21, 1857, enclosing a clipping from the Essex County Republican, April 18, 1857, CCA, New York—Plattsburg, H. B. Smith Papers, RG 56, NA. For examples of dissatisfaction with the application of selective rotation arising from rotation from one office into a better one, see Josiah A. Noonan to James Buchanan, Washington, March 18, 1857, Senate Nomination Papers, Papers of John R. Sharpstein, Records of the United States Senate, RG 46, NA, and Benjamin Barstow to Howell Cobb, Washington, February 2, 1858, CCA, Massachusetts—Salem, Barstow Papers, RG 56, NA. First Assistant Postmaster General King prepared a short editorial on the rotation policy as it applied to the post offices below the level of presidential appointments. But King noted that the editorial was “not approved by the President” and it was never published. Horatio King Papers, Library of Congress. An examination of the Washington Union for 1857 reveals no discussion of the policy of selective rotation.
publicity and time were the major shortcomings of the policy. The latter was never to be achieved. Kansas affairs intervened to strain the fragile unity achieved by the policy of selective rotation.