CHAPTER 9

Jacksonian Democracy

ANTICIPATION/REACTION

Directions: Before you begin reading this chapter, place a check mark beside any of the following seven statements with which you now agree. Use the column entitled “Anticipation.” When you have completed your study of this chapter, come back to this section and place a check mark beside any of the statements with which you then agree. Use the column entitled “Reaction.” Note any variation in the placement of check marks from anticipation to reaction and explain why you changed your mind.

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Andrew Jackson was the first “common man” elected to the presidency.
In the new two party system of the Jacksonian era, the Democrats perpetuated the principles of the Jeffersonian Republicans, while the Whigs perpetuated the principles of the Hamiltonian Federalists.
Most early-nineteenth-century Americans assumed that Native Americans would eventually be assimilated into the mainstream of American life.
Because he was a slave owner, President Jackson sympathized with South Carolina’s Ordinance of Nullification in 1832.
As a westerner, President Jackson sympathized with those who disliked the restrictive credit policies of the national bank.
President Jackson’s war on the national bank caused the Panic of 1837 and the ensuing economic depression.
Presidential election campaigns in the period of 1824-1840 focused on differences over major political and economic issues.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading Chapter 9 you should be able to:

1. Explain why Andrew Jackson was such an unusually popular and influential political leader to his generation.
2. Trace the origins and development of the second party system.
3. List the key political issues of Jackson’s presidency and identify Jackson’s position on each issue.
4. Describe the effects of Jackson’s economic policies.
5. Compare and contrast the principles and policies of the Democrats and Whigs.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

“Democratizing” Politics

The triumph of Jacksonian democracy meant the rise of the “common man” — the belief that every adult white American male was equally competent and politically important. The Jacksonians glorified instinct, ordinariness, and mediocrity, and they detested distinctiveness and servility. In response to these sentiments most states eliminated property qualifications for voting and many more public offices were made elective rather than appointive. Presidential electors now were chosen by popular vote, and presidential candidates were now selected by a national nominating convention. The beginning of the free-school movement and rapid increase in the number of newspapers indicate an effort to improve the knowledge and judgment of ordinary citizens.

In this more democratic environment, officeholders stressed their role as representatives of the people. Campaigning for votes became increasingly important as more “common men” became politically active. Political parties now became more important, bureaucratic, and powerful because it took money, people, and an organized effort to run campaigns. It was the parties’ role to recruit new voters in national elections, frequently by resort to demagoguery.

1828: The New Party System in Embryo

The second party system developed in the 1828 presidential election campaign between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. The campaign quickly degenerated into personal attacks from both sides. Though deplorable, this tactic turned out a record number of voters. Jackson was elected without ever taking a firm and consistent position on any major issue.
The Jacksonian Appeal

When he was elected president, Jackson was a wealthy planter, land speculator, and slaveowner, yet he distrusted entrenched status and all special privilege. But, as a relatively rough-hewn and poorly-educated westerner, Jackson was a perfect symbol of the new democratization of American life. Jackson epitomized many American ideals: the self-made man, patriotism, generosity, morality, tenacity, and equal opportunity. He was both an average and ideal American and was thereby able to draw voters’ support from every section and social class.

The Spoils System

Jackson quickly adopted a system for replacing federal officeholders with his own supporters, a system his supporters called rotation and his opponents derisively dubbed the spoils system. Rotation, which illustrated the Jacksonians’ contempt for expert knowledge and their faith in ordinary Americans, was intended to inhibit the development of an entrenched bureaucracy and allow more citizens to participate in the tasks of government—a democratic concept, but not one calculated to produce efficiency in government. The fact is, most of Jackson’s appointees were not “common men,” but were drawn from the same social and intellectual elite as those they replaced.

President of All the People

Jackson turned to an unofficial Kitchen Cabinet of close friends to advise him. He saw himself as the direct representative of all the people and willingly sought to increase his authority on their behalf. He vetoed more congressional bills than all his predecessors combined. He expanded the powers of the presidency, but, as a Jeffersonian, he favored limiting the powers of the national government. Jackson was a poor administrator, partly as a result of his strong prejudices and contempt for expert advice, but he was a strong and popular leader.

Sectional Tensions Revived

Jackson tried to steer a moderate course through sectional conflicts over tariff, public land, and internal improvements policies. At the time, low-tariff southerners were attempting to forge a sectional alliance with westerners who favored cheap public lands. Daniel Webster rose to defend the protective tariff interests of the northeastern states in the Webster-Hayne debate and, in his second reply to Hayne, he denounced the states’ rights doctrine, defended the Union, and effectively prevented a West-South alliance.
Jackson: “The Bank . . . I Will Kill It!”

Under its president, Nicholas Biddle, the second Bank of the United States was well managed and acted as a central bank, controlling the lending policies of state banks which, if left unregulated, caused inflation and exaggerated the business cycle. The Bank’s stabilizing policies won it many supporters, but it did have opponents—speculators seeking easy credit, hard-money advocates who distrusted paper money from any source, and many state banks that disliked the Bank’s regulating authority. To some it smacked of special privilege because it held a monopoly of public funds, yet was governed by a handful of rich investors.

Jackson’s Bank Veto

Jackson was an opponent of the Bank, a hard money man suspicious of all commercial banking and paper money. Henry Clay and other supporters of the Bank in his National Republican party sought to use the Bank issue to undermine Jackson’s popularity. Congress passed a bill to recharter the Bank in 1832, but Jackson vetoed it. He insisted the Bank was unconstitutional and an undemocratic private monopoly with too many foreign investors. When Jackson won reelection in 1832, he considered it a mandate to destroy the Bank. At Jackson’s request, Treasury Secretary Roger Taney withdrew all government funds from the Bank and deposited them in several politically sympathetic, but financially sound, “pet” state banks.

Jackson Versus Calhoun

John C. Calhoun was Jackson’s first vice president and he hoped to succeed Jackson to the presidency. But the two men were clashing personalities and the Peggy Eaton affair and revelations of Calhoun’s criticism of Jackson’s invasion of Florida in 1818 caused Jackson to question Calhoun’s honor and loyalty. Nevertheless, Calhoun and Jackson were not far apart ideologically; they both believed in government economy, distributing federal treasury surpluses to the states, and limiting the power of the national government, and Jackson, as in the Maysville Road veto, often took the states’ rights view.

Indian Removals

Jackson also was a states’ rightist on Indian policies. He viewed Indians as savages who were incapable of self-government, and who, if they refused to adopt the white man’s ways, could best be dealt with by removal from the path of western settlement. His removal policy led to the government purchase of tribal lands and relocation of the Indians to the Trans-Mississippi West. Many tribes were removed peacefully, but the Sac and Fox and Seminoles resisted and had to be subdued by troops. The Cherokees sought to escape removal by adopting white ways. They established an independent Cherokee Nation within Georgia, though Georgia refused to recognize it. In Worcester v. Georgia the Supreme Court ruled that the state of Georgia had no
constitutional authority to govern the Cherokees. Jackson backed Georgia, who ignored the Court, and thousands of Cherokee were removed along the “Trail of Tears” to the West. Jackson’s defiance of the Court encouraged extreme states’ rights southerners.

The Nullification Crisis

In 1832, southerners were dissatisfied with the new Tariff of 1832, troubled by the rise of antislavery sentiment in the North, and fearful of slave rebellion. They felt that the tariff and slavery issues symbolized the tyranny of a northern majority, and they turned to Calhoun’s doctrine of nullification for defense. South Carolina nullified the 1832 tariff. Jackson’s response to this defiance of federal authority was twofold: He labeled the nullifiers as traitorous and called for military preparations to occupy South Carolina, but he also asked congressional leaders for a downward revision of the tariff. Other southern states did not rally to South Carolina’s defense, and with an invasion threatened, Calhoun and the South Carolinian radicals settled for a compromise tariff that gradually reduced tariff rates. South Carolina withdrew its Nullification Ordinance, and then embarked on a crusade to unify the South behind an extreme states’ rights doctrine.

Boom and Bust

An increase in the nation’s stock of gold and silver specie encouraged the now unregulated state banks to offer easy credit, especially for land speculation. Alarmed by the speculative mania that ensued, Jackson issued the Specie Circular that required public land be paid for in gold or silver (hard money). The paper money-fed land boom ended and banks were forced to suspend specie payments on their paper notes. Jackson’s combative Bank War and his ill-considered Specie Circular contributed to a retraction of the economy.

Jacksonianism Abroad

Jackson was an exaggerated patriot. Nevertheless, his forceful yet unnecessarily blustering diplomatic style finally opened the British West Indies to American merchants and forced France to pay compensation for damages dating back to the Napoleonic wars.

The Jacksonians

By 1836, Jacksonian politics had produced a fairly cohesive Democratic party. Diverse in its make-up, the party loyal nevertheless agreed on some underlying principles: suspicion of special privilege and business monopoly, equal economic opportunity, limited national government, political freedom, and faith in the common man. Democrats generally endorsed states’ rights,
public education, and social equality among whites. However, Jacksonians showed no tendency either to penalize the wealthy or to intervene in economic affairs to aid the underprivileged.

**Rise of the Whigs**

Jackson’s opponents were less cohesive. Clay’s National Republican party was simply anti-Jackson. But, as Jackson’s second term ended his opponents began to coalesce into a new Whig party. It attracted those with a Hamiltonian view of national economic development, those well educated, and fierce Jackson haters. It also attracted extreme states’ righters, and, paradoxically, those who advocated a strong central government. The Whigs also appealed to ordinary people who were frightened by the excesses of individualism in Jacksonian America. But the Whigs’ “favorite son” nominating tactic failed in 1836, and Martin Van Buren succeeded Jackson to the presidency.

**Martin Van Buren: Jacksonianism Without Jackson**

Van Buren was Jackson’s vice president and a devoted Jacksonian Democrat. He opposed the Bank of the United States, favored state-sponsored internal improvements, and equivocated on the tariff. He was preeminently a practical politician. Van Buren took office as the Panic of 1837 began, but recovery was swift. Then, in 1839, a general depression set in when cotton prices collapsed and several state governments defaulted on internal improvements debts. To the dismay of activist Whigs, Van Buren assumed a hands-off approach to the depression. Van Buren’s primary maneuver was to withdraw public funds from all banking activity, require all payments to the government be made in specie, and deposit government revenue in an independent treasury. Fortunately, heavy agricultural exports, foreign investment capital, and the California gold rush maintained a supply of specie in the economy.

**The Log Cabin Campaign**

For the 1840 presidential election the Whigs adopted Jacksonian campaign tactics and nominated a noncontroversial military hero, William Henry Harrison. They contrasted Harrison’s simple, brave, honest public spiritedness with Van Buren’s “aristocratic” ways. The Whigs’ log cabin and hard cider campaign was too much for Van Buren, who tried to campaign on the issues. A huge turnout of voters elected Harrison. Harrison had little stomach for strong presidential leadership and Whig leaders Henry Clay and Daniel Webster anticipated congressional control of the administration. But Harrison died shortly after his inauguration and Vice President John Tyler’s elevation to the presidency confronted congressional Whigs with unanticipated problems.
Define the following:

“common man”

Jacksonian democracy

disestablishment

equality of opportunity

spoils system

rotation

distribution

removal

Describe the following:

Election of 1828
Webster-Hayne debate

Peggy Eaton affair

Maysville Road veto

Worcester v. Georgia

Trail of Tears

Nullification Crisis

Bank War

“pet” banks

Specie Circular

Panic of 1837
Independent Treasury Act

Election of 1840

*Identify the following:*

Andrew Jackson

John C. Calhoun

Denmark Vesey

Nat Turner

Nicholas Biddle

Roger Taney

Jacksonian Democrats

Whigs
SELF-TEST

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. An important political change of the 1820s was that
   A. senators began to be elected by popular vote rather than by state legislatures.
   B. issues became the key subjects of political campaigns rather than personalities.
   C. free blacks and women were allowed full political freedom.
   D. most states removed the property qualification for voting from their constitutions.

2. Andrew Jackson’s popularity in the 1828 presidential election was in large part due to his
   A. determination to take a clear and consistent stand on controversial issues.
   B. dislike for political parties and popular campaigning.
   C. image as a strong-willed, self-made man of the people.
   D. devotion to reason and expert advice in the making of public policy.

3. Which one of the following is LEAST related to the other three?
   A. political appointment
   B. the spoils system
   C. disestablishment
   D. rotation

4. In the Webster-Hayne debate, Daniel Webster
   A. attacked the doctrine of states’ rights.
   B. introduced the possibility of distributing federal treasury surpluses to the states.
   C. blamed Jackson for the suffering along the Trail of Tears.
   D. urged Jackson to veto the Maysville Road Bill.

5. Of the following, the BEST example of Jackson’s advocacy of limited federal government was his
   A. action during the Nullification Crisis.
   B. issuing the Specie Circular.
   C. veto of the Maysville Road Bill.
   D. adoption of the rotation system of federal appointment.
6. Indian removal was an example of President Jackson’s usual endorsement of
   A. protectionism.
   B. nullification.
   C. states’ rights.
   D. internal improvements.

7. In *Worcester v. Georgia* the Supreme Court ruled that
   A. the second Bank of the United States was constitutional.
   B. a state could not nullify an act of Congress.
   C. Indian tribes were independent of federal authority.
   D. Indian tribes could not be governed by states.

8. The Nullification Crisis of 1832 involved a dispute over
   A. distribution of federal surpluses.
   B. protective tariffs.
   C. internal improvements.
   D. public land policy.

9. The Tariff of 1832 was declared null and void by
   A. the South Carolina state legislature.
   B. the governor of South Carolina.
   C. a state convention in South Carolina.
   D. the South Carolina state Supreme Court.

10. President Jackson viewed South Carolina’s Ordinance of Nullification
    A. as treasonous.
    B. indifferently.
    C. as a legitimate expression of states’ rights.
    D. as a peaceful means of preserving the Union.

11. The Nullification Crisis was resolved by all these actions EXCEPT
    A. the Ordinance of Nullification was repealed.
    B. other southern states refused to support nullification.
    C. the 1832 tariff rates were gradually reduced.
    D. the U.S. Army temporarily occupied South Carolina and collected the tariffs.

12. Andrew Jackson liked
    A. banks.
    B. high protective tariffs.
    C. Indians.
    D. state-financed internal improvements projects.
13. The second Bank of the United States was opposed by all of the following EXCEPT
   A. most hard-money men.
   B. Henry Clay.
   C. Martin Van Buren.
   D. many state banks.

14. When he vetoed its recharter bill, Jackson argued that the second Bank of the United States
   A. overextended financial credit.
   B. was too lenient in its loan policies.
   C. refused to pay off the national debt.
   D. was a privileged monopoly of the rich.

15. After his reelection in 1832, President Jackson weakened the second Bank of the United States by
   A. firing its president, Nicholas Biddle.
   B. removing government deposits from it.
   C. revoking its existing charter.
   D. moving its headquarters from Philadelphia to New York.

16. President Jackson’s 1836 Specie Circular
   A. outlawed paper money.
   B. required federal funds to be deposited in “pet” banks.
   C. directed that public land purchases be paid for in gold and silver.
   D. distributed surplus federal funds back to the states.

17. Jacksonian Democrats tended to oppose
   A. free public schools.
   B. equal economic opportunity.
   C. the rise of the common man.
   D. central banking.

18. In contrast to the Democrats, Whigs
   A. were states’ rightists.
   B. had no effective congressional leadership.
   C. admired the strong presidency.
   D. favored federal aid to economic development.

19. The Independent Treasury Act of 1840 appealed most to
   A. Whigs.
   B. land speculators.
   C. hard-money men.
   D. “pet” banks.
20. The dominant symbol of the Whig presidential campaign in 1840 was a
A. gold coin.
B. rifle.
C. bank.
D. log cabin.

Essay Questions

1. Account for Andrew Jackson’s appeal to ordinary voters in the 1820s and 1830s. Stress especially his personal qualities and his symbolic representation of democracy.

2. Describe the role of Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun in the development of the second party system.

3. Explain why Jackson opposed the second Bank of the United States. What were his motives, what actions did he take, and what effects did they have?

4. Describe the Nullification Crisis’ impact on sectional tensions and national harmony. What role did tariff policy, slavery, and southern unity play in its origins and resolution?

5. Compare and contrast the views of Jacksonian Democrats and the Whigs both on matters of political principles and their positions on public issues.

CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISE

Compare and Contrast

In earlier chapters you were introduced to the common use of comparing and contrasting relationships as a tool historians use to organize information. Chapter 9 discusses the political principles and public policy views of the Jacksonian Democrats and the Whigs—the two major parties of the second party system. In the chart on the following page, indicate with a simple “favored,” “opposed,” or similar brief notation the position generally or usually taken by each of the two parties on the political principles and public policies indicated. (Note: Starred (*) boxes indicate additional principles and policy views discussed in the chapter on which Democrats and Whigs held views. You are to define these issues and complete these boxes as well.) Try to infer a party’s position where no direct evidence is presented in the text.
| PRINCIPLES AND POLICY VIEWS OF DEMOCRATS AND WHIGS |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| **VIEWS ON . . .**                  | **DEMOCRATS**                  | **WHIGS**                  |
| states’ rights                     |                                  |                            |
| equal opportunity                  |                                  |                            |
| common man                         |                                  |                            |
| strong presidency                  |                                  |                            |
| *                                  |                                  |                            |
| *                                  |                                  |                            |
| **POSITIONS ON . . .**              | **DEMOCRATS**                  | **WHIGS**                  |
| distribution of federal surplus    |                                  |                            |
| Indian removal                     |                                  |                            |
| protective tariffs                 |                                  |                            |
| Specie Circular                    |                                  |                            |
| federal internal improvements      |                                  |                            |
| Independent Treasury               |                                  |                            |
| *                                  |                                  |                            |
| *                                  |                                  |                            |