

## A LIFE IN BRIEF

Andrew Jackson, seventh president of the United States, was the dominant actor in American politics between Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln. Born to obscure parents and orphaned in youth, he was the first "self-made man" and the first westerner to reach the White House. He became a democratic symbol and founder of the Democratic Party, the country's most venerable political organization. In his two-term presidency, he expanded executive powers and transformed the president's role from chief administrator to popular tribune.

Jackson was born in 1767 in Waxhaw, South Carolina, to Scotch-Irish immigrants. He fought as a boy in the Revolutionary War, studied law, and in 1788 moved west to Nashville. In 1791 he began living with Rachel Donelson Robards, whose husband had abandoned her. They were formally married after her divorce in 1794. Charges of adultery arising from the episode dogged Jackson's later political career. After serving as Tennessee prosecutor, judge, congressman, and senator, he won fame as a Major General in the War of 1812 with smashing victories against the Creek Indians in 1814 and the British at New Orleans in January 1815.

Jackson's triumph at New Orleans quickly became the stuff of legend and made him America's greatest military hero since George Washington. In 1818 he led an army in pursuit of Seminole Indians into Spanish Florida, touching off an international furor. After Spain ceded Florida, Jackson served briefly as territorial governor and was then senator from Tennessee in 1823-25. In a confused, four-candidate presidential race in 1824, Jackson led the popular and electoral vote but lost in the House of Representatives to John Quincy Adams through the influence of Speaker Henry Clay. Jackson challenged Adams again in 1828 and defeated him, in a campaign which centered on Jackson's image as a man of the people battling aristocracy and corruption. In 1832 Jackson easily defeated Henry Clay.

Jackson's presidency defined itself in two central episodes: the nullification crisis and the "Bank War." Jackson took office amid mounting sectional acrimony over the "American System" program of fostering economic development through transportation subsidies and through protective tariffs on imports to aid American manufacturers. Many Southerners believed these policies promoted Northern growth at their expense. Jackson curbed the American System by vetoing road and canal bills beginning with the Maysville Road in 1830. However, in 1832 the state of South Carolina declared the existing tariff unconstitutional, null and void. The state took steps to block tariff collections within its borders. Though he favored a lower tariff, Jackson acted quickly to uphold federal supremacy by force if necessary. In a ringing proclamation, he declared the Union indivisible and branded nullification as treason. Congress reduced the tariff in 1833, defusing the crisis.

The Second Bank of the United States was a corporation chartered by Congress to provide a national paper currency and manage the government's finances. Like Thomas Jefferson, Jackson believed such a bank to be dangerous and unconstitutional.

In 1832 he vetoed a bill to extend the Bank's charter beyond its scheduled expiration in 1836. Jackson's veto message counterposed the virtuous plain people against the Bank's privileged stockholders. The next year Jackson moved the federal government's deposits from the Bank to state-chartered banks, triggering a brief financial panic and prompting the Senate to censure him in 1834. Undeterred, Jackson launched a broader assault against all forms of government-granted privilege, especially corporate charters. His Farewell Address in 1837 warned of an insidious "money power."

Jackson's Bank War and its populist, egalitarian rhetoric shaped the platform and rhetoric of his new Democratic party. (His policies also arguably helped trigger a financial panic in 1837, which deepened into a severe depression.) By casting himself as the people's tribune against the moneyed elite and their tools in government, he introduced an enduring theme in American politics.

He also carved out a stronger role for the presidency. Jackson replaced many government officials on partisan grounds, inaugurating the "spoils system." Catering to his core regional constituency of Southern planters and Western frontiersmen, he condemned antislavery agitation, favored cheaper public lands, and strong-armed Indian tribes into removing west of the Mississippi. In a confrontation between Georgia and the Cherokee Nation, Jackson backed state authority against tribal sovereignty and refused to protect Indians' treaty rights despite their recognition by the United States Supreme Court. Jackson wielded executive powers vigorously, defying Congress, vetoing more bills than all his predecessors together, and frequently reshuffling his Cabinet.

Strong-willed and sharp-tempered, a fierce patriot and rabid partisan, Jackson was always controversial, both as a general and as president. He personalized disputes and demonized opponents. In a notorious episode, Jackson broke open his first Cabinet and forced a rupture with Vice-President John C. Calhoun by championing the character of Peggy Eaton, the vivacious and controversial wife of the secretary of war. Yet behind Jackson's towering rages often lay shrewd calculation of their political effects.

Jackson secured the presidential succession in 1836 to his faithful lieutenant and second vice-president, Martin Van Buren. He then retired to The Hermitage, his cotton plantation near Nashville, where he died in 1845.

## LIFE BEFORE THE PRESIDENCY

Andrew Jackson was born on March 15, 1767, in the Waxhaw settlement, a community of Scotch-Irish immigrants along the border between North and South Carolina. Though his birthplace is in dispute, he considered himself a South Carolina native. His father died before his birth, and Andrew's mother and her three small boys moved in with her Crawford relatives. Jackson attended local schools, receiving an elementary education and perhaps a smattering of higher learning.

The Revolutionary War ended Jackson's childhood and wiped out his remaining

immediate family. Fighting in the Carolina backcountry was especially savage, a brutish conflict of ambushes, massacres, and sharp skirmishes. Jackson's oldest brother Hugh enlisted in a patriot regiment and died at Stono Ferry, apparently from heatstroke. Too young for formal soldiering, Andrew and his brother Robert fought with American irregulars. In 1781 they were captured and contracted smallpox, of which Robert died shortly after their release. While trying to retrieve some nephews from a British prison ship, Andrew's mother also fell ill and died.

An orphan and a hardened veteran at the age of fifteen, Jackson drifted, taught school a little, and then read law in North Carolina. After admission to the bar in 1787, he accepted an offer to serve as public prosecutor in the new Mero District of North Carolina, west of the mountains, with its seat at Nashville on the Cumberland River. Arriving in 1788, Jackson thrived in the new frontier town. He built a legal practice, entered into trading ventures, and began to acquire land and slaves.

He also took up with Rachel Donelson Robards, the vivacious daughter of the late John Donelson, one of Nashville's founders. The Donelsons were a prominent Nashville clan. Rachel was married but separated from her husband, Lewis Robards of Kentucky. In 1791 she and Jackson began living as man and wife. They formally married in 1794 after Robards procured a divorce in Kentucky. These circumstances came back to haunt Jackson in his presidential campaigns, when opponents charged him with bigamy and wife-stealing. Jackson's defenders then claimed that he and Rachel had believed she was already divorced and free to remarry in 1791, but this seems unlikely. Whatever the technicalities, frontier Nashville saw nothing wrong in their liaison at the time. Rachel's marriage to Robards was already irretrievably broken, and Jackson was a man of prospects. From the beginning, Andrew and Rachel's marriage was a perfect love match. The couple were deeply devoted to each other, and remained so throughout their lives.

Jackson's rise in Tennessee politics was meteoric, attesting to his strength of character. In quick succession he was a delegate to the state constitutional convention in 1795, then Tennessee's first congressman, then a senator. After a year he resigned to take a job closer to home, as judge of Tennessee's superior court. In 1802 he challenged Governor John Sevier for election as major general in command of the state militia. Jackson's senior by more than twenty years, Sevier was a veteran of the Revolution and of many Indian campaigns, and the state's leading politician. Jackson beat him for the generalship, but the aftermath brought the two men to a showdown in the streets of Knoxville, followed by preparations for a duel.

The Sevier feud was only one of many explosive quarrels involving Jackson. Jackson's hot temper, prickly sense of honor, and sensitivity to insult embroiled him in a series of fights and brawls. The most notorious of these affairs, in 1806, began with a minor misunderstanding over a horse race and ended in a duel with pistols between Jackson and Charles Dickinson. Dickinson, a crack shot, fired first and hit Jackson in the chest. Jackson gave no sign of being hurt but coolly stood his ground, aimed carefully, and killed his foe. Jackson carried Dickinson's bullet for the rest of his life. Later, in 1813,

during a hiatus in his military service during the War of 1812, Jackson fought in a Nashville street brawl against the Benton brothers, Jesse and Thomas Hart. There he took a bullet that nearly cost him an arm.

Jackson was brave in a fight and steadfast to his friends. Still these affrays marked him as a violent and dangerous man, and helped block his further political advance. Jackson resigned his judgeship in 1804 and devoted his efforts thereafter to his militia command and his business ventures. He speculated in land, acquired slaves, bred and raced horses, and engaged in merchandising. In 1804 he bought a cotton plantation outside Nashville, The Hermitage, where he and Rachel lived the rest of their lives.

At mid-life, Jackson's political career had apparently reached an end. He thirsted not for higher office but for military action. Potential foes were everywhere: the Indian tribes who still hovered near Tennessee's borders, their Spanish abettors in Florida and Mexico, and above all Jackson's old enemy, the British. Jackson's yearning for activity led him to befriend Aaron Burr when the latter came through Tennessee in 1805 seeking recruits for his shadowy schemes of conquest. Jackson cut loose from Burr in time to avoid imputations of treason, but he was still eager for the field. With mounting outrage he watched the inept efforts of presidents Jefferson and Madison to win redress from Great Britain for its violations of American sovereignty and interests.

In June of 1812, the United States finally declared war on Great Britain. That November, a Tennessee force was ordered to the defense of New Orleans. Jackson led two thousand men as far as Natchez, where he received a curt War Department communication dismissing his troops without pay or provisions. On his own authority, Jackson held the command together for the return home. His willingness to share his men's privations on this march earned him the nickname "Old Hickory."

In the fall of 1813, Indian hostilities finally brought an end to Jackson's inactivity. At Fort Mims in Mississippi Territory (now southern Alabama), warlike Creeks known as "Red Sticks" had overwhelmed and slaughtered more than four hundred whites. Jackson led a force of Tennesseans and allied Indians deep into the Creek homeland, where he fought a series of engagements. At the culminating battle of Horseshoe Bend in March 1814, Jackson annihilated the main Creek force. The campaign broke the Creeks' power of resistance and overawed the other Southwestern tribes, including those that had fought as Jackson's allies. In the next few years, Jackson negotiated treaties by which the Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Cherokees surrendered millions of acres of land in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and west Tennessee.

After this striking success as a militia commander, Jackson was commissioned United States Major General in May 1814 and given command of the southern frontier. The British were planning an attack on New Orleans, strategic gateway to the American interior. To block them, Jackson assembled a motley force of regulars, volunteers, militia, free blacks, and pirates. The British made landfall and advanced to near the city, where Jackson had fortified a line straddling the Mississippi River. On January 8, 1815, British General Sir Edward Pakenham led a frontal assault on Jackson's position. On

the west bank some inexperienced Americans broke and ran, but in the main attack on the east bank Jackson's men mowed down the advancing enemy with artillery and rifle fire. British casualties exceeded two thousand; Jackson lost thirteen dead, fifty-eight wounded and missing.

Unbeknownst to both sides, the Treaty of Ghent ending the war had been signed two weeks earlier, so the battle had no effect on the outcome. Still, this epic victory, with its incredible casualty ratio and its stirring image of American frontiersmen defeating hardened British veterans, passed immediately into patriotic legend. Jackson became a hero second in the national pantheon only to George Washington.

Jackson remained in the regular army after the war. Late in 1817 he received orders to subdue the Seminole Indians, who were raiding across the border from Spanish Florida. Liberally interpreting his vague instructions, Jackson effected a lightning conquest of Florida itself. He captured its bastions at St. Marks and Pensacola and arrested, tried, and executed two British nationals whom he charged with abetting the Indians. Foreign diplomats and some congressmen demanded that Jackson be repudiated and punished for his unauthorized invasion, but at the urging of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, President James Monroe stood firm. Whether anticipated by the administration or not, Jackson's action served American ends of nudging Spain to cede Florida in an 1819 treaty. A private controversy smoldered for years between Jackson, Monroe, and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun over whether Jackson had in fact exceeded orders. It finally broke open in 1831, contributing to a political rupture between then-president Jackson and his vice-president Calhoun.

Jackson resigned his army commission and was appointed governor of the new Florida Territory in 1821. He presided over the transfer of authority from the Spanish, then resigned and came home to Tennessee, where his friends were planning to promote him for the presidency in 1824.

## CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

### **1824**

The Virginia presidential dynasty was coming to an end with the second term of James Monroe. Three seasoned members of his Cabinet vied for the succession: Secretary of State John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, Secretary of the Treasury William Harris Crawford of Georgia, and Secretary of War John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Henry Clay of Kentucky, the brilliant Speaker of the House of Representatives and a rival of Jackson's for popularity in the new western states, was also an aspirant.

Compared to these men, Jackson had scanty qualifications as a statesman, with only brief and undistinguished service in Congress and as a territorial governor. Where all presidents since Washington had served extensive administrative and diplomatic apprenticeships, Jackson had never held a Cabinet post or even been abroad. He

spoke no foreign languages and wrote even English roughly. On the other hand, his heroics as a general had a far greater hold on the public imagination than the governmental experience of his competitors.

All five men were Jeffersonian Democratic-Republicans, but in the absence of organized opposition party affiliation had ceased to be much of a political marker. In past years, Jeffersonians had selected their presidential candidate through a congressional party caucus. Held in Washington where congressmen were gathered anyway, the caucus was a convenient mechanism to unite the party against the Federalist foe. But the withering of Federalism after the War of 1812 had undercut its rationale. Once seen as a necessary device for ensuring victory, the caucus now seemed a gratuitous intrusion upon the popular will, a means to deprive the voters of any meaningful choice at the polls. A poorly attended caucus nominated Crawford in 1824, but his consequent image as the insider's choice rather harmed than helped his chances. Other candidacies were put in play by various means. The Tennessee legislature nominated Jackson for the presidency in 1822 and, to burnish his credentials, elected him to the Senate the next year.

There was no organized national presidential campaign in 1824. Candidacies built on a regional base: Adams was the favorite in New England, Jackson in the Southwest, Clay in the Ohio valley, Crawford in his native Virginia. Calhoun dropped out, settling for the vice-presidency on the Adams and Jackson tickets. Following tradition, the candidates did not actively seek votes or make promises. Jackson and Adams were generally understood to support the current Monroe administration, Crawford (despite his Cabinet post) and Clay to oppose it.

Many political professionals, especially Clay, did not take Jackson's candidacy entirely seriously at first. The returns showed their mistake. He proved to be the only aspirant with a truly national popular following. Along with the entire Southwest, Jackson carried Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and the Carolinas, for a total of eleven states out of twenty-four. He led the field with 43% of the popular vote and 99 electoral votes, less than a majority. Adams ran second, with 84 electoral votes. Crawford had 41, Clay 37.

Since no candidate had a majority in the electoral college, under the Twelfth Amendment to the constitution the choice between the top three now fell to the House of Representatives, where each state delegation cast one vote. Speaker Clay, out of the running, announced his support for Adams, warning that Jackson was a mere "military chieftain" unfit by training or temperament for the presidency. With his aid, Adams drew the votes of thirteen states, a majority, on the first ballot in the House. Promptly Adams named Clay as Secretary of State, the traditional stepping-stone to the presidency. Jackson swore that a "corrupt bargain" had swindled him out of the office. Promptly he began to gird for a rematch in 1828.

## **1828**

The four years of John Quincy Adams's administration constituted one long,

acrimonious, and in the end one-sided presidential campaign. Determined not to be paralyzed by his status as a minority president, Adams overreached with controversial policy initiatives. He threw his support behind the "American System," Henry Clay's program of congressional aid to economic development through transportation subsidies and protective tariffs. Adams's activism backfired, as Jackson and his publicists mounted a cry to clean out the corruptionists and restore purity and economy in government. Major constituencies swung behind Jackson: Vice-President Calhoun and his South Carolina following, Crawfordites shepherded by Martin Van Buren of New York, and disaffected Clay men in the west led by Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri-- Jackson's former Tennessee antagonist, now a political ally.

This diffuse coalition included both friends and foes of the American System. To break it, Adams men tried to smoke out Jackson's position. Jackson refused to be pinned down, while his followers fended off questions about his qualifications and experience by touting his battlefield exploits, indomitable patriotism, and opposition to aristocracy and corruption. A good deal of mud was slung on both sides, much of it aimed at Jackson's marriage, his violent escapades, and the incidents of ferocious discipline and of disrespect for civilian authority that dotted his military career. Adams men painted him as a grasping and bloodthirsty character, a budding tyrant in the model of Caesar or Napoleon, whose election would spell the death of the republic. Jacksonians branded Adams as a corruptionist, an aristocrat, and--ridiculously--a libertine.

In the end, none of the slanders could touch Jackson's invincible popularity. He won easily in 1828, with 56% of the vote and 178 electoral votes to Adams's 83. Jackson carried New York and Pennsylvania as well as the entire West and South. He was the first president elected from west of the Appalachians and, at that time, the oldest man to assume the office. But his victory was touched with grief. As if in response to the torrent of abuse, Rachel sickened and died on December 22.

## **1832**

Jackson stood for re-election in 1832. By this time he had come out publicly against the American System. He had also created a new issue by vetoing the recharter of the Bank of the United States. The American System men, now calling themselves National Republicans, nominated Henry Clay. A third party also took the field: the quixotic Anti-Masonic Party, formed in reaction to exposures of political favoritism and corruption by members of the fraternal order of Freemasons. Strong in some northern states, the Anti-Masons nominated former attorney general William Wirt. They were generally anti-Jackson, but thoughts of uniting with the National Republicans collapsed when Clay refused to denounce the Masonic order, of which both he and Jackson were members.

The 1832 campaign introduced the national nominating convention in place of the old discredited congressional caucus as a means of selecting a candidate. The National Republicans and Anti-Masons held conventions and adopted formal addresses to the public. Jackson's followers, popularly though not yet officially known as Democrats, met

in Baltimore to endorse Jackson's choice of Martin Van Buren for Vice-President. To show their unanimity, they also adopted a rule requiring a two-thirds vote for nomination--a rule that would later deprive Van Buren of the Democratic presidential nomination in 1844.

Despite the new issues and innovations in party organization, the election was essentially a replay of 1828. Jackson again carried Pennsylvania, New York, and nearly the entire South. He defeated Clay handily, with 55% of the popular vote and 219 electoral votes to the latter's 49. Jackson read his victory as a popular ratification of his policies, especially the Bank veto. Opponents chalked it up to his untouchable personal popularity.

## DOMESTIC POLICY

### **Rotation in Office and the Spoils System**

Jackson entered the White House with an uncertain policy agenda beyond a vague craving for "reform" (or revenge) and a determination to settle relationships between the states and the Indian tribes within their borders. On these two matters he moved quickly and decisively.

During the campaign, Jackson had charged the Adams bureaucracy with fraud and with working against his election. As president, he initiated sweeping removals among highranking government officials--the Washington bureau chiefs, land and customs officers, and federal marshals and attorneys. Jackson claimed to be purging the corruption, laxity, and arrogance that came with long tenure, and restoring the opportunity for government service to the citizenry at large through "rotation in office." But haste and gullibility did much to confuse his purpose. Under the guise of reform, many offices were doled out as rewards for political services. Newspaper editors who had championed Jackson's cause, some of them very unsavory characters, came in for special favor. His most appalling appointee was an old army comrade and political sycophant named Samuel Swartwout. Against all advice, Jackson made him collector of the New York City customhouse, where the government collected nearly half its annual revenue. Swartwout absconded with more than \$1 million--a staggering sum for that day--in 1838.

Jackson denied that political criteria motivated his appointments, claiming honesty and efficiency as his only goals. Yet he accepted an officeholder's support for Adams as evidence of unfitness, and in choosing replacements he relied exclusively on recommendations from his own partisans. A Jackson senator from New York, William L. Marcy, defended Jackson's removals by proclaiming frankly in 1832 that in politics as in war, "to the victor belong the spoils of the enemy." Jackson was never so candid--or so cynical. Creating the "spoils system" of partisan manipulation of the patronage was not his conscious intention. Still, it was his doing.

## Indian Removal

Indian nations had been largely erased or removed from the northeastern United States by the time Jackson became president. But in the southwest, the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Creeks still occupied large portions of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. For many years, Jackson had protested the practice of treating with Indian tribes as if they were foreign nations. Jackson did not hate Indians as a race. He was friendly with many individual Indians, and had taken home an Indian orphan from the Creek campaign to raise in his household as a companion to his adopted son. But Jackson did believe that Indian civilization was lower than whites', and that for their own survival tribes who were pressed by white settlement must assimilate as individuals or remove to the west out of harm's way. Confident that he could judge the Indians' true welfare better than they, Jackson when employed as an Indian negotiator in his army years had often used threats and bribery to procure cessions of land. Formalities notwithstanding, he regarded tribes resident within the states not as independent sovereign entities but as wards of the government and tenants-at-will.

The inherent conflict between tribal and state authority came to a head just as Jackson assumed office. The Cherokee nation had acquired many of the attributes of white civilization, including a written language, a newspaper, and a constitution of government. Under its treaties with the federal government, the tribe claimed sovereign authority over its territory in Georgia and adjoining states. Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi countered by asserting state jurisdiction over their Indian domains.

Jackson backed the states. He maintained that the federal government had no right to defend the Cherokees against Georgia's encroachments. If the Indians wished to maintain their tribal government and landownership, they must remove beyond the existing states. To facilitate the removal, Jackson induced Congress in 1830 to pass a bill empowering him to lay off new Indian homelands west of the Mississippi, exchange them for current tribal holdings, purchase the Indians' capital improvements, and pay the costs of their westward transportation. This Indian Removal Act was the only major piece of legislation passed at Jackson's behest in his eight years as president.

Indian removal was so important to Jackson that he returned to Tennessee to conduct the first negotiations in person. He gave the Indians a simple alternative: submit to state authority or emigrate beyond the Mississippi. Offered generous aid on one hand and the threat of subjugation on the other, the Chickasaws and Choctaws submitted readily, the Creeks under duress. Only the Cherokees resisted to the bitter end. Tentatively in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* in 1831 and more forcefully in *Worcester v. Georgia* the next year, the Supreme Court upheld the tribes' independence from state authority. But these legal victories pointed out no practical course of resistance for the tribe to take. Tacitly encouraged by Jackson, Georgia ignored the rulings. Jackson cultivated a minority faction within the tribe, and signed a removal treaty with them in 1835. Though the vast majority of Cherokees rejected the treaty, those who refused to remove under its terms were finally rounded up and transplanted westward by military

force in 1838, under Jackson's successor Martin Van Buren. The Cherokees' sufferings in this forced exodus became notorious as the "Trail of Tears."

Meanwhile, dozens of removal treaties closed out pockets of Indian settlement in other states and territories east of the Mississippi. A short military campaign on the upper Mississippi quelled resistance by Black Hawk's band of Sacs and Foxes in 1832, and in 1835 a long and bloody war to subdue the Seminoles in Florida began. Most of the tribes went without force.

Given the coercion that produced them, most of the removal treaties were fair and even generous. Their execution was miserable. Generally the treaties promised fair payment for the Indians' land and goods, safe transportation to the West and sustenance upon arrival, and protection for the property of those who chose to remain behind under state jurisdiction. These safeguards collapsed under pressure from corrupt contractors, unscrupulous traders, and white trespassers backed by state authority. Jackson's desire to economize and avoid trouble with the state governments further undercut federal efforts to protect the tribes. For this record he bore ultimate responsibility. Jackson did not countenance the abuses, but he did ignore them. Though usually a stickler for the precise letter of formal obligations, he made promises to the Indians that the government did not and perhaps could not fulfill.

### **The American System and the Maysville Road Veto**

When Jackson took office, the leading controversies in Congress concerned the "American System" of economic development policies propounded by Henry Clay and furthered by the previous Adams administration. As a senator in 1824, Jackson had backed the System's twin pillars of a protective tariff to foster domestic industry and federal subsidies for transportation projects (known as "internal improvements"). These policies were especially popular in the country's mid-section, from Pennsylvania west through Ohio to Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri. They were widely hated in much of the South, where they were regarded as devices to siphon wealth from cotton planters to northern manufacturers.

Many Americans judged the American System by its impact on their local interests. Jackson had supported it on national grounds, as a means to build the country's strength and secure its economic independence. Poor transportation in particular had hamstrung the American military effort in the War of 1812. But the unseeemly scramble in Congress for favors and subsidies and the rising sectional acrimony over the tariff during the Adams presidency turned Jackson against the System. As a nationalist, he deplored sectional wrangling that threatened disunion, and he came to see protective tariffs and transportation subsidies as vehicles for corruption and for the advancement of special privilege.

Jackson announced his new policy by vetoing a bill to aid the Maysville Road in Kentucky in 1830. A string of similar vetoes followed, essentially halting federal internal improvement spending. Reversing himself on the tariff, Jackson renounced protection

in 1831 and endorsed a reduction in rates. Invoking Jeffersonian precedent, he urged a return to simple, frugal, minimal government.

At the same time, Jackson reproved the increasingly strident Southern sectional opposition to the tariff headed by his own Vice-President, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Radical South Carolinians blamed the tariff for all their economic woes and misfortunes. They denounced it as an unconstitutional exercise of congressional power, a measure to illegitimately channel wealth from South to North under the guise of an import tax. Drawing on the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions against the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798, Calhoun fashioned an argument that an individual state, acting through a formal convention, could interpose its authority to declare null and void any federal law that it deemed to violate the constitution. Jackson thought this nullification doctrine treasonous and absurd. At a political dinner in 1830 he stamped his disapproval on it by staring at Calhoun and toasting, "Our federal Union: *It must be preserved.*"

### **The Eaton Affair**

Jackson was already becoming estranged from Calhoun over a simmering Washington scandal. Jackson's Secretary of War, John Henry Eaton, was an old army comrade of Jackson's, his campaign biographer, and Tennessee neighbor. He was the president's one personal confidant in a Cabinet made up of near-strangers. Just before the inauguration, Eaton had married Margaret O'Neale Timberlake, the vivacious daughter of a Washington hotelier. Scandalous stories circulated about "Peggy" O'Neale, whose first husband, a purser in the navy, had died abroad under mysterious circumstances not long before her marriage to Eaton. Rumor said that he committed suicide over her dalliance with Eaton. Cabinet wives, including Calhoun's wife Floride, regarded Peggy with abhorrence and conspicuously shunned her.

In the snubbing of Mrs. Eaton, Jackson saw the kind of vicious persecution that he believed had hounded his own Rachel to her death. He also believed he spied a plot to drive out Eaton from his Cabinet, isolate him among strangers, and control his administration. The master of the plot, Jackson came to decide, was Calhoun. He was also shown evidence that during the controversy over his Florida incursion back in 1818, Calhoun had criticized him in Monroe's Cabinet while publicly posturing as his defender. Jackson now accused Calhoun of treachery, initiating an angry correspondence that ended with the severing of social relations between the two.

The Eaton scandal cleaved Jackson's own household. His niece, White House hostess Emily Tennessee Donelson, refused to associate with Mrs. Eaton, and Emily's husband, Jackson's nephew and private secretary Andrew Jackson Donelson, backed her up. The one Cabinet officer who stood apart from the snubbing was a man with no wife to contend with--Secretary of State Martin Van Buren of New York, a widower. Jackson was drawn to Van Buren both by his courtliness to Peggy Eaton and his policy views. Van Buren wished to return to the minimalist, strict constructionist governing philosophy of the old Jeffersonian party. In practical political terms, he sought to rebuild the

coalition of "planters and plain republicans"--put concretely, an alliance of the South with New York and Pennsylvania--that had sustained Jefferson. Van Buren opposed the American System, but on broad philosophical rather than narrow sectional grounds.

As Jackson separated from Calhoun, he became more intimate with Van Buren. By 1831 the Eaton imbroglio threatened to paralyze the administration. Eaton and Van Buren created a way out: they resigned, giving Jackson an occasion to demand the resignations of the other secretaries and appoint a whole new Cabinet. To reward Van Buren, Jackson named him as minister to Great Britain, the highest post in the American diplomatic service. The nomination came before the Senate, where Vice-President Calhoun, on an arranged tie vote, cast the deciding vote against it. Van Buren, who had already assumed his station abroad, came home as a political martyr, Jackson's choice for vice-president in 1832, and his heir apparent to the presidency.

### **The Nullification Crisis and the Compromise of 1833**

As Van Buren rose and Calhoun fell, the tariff controversy mounted to a crisis. In 1832 Congress passed a new tariff that reduced some rates but continued the protectionist principle. Some Southerners claimed this as a sign of progress, but South Carolinians saw it as reason to abandon hope from Washington. In November, a state convention declared the tariff unconstitutional and hence null and void. South Carolina's legislature followed up with measures to block the collection of federal custom revenues at the state's ports and to defend the state with arms against federal incursion.

Jackson responded on two fronts. He urged Congress to reduce the tariff further, but he also asked for strengthened authority to enforce the revenue laws. Privately, and perhaps for calculated political effect, he talked about marching an army into South Carolina and hanging Calhoun. In December he issued a ringing official proclamation against nullification. Drafted largely by Secretary of State Edward Livingston, the document questioned Carolinians' obsession with the tariff, reminded them of their patriotic heritage, eviscerated the constitutional theory behind nullification, and warned against taking this fatal step: "Be not deceived by names. Disunion by armed force is *treason*. Are you really ready to incur its guilt?"

While Jackson thundered, Congress scrambled for a solution that would avoid civil war. Henry Clay, leader of the congressional opposition to Jackson and stalwart of the American System, joined in odd alliance with John C. Calhoun, who had resigned his lame-duck vice-presidency for a seat in the Senate. They fashioned a bill to reduce the tariff in a series of stages over nine years. Early in 1833 Congress passed this Compromise Tariff and also a "force bill" to enforce the revenue laws. Though the Clay-Calhoun forces sought to deny Jackson credit for the settlement, he was fully satisfied with the result. South Carolina, claiming victory, rescinded its nullification of the tariff but nullified the force bill in a final gesture of principled defiance. The Compromise of 1833 brought an end to tariff agitation until the 1840s. First with internal improvements, then with the tariff, the American System had been essentially stymied.

## The Bank Veto

The congressional Clay-Calhoun alliance foreshadowed a convergence of all Jackson's enemies into a new opposition party. The issue that sealed this coalition, solidified Jackson's own following, and dominated his second term as president was the Second Bank of the United States.

The Bank of the United States was a quasi-public corporation chartered by Congress to manage the federal government's finances and provide a sound national currency. Headquartered in Philadelphia with branches throughout the states, it was the country's only truly national financial institution. The federal government owned one-fifth of the stock and the President of the United States appointed one-fifth of the directors. Like other banks chartered by state legislatures, the Bank lent for profit and issued paper currency backed by specie reserves. Its notes were federal legal tender. By law, it was also the federal government's own banker, arranging its loans and storing, transferring, and disbursing its funds. The Bank's national reach and official status gave it enormous leverage over the state banks and over the country's supply of money and credit.

The original Bank of the United States was chartered in 1791 at the urging of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. Opposition to it was one of the founding tenets of the Jeffersonian Democratic-Republican party. That party, then in power, allowed the Bank to expire when its twenty-year charter ran out in 1811. But the government's financial misadventures in the War of 1812 forced a reconsideration. In 1816 Congress chartered the Second Bank, again for twenty years.

Imprudent lending and corrupt management brought the Second Bank into deep disrepute during the speculative boom-and-bust cycle that culminated in the Panic of 1819. Calls arose for revocation of the charter. But the astute stewardship of new Bank president Nicholas Biddle did much to repair its reputation in the 1820s. By 1828, when Jackson was first elected, the Bank had ceased to be controversial. Indeed, most informed observers deemed it indispensable.

Startling his own supporters, Jackson attacked the Bank in his very first message to Congress in 1829. Biddle attempted to conciliate him, but Jackson's opposition to renewing the charter seemed immovable. He was convinced that the Bank was not only unconstitutional--as Jefferson and his followers had long maintained--but that its concentrated financial power represented a dire threat to popular liberty.

Under the advice of Senators Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, Biddle sought a congressional recharter in 1832. They calculated that Jackson would not dare a veto on the eve of the election; if he did, they would make an issue of it in the campaign. The recharter bill duly passed Congress, and on July 10 Jackson vetoed it.

The veto message was one of the defining documents of Jackson's presidency. Clearly intended for the public eye, parts of it read more like a political manifesto than a communication to Congress. Jackson recited his constitutional objections and introduced some dubious economic arguments, chiefly aimed at foreign ownership of

Bank stock. But the crux of the message was its attack on the special privilege enjoyed by private stockholders in a government-chartered corporation. Jackson laid out an essentially laissez-faire vision of government as a neutral arbiter, phrased in a resonant populism:

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society--the farmers, mechanics, and laborers--who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government. There are no necessary evils in government. Its evils exist only in its abuses. If it would confine itself to equal protection, and, as Heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike on the high and the low, the rich and the poor, it would be an unqualified blessing.

Though some original Jackson men were flabbergasted and outraged at his turn against the Bank, the veto held up in Congress. It became the prime issue in the ensuing presidential campaign, with both sides distributing copies of Jackson's message. Jackson read his re-election as a mandate to pursue his attack on the Bank further.

### **Removal of the Deposits**

As soon as the nullification crisis was resolved, Jackson took his next step. The Bank's open involvement in the presidential campaign convinced him more than ever of its inherent corruption. To draw its fangs until its charter ran out in 1836, he determined to withdraw the federal government's own deposits from the Bank and place them in selected state-chartered banks.

This was a maneuver requiring some delicacy. Under the charter, the Secretary of the Treasury, not the President, had authority to remove the deposits. He had also to explain his reasons to Congress, where the House of Representatives had just voted by a two-to-one margin that the deposits should stay where they were. Jackson canvassed his Cabinet on removal. Most of them opposed it, but he got the support and arguments he needed from Attorney General Roger Taney. Jackson drew up a paper explaining his decision, read it to the Cabinet, and ordered Treasury Secretary William John Duane to execute the removal. To Jackson's astonishment, Duane refused. He also refused to resign, so Jackson fired him and put Taney in his place. Taney ordered the removal, which was largely complete by the time Congress convened in December 1833.

Even many congressional foes of the Bank could not countenance Jackson's

proceedings against it. He had defied Congress's intent, rode roughshod over the Treasury Secretary's statutory control over the public purse, and removed the public funds from the lawfully authorized, responsible hands of the Bank of the United States to an untried, unregulated, and perhaps wholly irresponsible collection of state banks. To many, Jackson seemed to regard himself as above the law.

Fortunately for Jackson, Bank president Nicholas Biddle over-reacted and played into his hands. Regarding the removal of deposits as a declaration of open war, Biddle determined to force a recharter by creating a financial panic. Loss of the deposits required some curtailment of the Bank's loans, but Biddle carried the contraction further than was necessary in a deliberate effort to squeeze businessmen into demanding a recharter. This manipulation of credit for political ends served only to discredit the Bank and to vindicate Jackson's strictures against it.

Congress did not even consider recharter, but it did lash out at Jackson. Clay men and Southern anti-tariffites could not agree on the American System; they could not all agree on rechartering the Bank; but they could unite in their outrage at Jackson's high-handed proceedings against it. In the 1833-1834 session, Jackson's congressional foes converged to form a new party. They took the name of Whigs, borrowed from Revolutionary-era American and British opponents of royal prerogative.

Whigs held a majority in the Senate. They rejected Jackson's nominees for government directors of the Bank of the United States, rejected Taney as Secretary of the Treasury, and in March 1834 adopted a resolution of censure against Jackson himself for assuming "authority and power not conferred by the Constitution and laws, but in derogation of both." Jackson protested the censure, arguing that the Senate had adopted the moral equivalent of an impeachment conviction without formal charges, without a trial, and without the necessary two-thirds vote. Led by Thomas Hart Benton, Jackson's defenders mounted a crusade to expunge the censure from the Senate journal. They succeeded in 1837, at the end of Jackson's presidency, after Democrats finally won majority control of the Senate.

## **Hard Money**

The Bank, defeated, retired from the fray after the 1834 session. When its charter expired it accepted a new one from Pennsylvania and continued to operate as a state institution. Meanwhile the state banks, cut loose from central restraint and gorged with federal funds, went on a lending spree that helped fuel a speculative boom in western lands. Everything came crashing down in the Panic of 1837, which broke just as Jackson retired from office. The ensuing depression plagued Martin Van Buren's presidency and lingered on into the 1840s.

Jackson's unsatisfactory experiment with the state banks helped drive his economic thinking toward more radical extremes. He renounced all banknote currency and demanded a return to the "hard money" of gold and silver. To that end, and to curb rampant speculation, he ordered the issuance of a "Specie Circular" in 1836 requiring

payment in coin for western public lands. By the end of his presidency he was attacking all chartered corporations, including manufacturing concerns, turnpike and canal companies, and especially banks, as instruments of aristocratic privilege and engines of oppression. His Farewell Address in 1837, largely drafted by Taney, warned of an insidious "money power" that threatened to subvert American liberty.

## **Slavery and Abolition**

During Jackson's presidency, the momentous question of slavery intruded forcefully into politics. Northern evangelical opponents of slavery known as abolitionists organized and began to bombard the nation and Congress with pleas and petitions to rid the republic of this great wrong. Defenders of slavery responded with denunciations and with violence. They demanded in the interest of public safety that criticism of slavery be not only answered, but silenced. Some, especially the South Carolina nullifiers, linked abolitionism to the tariff as part of a systematic campaign of Northern sectional oppression against the South.

There is nothing to show that Jackson ever pondered slavery as a fundamental moral question. Such thinking was not in his character: he was a man of action, not of philosophy. He grew up with the institution of slavery and accepted it uncritically. Like his neighbors, he bought and sold slaves and used them to work his plantation and wait on his needs. Jackson reacted to the abolitionist controversy in purely political terms. He perceived it as a threat to sectional harmony and to his own national Democratic party, and on that ground he condemned the agitation of both sides.

During Jackson's administration, Congress began adopting annual "gag rules" to keep discussion of abolition petitions off the House and Senate floor. In 1835, abolitionists sent thousands of antislavery tracts through the mails directly to southern clergy, officials, and prominent citizens. Many of these were never delivered, intercepted by southern postmasters or by angry mobs. Jackson and Postmaster General Amos Kendall approved their action. Jackson recommended federal suppression of "incendiary publications" and damned the abolitionists' "wicked attempts" to incite a slave rebellion. His Farewell Address in 1837 warned of the dangers of sectional fanaticism, both northern and southern.

## **FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Generally, foreign affairs were not a prominent concern of Jackson's administration. His agents negotiated a number of treaties to secure foreign trade openings and settle outstanding damage claims. Of these, only an agreement with Britain over the West Indies trade, which Jackson reached by repudiating the demands of the previous Adams administration, was in any way controversial.

Late in Jackson's presidency, however, an unseemly dispute with France nearly brought the two nations to the brink of war. In an 1831 treaty, France agreed to pay claims for

Napoleonic depredations on American shipping. But the French Chamber of Deputies refused to appropriate the necessary funds. Jackson finally lost patience and asked Congress to authorize reprisals if the money was not paid. The French government then demanded retraction of this insult as a condition of payment. Jackson responded in effect that what he said to Congress was none of a foreign government's business. The impasse deepened through 1835: ministers were recalled and military preparations begun. Finally, under British urgings, the French agreed to construe a conciliatory passage in a later message of Jackson's as sufficient apology. France paid the debt and the crisis passed without repercussions.

The same could not be said of Jackson's dealings with Mexico. Jackson craved the Mexican border province of Texas for the United States, and he made its purchase the first priority of his presidential diplomacy. Given the instability of Mexico's government and its suspicions of American designs, a Texas negotiation required great discretion and patience. Jackson's chosen agent, Anthony Butler, possessed neither of those qualities, and Jackson's own careless instructions encouraged Butler's clumsy dabbling in the diplomatic underworld of bribery and personal influence. His machinations, combined with the flow of American settlers into Texas, aroused Mexican apprehensions of American designs there. In 1835, American emigrants to Texas led by Jackson's old Tennessee comrade Sam Houston mounted a successful revolt against Mexico and declared their independence. Jackson prudently declined to endorse American annexation of Texas or even to recognize the new republic without prior congressional approval. Still, his earlier inept efforts to buy the province helped sow seeds of mutual distrust that would bear fruit in war between the United States and Mexico a decade later.

## LIFE AFTER THE PRESIDENCY

Throughout Jackson's presidency, he yearned for a quiet retirement at The Hermitage, but when the time for it came he found that he could not let go of politics. He yearned to see his policies carried through and his reputation vindicated. Martin Van Buren, his handpicked successor as president, had become his closest political confidant. Throughout Van Buren's term Jackson peppered him with advice, exhortations, and warnings. He summoned all of his failing energies in behalf of Van Buren's Independent Treasury financial plan and his unsuccessful reelection bid in 1840.

William Henry Harrison's defeat of Van Buren staggered Jackson, but he soon found cause for rejoicing in Harrison's sudden death and the reversion of his successor John Tyler to Democratic policies on banking and the tariff. To his great satisfaction, Jackson's influence was again enlisted, this time in support of the annexation of Texas. Jackson backed annexation with enthusiasm. When Van Buren declared against it, Jackson helped start the movement to jettison him in favor of Tennessean James K. Polk for the 1844 Democratic nomination. Jackson lived long enough to see his loyal disciple Polk installed in the presidency to carry on his work.

Honors and tributes enriched Jackson's retirement. He was the living symbol of democracy, and an endless parade of admirers trekked to The Hermitage to do him homage. Jackson accepted public tributes with an air of diffident humility, but he seemingly never tired of them. In 1840 he dragged himself to New Orleans for a twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of his great triumph. Conscious of his importance and jealous of his reputation, Jackson spent much time arranging his papers and making preparations for Amos Kendall's projected biography.

Gradually the weight of age and illness bore down on Jackson. His health had been precarious for many years, yet he had recovered from the brink so many times that friends half-seriously questioned his mortality. Jackson knew better. He had long anticipated death, and faced it without fear. He died at The Hermitage on June 8, 1845, surrounded by family and friends, and was buried in his garden next to Rachel.

## FAMILY LIFE

As a refuge from his turbulent military and political career, Jackson craved the comfort and security of a family circle. His close blood relations all died before he turned fifteen, but his marriage to Rachel gave him a surrogate family in the huge Donelson clan. Jackson looked out for his many nephews, stood surety for them, gave them advice, and furthered their careers. One of these young men, Andrew Jackson Donelson, went to West Point and became Jackson's military aide and later presidential private secretary, while his wife and first cousin, Emily Tennessee Donelson, served as Jackson's White House hostess.

Jackson's home life with Rachel at The Hermitage had been happy and utterly conventional. Her death just after the 1828 election staggered Jackson. He entered the White House as a bereaved widower and continued to grieve for Rachel through the remainder of his life. The one great disappointment in their marriage had been that it was childless. In 1809 they had adopted at birth a son of Rachel's brother Severn Donelson, whom they named Andrew Jackson, Jr., and raised as their son. He, his wife Sarah Yorke Jackson, and their children kept Jackson company at The Hermitage in his declining years.

## IMPACT AND LEGACY

Andrew Jackson left a permanent imprint upon American politics and the presidency. Within eight years, he melded the amorphous coalition of personal followers who had elected him into the country's most durable and successful political party, an electoral machine whose organization and discipline would serve as a model for all others. At the same time, his controversial conduct in office galvanized opponents to organize the Whig party. The Democratic party was Jackson's child; the national two-party system was his legacy.

Jackson's drive for party organization was spurred by his own difficulties with Congress. Unlike other famously strong presidents, Jackson defined himself not by enacting a legislative program but by thwarting one. In eight years, Congress passed only one major law, the Indian Removal Act of 1830, at his behest. During this time Jackson vetoed twelve bills, more than his six predecessors combined. One of these was the first "pocket veto" in American history. The Maysville Road and Bank vetoes stood as enduring statements of his political philosophy.

Jackson strengthened himself against Congress by forging direct links with the voters. His official messages, though delivered to Congress, spoke in plain and powerful language to the people at large. Reversing a tradition of executive deference to legislative supremacy, Jackson boldly cast himself as the people's tribune, their sole defender against special interests and their minions in Congress. In other ways too, Jackson expanded the scope of presidential authority. He dominated his Cabinet, forcing out members who would not execute his commands. In two terms he went through four secretaries of State and five of the Treasury. Holding his official subordinates at arm's length, Jackson devised and implemented his policies through a private coterie of advisers and publicists known as the "Kitchen Cabinet." His bold initiatives and domineering style caused opponents to call him King Andrew, and to take the name of Whigs to signify their opposition to executive tyranny.

Jackson was no deep thinker, but his matured policy positions did bespeak a coherent political philosophy. Like Jefferson, he believed republican government should be simple, frugal, and accessible. He cherished the extinction of the national debt during his administration as a personal triumph. Believing that social cleavages and inequities were fostered rather than ameliorated by governmental intervention, he embraced laissez faire as the policy most conducive to economic equality and political liberty.

Jackson was both a fiery patriot and a strident partisan. Regarding the national union as indivisible and perpetual, he denounced nullification and secession while reprobating policies like the tariff which fostered sectional divisiveness. His aggressive Indian removal policy and his espousal of cheaper western land prices reflected his nationalism's grounding in the southwestern frontier.

Jackson's powerful personality played an instrumental role in his presidency. He indulged in violent hatreds, and the extent to which his political positions reflected mere personal animus is still debated. Jackson demonized many of those who crossed him, including John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, Bank of the United States president Nicholas Biddle, and Cherokee Indian chief John Ross. Jackson's own character polarized contemporaries and continues to divide historians. Some praise his strength and audacity; others see him as vengeful and self-obsessed. To admirers he stands as a shining symbol of American accomplishment, the ultimate individualist and democrat. To detractors he appears an incipient tyrant, the closest we have yet come to an American Caesar.

THE AMERICAN FRANCHISE

The party that Andrew Jackson founded during his presidency called itself the American Democracy. In those same years, changes in electoral rules and campaign styles were making the country's political ethos more democratic than it had been before. Both circumstances combined to fix the identity of this era in Americans' historical memory as the age of Jacksonian Democracy.

The currency of this label began with contemporaries. In 1831-1832, the Frenchman Alexis de Toqueville toured the United States. His classic *Democracy in America* identified democracy and equality as salient national traits. Tocqueville saw America as "the image of democracy itself, with its inclinations, its character, its prejudices, and its passions." To Tocqueville and other visitors, both favorable and critical, the United States represented the democratic, egalitarian future; Europe the aristocratic past. Not surprisingly, Andrew Jackson's partisans (and some sympathetic historians) were eager to appropriate this identity exclusively to themselves, counterposing their Democracy's democracy to the opposing Whig party's "aristocracy." This identification, however, should not be accepted uncritically.

### **The Jacksonian Democratic Party**

The Democratic party and its program emerged in stages out of the largely personal following that had elected Andrew Jackson president in 1828. As progressively defined by Jackson during his two terms, the party's outlook was essentially laissez faire. Anointing themselves as Thomas Jefferson's true heirs, Democrats stood for simple, frugal, and unintrusive government. They opposed government spending and government favoritism, especially in the form of corporate charters for banks and other enterprises. They claimed that all such measures invariably aided the rich, the privileged, and the idle--the aristocracy--against the humble yet meritorious ordinary working people.

Again following Jefferson, the Democracy espoused anticlericalism and rigorous separation of church and state. At a time of great evangelical fervor, Democrats stood aloof from the nation's powerful interdenominational (but primarily Presbyterian-Congregational) benevolent and philanthropic associations; and they denounced the intrusion into politics of religious crusades such as Sabbatarianism, temperance, and abolitionism. Democrats thus garnered adherents among religious dissenters and minorities, from Catholics to freethinkers.

Under Jackson and his successor Van Buren, Democrats pioneered in techniques of party organization and discipline, which they justified as a means of securing popular ascendancy over the aristocrats. To nominate candidates and adopt platforms, Democrats perfected a pyramidal structure of local, state, and national committees, caucuses, and conventions. These ensured coordinated action and supposedly reflected opinion at the grass roots, though their movements in fact were often directed from Washington. The "spoils system" of government patronage inaugurated by Jackson inspired activity and instilled discipline within party ranks.

Jackson and the Democrats cast their party as the embodiment of the people's will, the defender of the common man against the Whig "aristocracy." The substance behind this claim is still in dispute. After the War of 1812, constitutional changes in the states had broadened the participatory base of politics by erasing traditional property requirements for suffrage and by making state offices and presidential electors popularly elective. By the time Jackson was elected, nearly all white men could vote, and the vote had gained in power. In 1812 only half the states chose presidential electors by popular vote; by 1832, all did except South Carolina. Jackson and the Democrats benefitted from and capitalized upon these changes, but in no sense did they initiate them.

The presence of a class component in Jacksonian parties, setting Democratic plain farmers and workers against the Whig bourgeoisie or business elite, is argued to this day. One can read Democratic hosannas to the plain people as a literal description of their constituency or as artful propaganda. Once the popular Jackson left the scene, the two parties were very nearly equal in their bases of popular support. Presidential elections through the 1840s were among the closest in history, while party control of Congress passed back and forth.

Close competition and nearly universal white-male suffrage turned political campaigns into a combination of spectator sport and participatory street theater. Whigs as well as Democrats championed the common man and marshaled the masses at barbecues and rallies. Both parties appealed to ordinary voters with riveting stump speeches and by crafting candidates into folk heroes. Whigs answered the popularity of "Old Hickory" Andrew Jackson, hero of New Orleans, with figures like "Old Tippecanoe" William Henry Harrison, victor of the rousing "log cabin" presidential campaign of 1840. With both parties chasing every vote, turnout rates spiraled up toward 80 per cent of the eligible electorate by 1840.

### **The Democratic Spirit of the Age**

Looking beyond the white male electorate, many of the Democrats' postures seem profoundly anti-egalitarian and anti-democratic, judged not only by a modern standard but against the goals of the burgeoning humanitarian and reform movements of that time. On the whole, Democrats were more aggressively anti-abolitionist than Whigs, and they generally outdid them in justifying and promoting ethnic, racial, and sexual exclusion and subordination. Jackson's original political base had been in the South. In the 1830s and 1840s the two parties competed on nearly even terms throughout the country, but in the next decade the Democracy would return to its sectional roots as the party of slaveholders and their northern sympathizers.

Yet even if Jackson's Democrats had no exclusive hold on democratic principles, they still partook of the spirit of a democratic age. As Tocqueville famously observed, "the people reign in the American political world as the Deity does in the universe. They are the cause and the aim of all things; everything comes from them, and everything is

absorbed in them." To Tocqueville, Americans' energetic voluntarism, their enthusiasm for societies, associations, reforms, and crusades, their vibrant institutions of local government, the popular style and leveling spirit of their manners, customs, pastimes, art, literature, science, religion, and intellect, all marked democracy's pervasive reign.

From this perspective, the fact that Andrew Jackson--a rough-hewn, poorly educated, self-made frontiersman--could ascend to the presidency mattered more than the policies he embraced. His rhetorical championship of the plain people against the aristocrats, whatever its substance or sincerity, was itself the sign and harbinger of a massive social shift toward democracy, equality, and the primacy of the common man. Jackson stands in this light not as the leader of a party, but as the symbol for a democratic age.