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Sommario/riassunto	The culminating volume in The Papers of Henry Clay begins in 1844, the year when Clay came within a hair's breadth of achieving his lifelong goal—the presidency of the United States. Volume 10 of Clay's papers, then, more than any other, reveals the Great Compromiser as a major player on the national political stage. Here are both the peak of his career and the inevitable decline. On a tour through the southern states in the spring of 1844, Clay seemed certain of gaining the Whig nomination and the national election, until a series of highly publicized letters opposing the annexation of Texas cost him crucial support in both South and North. In addition to the Texas issue, the bitter election was marked by a revival of charges of a corrupt bargain, the rise of nativism, the influence of abolitionism, and voter fraud. Democrat James K. Polk defeated Clay by a mere 38,000 popular votes, partly because of illegal ballots cast in New York City. Speaking out against the Mexican War, in which his favorite son was a casualty, the Kentuckian announced his willingness to accept the 1848 Whig

nomination. But some of his closest political friends, including many Kentucky Whig leaders, believed he was unelectable and successfully supported war hero Zachary Taylor. The disconsolate Clay felt his public career was finally finished. Yet when a crisis erupted over the extension of slavery into the territories acquired from Mexico, he answered the call and returned to the United States Senate. There he introduced a series of resolutions that ultimately passed as the Compromise of 1850, the most famous of his three compromises. Clay's last years were troubled ones personally, yet he remained in the Senate until his death in 1852, continuing to warn against sectional extremism and to stress the importance of the Union-messages that went unheeded as the nation Clay had served so well moved inexorably toward separation and civil war.
