

Henry Clay



[Henry Clay](#) of Kentucky (1777-1852) enjoyed a distinguished political career, even though he never attained his greatest desire—the presidency. A pivotal Senate leader during the antebellum era, a period in Senate history marked by heated debates over slavery and territorial expansion, Clay first entered politics in Kentucky's state house of representatives in 1803. He was elected to the United States Senate in 1806, even though he had not yet reached the constitutionally required age of 30. Following two non-consecutive terms in the Senate, Clay was elected to the House of Representatives, where he quickly rose to become Speaker. From 1825 to 1829 he served as secretary of state under President John Quincy Adams, then returned to the Senate in 1831 and again in 1849, serving a total of 16 years as senator. Throughout his career, as senator, [Speaker of the House](#), and secretary of state, Clay helped guide a fragile Union through several critical impasses. As senator, he forged the [Compromise of 1850](#) to maintain the Union, but such compromises could not settle the fractious issues that ultimately resulted in Civil War. Clay earned titles such as "The Great Compromiser" and "The Great Pacificator," but he was also a shrewd and ambitious politician who gained some powerful enemies, notably President Andrew Jackson. In 1833 Clay orchestrated [Jackson's censure](#). When [Clay died in 1852](#), a great Senate voice was silenced. Henry Clay was the first person honored by a [funeral ceremony in the Capitol Rotunda](#).