

Chapter Twelve:

Jacksonian America (1815-1840)

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Chapter Twelve: Jacksonian America (1815-1840)

12.1 INTRODUCTION

After the War of 1812, a number of significant transformations took place in the United States. Cities became the center of commerce and manufacturing in order to meet the demand for finished goods from the nation's ever-increasing population. Simultaneously, the countryside became the source for raw materials, launching calls for territorial expansion. The market revolution wove local life together with regional, national, and international developments at a time when American men became more politically active. Between 1816 and 1828, most states stopped tying the right to vote to property ownership. Therefore, the number of white men voting more than doubled. The framers' vision of a republic led by enlightened elites faded from view as politicians embraced a democracy guided by the will of the people expressed in popular elections.

Many leading politicians sought to deal with deficiencies in the nation's financial and transportation systems exposed by the war. During the Era of Good Feelings, which coincided with James Monroe's presidency, a new generation of leaders such as John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster committed themselves to a program of nationally-minded growth to further the market revolution. However, a number of tensions in American society emerged to undermine their programs and the unity of the period. Economic, population, and territorial growth resulted in much change; these changes prompted public debates over tariffs, banking, internal improvements, the extension of slavery, and Indian removal. Most Americans supported continued growth, but they differed on the best means to achieve that growth.

Their debates laid the groundwork for the emergence of new political parties in the Age of the Common Man, which coincided with Andrew Jackson's presidency. As Americans divided over the president's policies, the second party system emerged to replace the first party system. The Democrats supported Jackson's views on the relationship between the people and their government. They believed the government should reflect the will of the majority and should work to promote the interests of the common citizen. The Whigs preferred the nationalist tendencies of the postwar years because they thought the government played an important role in economic growth. By the early 1840s, most Americans recognized how much the United States had changed economically and socially since the days of the Revolution, and those changes affected their political outlook.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Describe and analyze the factors that contributed to the Era of Good Feelings, especially the nationalist tendencies of the government and the sectional tensions those tendencies caused.
- Explain Andrew Jackson's democratic vision and analyze the role Jacksonian Democracy played on public policy debates in the 1830s.
- Describe the reasons behind the collapse of the first party system and analyze the factors that led to the development of the second party system.
- Explain and evaluate the causes of the Panic of 1819, the Missouri Compromise, Indian Removal, the Nullification Crisis, the Bank War, and the Panic of 1837.

12.2 THE ERA OF GOOD FEELINGS

Marking the end of the War of 1812, the Treaty of Ghent, ushered in an era of heightened nationalism in the United States. Patriotic sentiments ran high as Americans delighted in their “victory” over the British and looked for ways to make their nation even stronger. People all over the country celebrated Virginian James Monroe’s election to the presidency in 1816. Meanwhile, Monroe struck an optimistic tone in his first inaugural address, noting the “present happy condition of the United States” and “the happy Government under which we live.”¹ To further promote the happy condition, he launched a goodwill tour to mend the regional divisions that had grown during the war since the New Englanders never really supported the war. In the postwar euphoria, however, the Republican president even received a warm reception in the old Federalist stronghold of Boston in 1817, prompting a local newspaper to comment on the emergence of an “era of good feelings.” Given his popularity, it came as no surprise to most voters when Monroe won nearly unanimous reelection in 1820.

James Monroe, like many other leaders in the nation’s early years, opposed the development of political parties and believed the nation’s elite should govern the country. They felt the elites better understood what could make the country successful over time, and they could mediate the will of the people. Therefore, Monroe worked to eliminate party politics during his two terms in office. After the ill-timed Hartford Convention in 1814, where delegates from several England states met to draft several Constitutional amendments to weaken the power of the southern states, the Federalist Party faded from the political scene. In the Era of Good Feelings, only the newly-christened National Republicans remained. Within this one-party system, Federalists like John Quincy Adams and Republicans like John C. Calhoun and Henry Clay worked to promote a stronger, self-sufficient United States. In the end,



Figure 12.1 James Monroe | People all over the country celebrated Virginian James Monroe’s election to the presidency in 1816. During his presidency, Monroe worked to eliminate party politics.

Artist: Gilbert Stuart
Source: National Portrait Gallery

however, James Monroe found it as difficult to avoid factionalism as George Washington had in the 1790s. Two major events—the Panic of 1819 and the Missouri Compromise—undermined National Republican unity and paved the way for Andrew Jackson to become a major figure in American life.

12.2.1 Promoting a Nationalist Vision

Even before James Monroe ascended to the presidency, nationally-minded leaders began to think about ways to improve the three sectors of the American economy: agriculture, commerce, and manufacturing. During the War of 1812, the lack of both a national bank to help secure credit to finance the war and a functioning nationwide transportation network to help move troops and goods hindered the effort to defend the country from British attacks. Realizing the potential of the budding market revolution and the interconnectedness of the nation's postwar economy, a majority of Congress accepted a larger role for the federal government in economic matters. At the same time, the Supreme Court deemed much of the government's expansion as wholly in line with the Constitution. Finally, the diplomatic corps worked after 1817 to foster trade, to support territorial expansion, and to increase American influence over other countries in the Western Hemisphere.²

Congressional Nationalism

In 1816, while James Madison was still president, Congress eagerly began to resurrect much of Alexander Hamilton's economic vision for the country and to adapt it to meet the needs of a growing nation. Led by Henry Clay of Kentucky in the Senate and John C. Calhoun of South Carolina in the House of Representatives, Congress considered proposals for a national bank, a protective tariff, and internal improvements. Supporters believed the program, which Clay labeled the "American System" in 1824, would benefit all regions of the country. The bank would create a more stable currency system by checking the money and credit supply. The tariff would protect nascent American factories from foreign competition, make the nation less dependent on foreign trade, and raise additional revenue for the government. Finally, internal improvements would allow raw materials and finished goods to move around the country at a faster pace.

To many nationally-minded leaders, addressing the banking issue was of prime importance because the war and its aftermath suggested the potential problems of unregulated currency. As the market revolution took hold, the practice of bartering tapered off. Banks allowed people to purchase goods and services with their notes as opposed to the often cumbersome gold or silver coins (i.e., specie). In 1811 Congress refused to recharter the Bank

of the United States, claiming it exceeded what was a necessary power of the government. After the demise of the national bank, the number of state banks began to rise precipitously.

During the war, financial problems pushed most state banks to suspend specie payments (meaning note holders could not exchange paper currency for its equivalent in coin). Since there was no expectation of convertibility, banks issued currency well in excess of the amount of specie they possessed. It became increasingly difficult to determine the real value of the currency in circulation; furthermore, state banks showed no indication they planned to resume specie payments after 1815. Many people feared the speculative bubble would burst; to those concerned, the best way to prevent an economic downturn was to create a new national bank.

James Madison sent a message to Congress requesting it consider a proposal for a national bank in 1816. Five years before, questions about the constitutionality of such a venture derailed the recharter effort, but after the War of 1812, few people mentioned such considerations in the debate about the new bank because the fight with the British convinced many American leaders of the necessity of supporting economic development. Members voted to charter the Second Bank of the United States (the “BUS” or the “bank”) for a period of twenty years. Under the terms of the charter, the government would deposit government funds in the bank, accept the bank’s notes as payment for government transactions, and buy one-fifth of the bank’s stock. The bank, a private corporation, agreed to transfer Treasury funds without charge, to allow the federal government to appoint five of the bank’s twenty-five directors, and to pay the government a fee of \$1.5 million.³ The BUS could open branches anywhere it saw fit; therefore, its

notes became the only currency accepted all over the country. It could also demand the state bank notes it accepted be redeemable in specie, a policy which could help curb inflation.

After settling the banking question, John C. Calhoun, with the backing of Henry Clay, pushed Congress to consider implementing an openly protective tariff (import tax). Calhoun and Clay saw the tariff as having two functions: protecting manufacturers from foreign competition by making it cost-prohibitive for consumers to buy



Figure 12.2 Second Bank of the United States | In 1816, Congress chartered the Second Bank of the United States for a period of twenty-five years in an attempt to further their nationalist vision for the country. William Strickland designed the headquarters of the BUS in Philadelphia.

Author: Independence National Historical Park Collection
Source: Wikimedia Commons

anything other than American made goods and providing the government the revenue necessary to fund internal improvements.⁴ The potential for uneven economic benefits had, in previous years, prevented Congress from enacting the tariff. Opponents of the tariff maintained that while the commercial sector would benefit from protection, the agriculture sector would suffer. Protected industries would see their profits increase, while farmers would find it more difficult to sell raw materials on the international market and more expensive to purchase goods in an uncompetitive market. Thus, a small segment of the American population would gain at the expense of the rest of the population.

Although Calhoun and Clay worried about the reaction of frontier farmers who traditionally opposed federal taxes, they persevered in their effort to increase the tariff rate. They convinced enough members of both chambers to support the Tariff of 1816, which set the rate at 20 percent for most goods and 25 percent for textiles. As with the bank, the war provided the impetus for this measure. With foreign trade virtually cut off by the British blockade, it became apparent to most Americans that some measure of self-sufficiency in manufactured goods was important. Even delegates in western and southern states, usually hostile to tariffs, could see the connection between manufacturing and commercialized agriculture.

Finally, Congress took up the question of internal improvements—by far the most controversial issue on the nationalist’s agenda. Federal support for roads, canals, and other transportation improvements would help develop the nation’s economic capacity by cutting the costs and time of shipping raw materials to markets and manufactured goods to consumers. Moreover, rising revenues from federal land sales and tariffs provided the government surplus revenue to fund such ventures. In late 1816, Calhoun and Clay supported the Bonus Bill, designed to use the revenue from the Second National Bank to fund internal improvements. The question of the constitutionality of the measure, specifically that it might not be a necessary function of the government, colored the debate.⁵

While National Republican leaders secured enough votes to pass the bill, James Madison vetoed it shortly before leaving office. Although Madison had bent his strict constructionist views to support the bank, he told Calhoun he would not do the same for internal improvements. The outgoing president suggested introducing a constitutional amendment that would give the government the power to fund improvements. Once in office, James Monroe did encourage Congress to adopt an amendment for funding roads and canals. However, Henry Clay, convinced that Congress already had the power to fund improvements, prevented the consideration of an amendment. Thus, internal improvements became the purview of

the state governments. Some wholly embraced the development of a transportation network, while others seemed reluctant to commit funds to such projects in the 1820s and 1830s.

Judicial Nationalism

In 1801, John Adams (in one of his final acts as president) appointed John Marshall, his fellow Federalist, to head the nation's top court; he hoped to protect his party's nationalist agenda after he left office. During the Jefferson and Madison years, the Supreme Court worked to establish itself as the authority over constitutional matters at the federal level in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803)

and at the state level in *Fletcher v. Peck* (1810). However, the chief justice thought the time was not right to decide major constitutional questions on the “necessary and proper” clause as it related to government support for economic development. Only in the Era of Good Feelings did Marshall and the associate justices issue a series of decisions strengthening the role of the federal government and bolstering the turn toward manufacturing and commercial agriculture.

The first major decision addressing these issues, *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* (1819), related to the sanctity of contracts. During the colonial era, Dartmouth received a royal charter to conduct its business in New Hampshire; however, in 1816 the state legislature passed a law to convert the private college into a public university by granting the governor the right to appoint a new Board of Trustees. After the state implemented the change, the old trustees sought to reverse the statute. Their case made it to the Supreme Court. Daniel Webster, an alumnus of Dartmouth, made an impassioned plea to the justices about how the college, like all corporations, should be protected from shifts in the public mood. The majority opinion in favor of the college suggested that the government could not modify (or regulate) corporate charters or other contracts once issued without the consent of both parties.

The second major decision, *McCulloch v. Maryland* (1819), related to the constitutionality of the Second Bank of the United States. The state of Maryland decided to tax the bank at a high rate in an effort to give preference



Figure 12.3 John Marshall | Shortly before leaving office in 1801, John Adams appointed John Marshall to serve as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in an attempt to preserve some of the Federalist agenda once Thomas Jefferson became president. This image by Saint-Mémin depicts Marshall as he looked in 1808.

Artist: Charles Balthazar Julien Fevret de Saint-Mémin
Source: Library of Congress

to state chartered banks. The BUS refused to pay, prompting the state to file a suit in federal court in an effort to collect the taxes. The Marshall Court sided with the bank, not with the state. Their decision noted “that the act to incorporate the Bank of the United States is a law made in pursuance of the constitution, and is a part of the supreme law of the land.” Moreover, the justices indicated a state did not have the power to impede the legitimate actions of the federal government.⁶ In making its decision, the Supreme Court finally weighed in on the “necessary and proper” clause by supporting the concept of implied powers.

The third major decision, *Gibbons v. Ogden* (1824), related to the interstate commerce. After Robert Fulton invented the steamboat in 1807, New York state legislature granted Fulton and Robert Livingston exclusive control over ferry traffic on the Hudson River for twenty years. As such, they had the right to grant permits to any ferry operator they chose. They granted a permit to Thomas Gibbons but not to Adam Ogden to transport passengers and freight across the river. Thus, Ogden sued Gibbons to challenge his monopoly of the ferry traffic. The case eventually made its way to the Supreme Court because it involved traffic going from New York to New Jersey. The Marshall Court deemed the New York monopoly law “repugnant” to the Constitution since the power to regulate commerce between two or more states went to Congress, not the individual states.⁷

Collectively, these three decisions suggested the federal government had a rightful role to play in promoting economic development. *Dartmouth College v. Woodward* suggested the government could not legitimately regulate private businesses, which encouraged free enterprise in the United States. *McCulloch v. Maryland* and *Gibbons v. Ogden* supported a broad interpretation of the federal government’s power in relation to the states.

Diplomatic Nationalism

While Congress and the Supreme Court promoted economic development, John Quincy Adams, James Monroe’s secretary of state, sought to formulate an imperial rhetoric for the United States that fit with the president’s nationalism. Skilled in diplomacy during his father’s administration, Adams believed in the unique virtue of the United States, in the necessity of remaking the world in the American image, and in the nation’s God-given right to expand. Based on his beliefs, the secretary of state (with the president’s blessing) sought to promote foreign trade, to pursue continental expansion, and to lessen the influence of European powers in Latin America.⁸

In the wake of the War of 1812, both Great Britain and the United States sought ways to improve their relationship, largely because the war settled none of their differences. The British reached out to the Americans to

address issues not resolved in the Treaty of Ghent; their effort led to several agreements that brought long-term peace between the two nations. The Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817 demilitarized the Great Lakes region; the Congress of 1818 provided for American fishing rights off the coast of Canada, restricted British travel on the Mississippi River, ended British trade with the Indians in the Louisiana Purchase, and set the boundary between the United States and Canada at the Rocky Mountains. The Anglo-American rapprochement also tacitly gave American shippers the protection of the British Navy in the Atlantic. Thus, the Americans could spend less on their own navy and devote those resources to other projects. The agreements improved foreign trade and helped both nations improve their economic health.

The American government had long wanted to acquire Spanish Florida (a haven for runaway slaves), and members of the Monroe administration were no different. During the War of 1812, the Americans had seized West Florida (the panhandle). After the war, Andrew Jackson—in his attempt to quell the Indians in the Southeast—took American forces into Spanish-controlled East Florida under dubious circumstances. Rather than apologize



Figure 12.4 Adams-Onís Treaty Map | This treaty, concluded in 1819, set the border between the United States and New Spain and gave the United States complete control over Florida.

Author: Bill Rankin
License: CC BY SA 3.0

for Jackson's violation of Spanish territorial integrity, Adams used the incident to put pressure on the Spanish foreign minister Don Luis de Onís to return to the negotiating table. In 1819, with the Adams-Onís Treaty, the United States took control of Florida in exchange for \$5 million. Spain relinquished its claim to Oregon, and the United States renounced, at least temporarily, its claim to Texas. The treaty helped pave the way for further expansion across the continent.

Spain's reluctance to complete an agreement with the United States over Florida stemmed from its fear of losing control over its entire New World Empire. Since the turn of the century, a series of revolutions had shaken Latin America. The United States seemed both sympathetic to these revolutions and concerned about the ability of the new republics to maintain their independence. As a show of support, the Americans opted to recognize the revolting governments as a means to undercut European influence, to assist commerce, and to nominally encourage the growth of republicanism.⁹ By the early 1820s, American leaders feared the possibility that even if Spain could not regain its hegemony, other European powers might try to expand their influence in the Western Hemisphere.

Initially, Monroe considered issuing a joint declaration with the British pledging to protect the fledgling governments in Latin America. However, Adams convinced him that the United States should chart its own course. In his annual message to Congress in 1823, the president outlined the Monroe Doctrine. Adams, who drafted the statement, believed the Americans had to make a forceful statement suggesting that future European colonization would not be welcome in the Western Hemisphere. Moreover, since American and European political systems were different, neither side should meddle in the affairs of the other.¹⁰ Most Americans praised the doctrine for its assertion that the United States was unique among nations. Few people realized their government would have found it difficult to back up the Monroe Doctrine had the Europeans challenged its provisions.

12.2.2 The Retreat from Nationalist Tendencies

During the Era of Good Feelings there was only one political party; however, differences of opinion on the role of the federal government never completely disappeared. Most national leaders believed the government should serve the interests of the common good, but they disagreed on what exactly the common good meant. The Republicans had never spoken with one voice. Moderates tended to support the same programs to promote commercial development as the Federalists. Radicals, or Old Republicans, opposed any talk of loose construction, preferring a very limited federal

government. By 1820, an economic crisis and a debate on slavery in the territories underscored existing differences within the National Republican coalition.¹¹

Panic of 1819

The market revolution created a remarkable amount of economic growth in the United States as commodity prices rose after the war. Simultaneously, inflation and speculation also increased. State banks issued notes in excess of their reserves and made somewhat risky loans. When Congress chartered the Second Bank of the United States, supporters hoped its policies would lead to deflation. The bank's Board of Directors, like most Americans during this era, found the opportunity to make money too appealing. Rather than working to limit the amount of money in circulation, their policies only led to more inflation and speculation. Furthermore, Congress had hoped to make the United States more self-sufficient through the bank and the tariff. To some extent, those measures achieved their goal, but the American economy was never completely divorced from the European economy. If anything, the market revolution made the American business cycle more sensitive to the world market.¹²

After 1815, rising prices had encouraged the inflation and speculation, but most financial experts realized any excessive demand for specie could destabilize the entire credit system. In late 1818, the Second Bank of the United States shifted from an inflationary policy to a deflationary policy to stave off a drop in their specie reserves. It began to demand repayment of outstanding loans, and it required state banks to convert their notes held by the BUS to specie. The BUS clearly acted to save itself. In the process, it brought ruin to numerous state banks and, in turn, the American people.¹³ International developments compounded the American credit problems. The American speculative boom had rested on the expectation that commodity prices would continue to rise, but they began a steep decline in 1819 as Europe recovered from the Napoleonic Wars, lessening their need for American foodstuffs. Moreover, pent-up European demand for cotton had caused the price to rise after 1815. English manufacturers then began to look for a cheaper source from which to obtain raw cotton, causing a collapse in the American market. Finally, European nations adopted the gold standard, leading to a drain on world gold reserves.¹⁴ The combined domestic and international problems caused the Panic of 1819 and a subsequent depression in the United States.

During the panic, American cities faced the direst circumstances, but farmers far from commercial centers also felt the strain. Around 500,000 urban residents could not find work. For example, in Philadelphia approximately 75 percent of workers remained idle. The number of paupers

rose dramatically as did the numbers of debtors imprisoned for nonpayment. People who owned their own homes faced foreclosures, and those who did not own homes stopped believing they someday could. Rural landowners, even those considered well off, struggled to pay back their debts when banks called in their loans. For example, in Nashville the number of reported bankruptcies reached 500 in 1819 alone.¹⁵ Throughout the crisis, the BUS avidly pushed its debtors to repay their outstanding loans, leading to more business failures, more property seizures, and more unemployment. Across the nation, popular protest became common. Some debtors called for “stay laws” to provide more time to pay back their creditors. Others sought the abolition of debtor’s prisons. Finally, many voters sought to reduce state and federal expenditures in order to cut the people’s tax burden. It would take several years for the economy to recover, and those harmed by their creditors never lost their suspicion of financial institutions, which they thought did more damage than good for the American economy.

Missouri Compromise

In the years after the Revolutionary War, states in the North, inspired by the egalitarian sentiments of the fight for independence, began to rethink the merits of bound labor. By the mid-1780s, all northern states had ended slavery or had made plans to end slavery in their states. At the same time, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 prohibited slavery in the territories north of the Ohio River. Some northerners thought the South would turn away from slavery as well. Manumission (freeing slaves on an individual basis) was not unheard of in the years immediately following the revolution. However, after the invention of the cotton gin, most southern states committed themselves to maintaining slavery. Moreover, as the nation expanded westward, so too did slavery, especially in areas where cotton grew well. Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana all joined the union as slave states. Through the years, the country maintained a balance of slave and free states in the Senate by chance more than anything else; however, the free states had an advantage in the House of Representatives because more people lived in the North than the South.

In 1819, the sectional balance nearly came unhinged when Missouri petitioned to become the first state carved out of the unorganized portions of the Louisiana Purchase. As a territory, Missouri had allowed slavery and would continue to do so as a state. Amidst concerns about an uneven balance in the Senate, James Tallmadge—an anti-slavery representative from New York—introduced a measure designed to prohibit slavery in Missouri and provide for the gradual emancipation of the 10,000 slaves living there. While Tallmadge feared the expansion of slavery, most members of Congress expressed more concern about the balance of power in the national

government. Rufus King, in support of the Tallmadge Amendment, attacked the morality of slavery, suggesting laws protecting slavery went against the “law of God.” However, Old Republicans distrusted the motives of the Old Federalists who seemed to want to use the debate to revive their party. King and other former Federalists had long opposed the boost in representation the slave states received because of the “three-fifths” rule allowed them to count slaves toward their total population. Forcing Missourians to free their slaves would cut southern political power.¹⁶ Ultimately, the House opposed statehood for Missouri unless accompanied by the Tallmadge Amendment, while the Senate supported it. As the end of the congressional session approached in March, no decision had been made.

Led by Speaker of the House Henry Clay, nationally-minded leaders hoping to avoid disunion worked toward an agreement as the new Congress gathered in December. The resulting Missouri Compromise (Compromise of 1820) brought Missouri in as a slave state and Maine in as a free state, since Maine had petitioned for independent statehood shortly after Missouri. To soothe northern concerns about the expansion of slavery, the compromise also included the Thomas Proviso (named for Jesse Thomas of Illinois) that banned slavery north of the southern boundary of Missouri, the 36°30' line, for the rest of the land within the Louisiana Purchase.

Both sides believed they managed to divert a major crisis. Southerners, however, thought they had won a major victory with the Missouri Compromise. Although the vast northern regions of the Louisiana Purchase would bar slavery, most people assumed no one would settle in the “Great American Desert.” From his home in Virginia, however, Thomas Jefferson worried about the compromise. In a letter to John Holmes, the former president predicted the growing divisions on the question of slavery might be “the knell of the Union” because “the angry passions of men, will never be obliterated; and every new irritation will mark it deeper and deeper.”¹⁷

The Corrupt Bargain

By James Monroe’s second term, divisions about economic development and the expansion of slavery were setting the stage for the presidential election of 1824. Meanwhile, Martin Van Buren, an upstate New York lawyer and politician, took a seat in the United States Senate in 1821. As a senator, he hoped to develop a strong political party to promote a limited government. In an age where more white men gained the right to vote because many states abandoned property qualifications for voting, he quickly realized the role public opinion played in the political system. While the nation’s founders seemed to think political parties served no lasting purpose, Van Buren saw them as a necessary function of government and as a means to

draw power away from privileged insiders. Seeking out other likeminded politicians, he began to dwell on how to use the election in 1824 to build a solid political organization committed to Jeffersonian principles such as a strict construction.

Most people expected James Monroe would support John Quincy Adams, his secretary of state and son of a former president, for president in 1824. However, Monroe said nothing about his choice of a successor, which left Van Buren control over the Congressional Caucus and the party's nominee. At Van Buren's behest, the National Republicans nominated William H. Crawford, the secretary of treasury from Georgia, known for his support of states' rights. To Van Buren, Crawford's southern roots could help build a regionally balanced political party. Fearing their constituents more than Van Buren, many Republicans failed to show up for the caucus vote. Therefore, more candidates entered the race, including John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson. Each candidate appealed to voters in their home region, but it seemed unclear if any could develop nationwide support. John C. Calhoun also considered running, but he opted to be the only nominee for vice president.

In many ways, the [election of 1824](#) was the battle of the favorite son candidates. Adams polled well in New England, Crawford and Jackson split the South, and Clay and Jackson split the West. Jackson led in the popular (42 percent) and Electoral College (38 percent) votes, but he did not have the needed majority in the Electoral College. Per the Constitution, the House of Representatives would choose from the top three candidates—Jackson, Adams, and Crawford. Jackson assumed the House would choose him; he did not expect that Clay, the Speaker of the House, would actively work to deny him the presidency. Clay did not think Jackson had the necessary qualifications to be president. On the other hand, Adams and Clay shared many of the same principles on the government's role in economic development. In the end, Adams won thirteen states to Jackson's seven.

Just days after the voting in the House, Adams announced Clay was to serve as his secretary of state. What seemed normal politics to Adams and Clay seemed to the defeated Jackson a sure sign the two men had conspired to steal the presidency. Not one to be slighted easily, Jackson frequently complained about the “corrupt bargain.” While little evidence surfaced to suggest Clay had in fact made a blatant deal with Adams by giving his support in the House vote for a position in the cabinet, the prevailing rumors made it quite difficult for Adams to govern effectively.¹⁸ Once in office, Adams set out to complete the National Republic agenda, which only confirmed the opposition's suspicions.

In his first message to Congress, the new president outlined a grandiose plan for national development, including support for roads, canals, a

national university, and a national astronomical observatory, among others. He also suggested Congress support such programs for the “common good” regardless of what their constituents thought best.¹⁹ Most members of Congress found Adams slightly audacious for even making the proposal, as it seemed contrary to what the people wanted. In the recent election, more voters chose Jackson and Crawford with their calls for a smaller government than Adams or Clay with their calls for a larger government. Adams lacked the political skill to implement much of his program. As a result, Congress never acted on any of his proposals.

12.2.3 Before You Move On...

Key Concepts

After the War of 1812, patriotic feelings ran high in the United States, leading to the emergence of the Era of Good Feelings. During this time of one-party rule, American leaders worked to promote a stronger, self-sufficient United States. Congress chartered the Second Bank of the United States and approved a protective tariff. The bank created a more stable currency system by checking the money and credit supply. The tariff protected American factories from foreign competition, raised additional revenue for the government, and theoretically made the nation less dependent on foreign trade. The Supreme Court issued a series of decisions designed to enhance the power of the federal government and support economic development. These decisions, *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, and *Gibbons v. Ogden*, supported a broad interpretation of the federal government’s role in relation to the states and to economic development. Finally, James Monroe and John Quincy Adams developed foreign policy that protected American rights in the Western Hemisphere, especially with the Monroe Doctrine. Although political divisions faded from view, the president could not eliminate differences of opinion about the role of government. The Panic of 1819, the Missouri Compromise, and the “corrupt bargain” all suggested that a new era of partisan politics would soon emerge because economic, social, and political concerns continued to divide the American people. The expansion of democratic sentiment helped bring Andrew Jackson to the forefront of those developments.

Test Yourself

1. Which of the following did not represent the government’s nationalist tendencies in the Era of Good Feelings?
 - a. Second Bank of the United States
 - b. Tallmadge Amendment
 - c. Tariff of 1816
 - d. *Gibbons v. Ogden*

2. The Panic of 1819 increased the American people's faith in the Second Bank of the United States.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. As a result of the "corrupt bargain,"
 - a. Henry Clay's plans for economic development were defeated.
 - b. John Quincy Adams became president.
 - c. the protective tariff rate increased.
 - d. Congress approved the Monroe Doctrine.

[Click here to see answers](#)

12.3 THE AGE OF THE COMMON MAN

The power of Andrew Jackson's personality stamped his name indelibly on American history during the 1830s. Then and later, Jackson received credit for many of the trends that emerged during this period; however, it is more accurate to say that he was a manifestation of the social and cultural currents of the time. He was a war hero, an Indian fighter, and in the minds of many, a representative of the common man—particularly since he was the first American president not born to an elite family. When Jackson took office, he sought to assert the power of the executive branch. As such, he used presidential powers such as patronage and the veto to promote his vision for the nation, a trend that would help define the modern presidency in the early twentieth century. On the major issues of the day—Indian removal, nullification, and the bank—Jackson vowed not only to win the battles but destroy his political enemies. Opposition to Jackson's vision would eventually lead to the emergence of the second party system.

The extension of democracy to nearly all white men characterized the Age of the Common Man, sometimes called the Age of Jackson. By the late 1820s, almost all adult white men had gained the right to vote, and more government positions became elective rather than appointive. The very image of the "common man" came to be glorified. The ideal of equality among white males became a pervasive theme, even if it did not reflect social and economic realities, since the disparity of wealth increased from 1815 to 1840. Furthermore, the era saw the mass removal of Indians from their homelands and increasing sectional tensions over slavery. These developments called into question the meaning of democracy for minorities. Nevertheless, for

most white Americans, life seemed relatively good; therefore, few people questioned the political, social, and economic inequality that emerged in the 1830s.

12.3.1 The Emergence of Jacksonian Democracy

With the help of a growing number of political supporters, Andrew Jackson used the four years after his defeat in 1824 to build up his reputation with the people as a common man and to outline his vision for the nation. Since voters thought it unseemly for candidates to campaign for themselves, Jackson spent most of his time in Tennessee at his home, the Hermitage, carefully watching how his followers worked to develop broad support for his nomination. After William Crawford failed to win national support in 1824, Martin Van Buren switched his allegiance to Jackson. The *New Yorker* increasingly saw his own view on the importance of political parties match up with Jackson's view on a more limited government. Van Buren enlisted the support of John C. Calhoun (Adams's vice president) to woo southern voters. Calhoun, who was extremely politically ambitious, thought switching parties would improve the likelihood that someday he would become president. Next, Jackson targeted other voters alienated by the Adams's policies. Local Hickory Clubs—a reference to Jackson's nickname, Old Hickory—appeared all over the country to raise funds for the campaign and encourage people to vote. Meanwhile, partisan newspapers began praising Jackson's vision for the country. Politicians involved in the Jackson campaign hoped to reap the rewards of their loyalty; they fully expected to be the beneficiaries of the federal patronage system, sometimes called the spoils system by its opponents.²⁰

Jackson's democratic vision was firmly rooted in his own triumph over humble beginnings, but it also reflected the ongoing changes in American life since the days of the fight for independence. In a series of private letters, which he fully expected to be published, Jackson outlined the problems facing the nation in the 1820s. His musings promoted a states' rights philosophy based on the will of the majority. In other words, Jackson believed that certain powers fell outside the scope of the federal government. Furthermore, national leaders should serve as stewards of what the majority of Americans indicated they wanted in state and national elections. Jackson saw conflict, not consensus, in American society—a conflict between the producers and the non-producers. He sought ways to refocus the federal government's actions to benefit farmers and laborers at the expense of the business community. For Jackson, the government's main purpose was to address problems of artificial inequality because it could do little about natural inequality. The former resulted when certain segments of the

population sought to use the government for their own benefit at the expense of the majority; the latter stemmed from a person's innate abilities.²¹

As the Jackson camp busied itself preparing for the contest in 1828, Adams did very little to develop popular support. As president, he could have used federal patronage to develop loyalty; moreover, he could have pushed Congress to consider at least some of the measures he proposed in 1825. Meanwhile, politicians who shared his views on using the federal government to promote economic growth, including Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, tried to reach out to supporters through partisan newspapers and organizations. But overall, Adams's supporters seemed ineffective in presenting their candidate's vision to potential voters.

Although the two candidates presented different visions for the United States, those issues did not dominate the campaign. Questions about the candidates' fitness for office and rumors of scandal seemed more important to voters, but those concerns did take their cues from broader concerns about the nation's moral decline. Jackson's team focused on the allegedly-corrupt way in which Adams achieved the presidency. Furthermore, they painted the president as a monarchist bent on undermining the wave of democratic sentiment spreading across the country. They frequently indicated that because his father served as president, Adams clearly sought to establish an unelected dynasty. Finally, they called his morality into question. They implied he was a gambler who installed gaming tables in the White House at the public's expense. Moreover, they charged that while Adams served as the American minister to Russia he found a young American girl to satisfy the czar of Russia's sexual desires.²² However, what Jackson's supporters accused Adams of was nothing compared to the charges leveled by Adams's team against Jackson.

Using his military exploits and past duels, Adams's followers suggested that Jackson would become a tyrant once in office. In turn, his actions would destroy the American democratic experiment. The papers also repeated rumors that Jackson was the mulatto son of a prostitute. The most flagrant accusations about Jackson centered on his marriage to Rachel Donelson in 1794. Rachel believed her estranged husband, Lewis Robards, filed for divorce. She and Jackson only found out after their wedding that he had not, and they had to re-exchange their vows two years later. In the hands of the partisan papers, Jackson became an adulterer who kidnapped Rachel from her husband and forced her to live in a licentious state.²³

Throughout the campaign, Jackson's supporters found it easier to paint their candidate as a hero of the common man, as accusations about his lawlessness increased his standing with many voters. However, Adams's supporters could not overcome concerns that their candidate was an

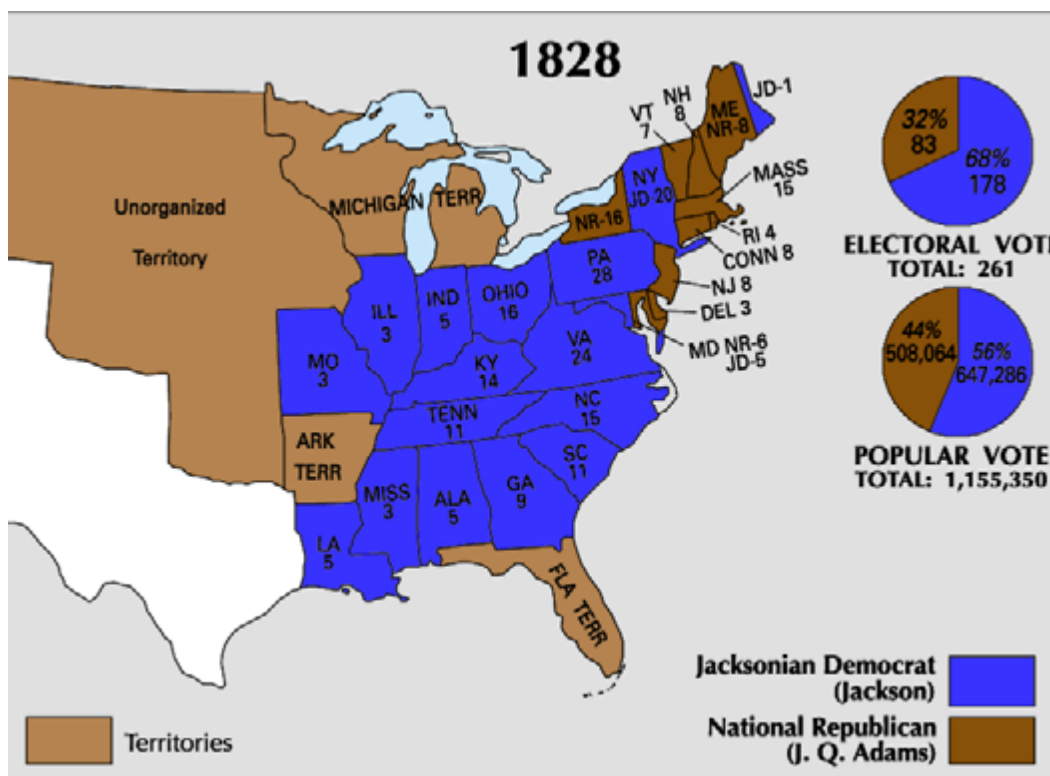


Figure 12.5 Presidential Election Map, 1828 | Andrew Jackson triumphed in the popular and Electoral College votes in 1828 because his supporters successfully portrayed him as a champion of the common man and a defender of states' rights.

Author: National Atlas of the United States
Source: Wikimedia Commons

elitist. Jackson won a sweeping victory in the popular (56 percent) and the Electoral College (68 percent) votes. His commanding majority clearly came from widespread support among urban workers, small northern farmers, southern yeomen, and southern planters. The election also showed the concerns the nation's founders had about political factions for the most part had disappeared. Candidates for local, state, and national office increasingly depended on parties to build support and deliver votes.

12.3.2 Jackson in Office

Although Andrew Jackson expressed satisfaction with his victory, he arrived in Washington for his inauguration in deep mourning. In December, Rachel Jackson had travelled to Nashville to do some Christmas shopping where, for the first time, she read about the opposition's criticisms of her marriage. She fainted on the spot and died not long after. Mrs. Jackson had not been in good health before her trip, but none of Jackson's friends could convince him that his political opponents were not responsible for his beloved wife's death. In his younger years, the president-elect might have challenged those responsible to a duel. But in his advancing age, he vowed



Figure 12.6 Inaugural Festivities, 1833 | Jackson's supporters descended on the capital city in March to celebrate their hero's victory. This print shows the crowd of well-wishers during the inaugural reception at the White House.

Artist: Robert Cruikshank
Source: Library of Congress

to demolish his enemies through the political system by destroying the American System.

In honor of their hero's ascension to the presidency, Jackson's supporters followed him to Washington. After taking the oath of office on the steps of the Capitol, Jackson gave a vague inaugural address promoting states' rights, pledging respect for the Constitution, and promising to correct the abuses of power by the privileged. Most people remembered the day not for what

Jackson said about his plans for reform, but for the boisterous celebration of his well-wishers. Thousands of people (perhaps as many as 20,000) lined Pennsylvania Avenue. Jackson insisted on opening the presidential mansion, recently christened the White House, to the public for a reception. The numbers quickly overwhelmed the staff as they attempted to stop people from breaking the china and standing on the furniture. Jackson escaped the mayhem, and the staff finally restored order by moving the refreshments to the lawn. After the festivities, partisan papers commented on the events. Jackson's supporters saw it as a sign the new president truly represented the American people. His opponents saw it as an omen of the mayhem to come under Jackson's leadership.

Andrew Jackson chose Martin Van Buren to become his secretary of state because the New Yorker had been so instrumental in building a coalition to support him. Van Buren then encouraged Jackson to make use of the federal patronage system not only to reward his loyal followers but to build support for his democratic agenda. At all levels of the civil service, the new administration began to fill posts with Jacksonians. Numerically speaking, Jackson's overall replacement rate was similar to Thomas Jefferson who had also used patronage to develop political support. Politics partly dictated Jackson's move to bring in loyal supporters. But to the new president, a regularly rotating civil service would ward against the abuses of power seen in the Federalist and National Republican years and prevent a permanent government.²⁴

In time, Van Buren also became Jackson's most influential political adviser and likely successor, although during the early years of the administration he competed with Vice President John C. Calhoun for the president's ear. Philosophically, Calhoun began to move away from his support for a nationalist agenda by the late 1820s; he committed himself

to promoting states' rights, something that Jackson and Van Buren also supported. However, each man understood the concept of states' rights slightly differently. Calhoun supported an extreme version of states' rights philosophy where states had the right to check power of the federal government. Van Buren, as a strict constructionist, believed the Constitution delegated some powers to the federal government and some powers to the states. In time, Jackson found his views matched those of Van Buren more than those of Calhoun. Politics aside, the Jackson administration would find itself mired in personal controversy, driving Jackson and Calhoun farther apart.²⁵

In 1828, Jackson's close friend Senator John Eaton married Margaret ("Peggy") O'Neale Timberlake, the daughter of a Washington innkeeper, not long after her first husband, a naval officer, died. Rumors abounded that Peggy's dalliances with Eaton led John Timberlake to commit suicide. After the wedding, Jackson named Eaton as his choice for secretary of war because he wanted one close associate in the cabinet. Polite Washington society, including the vice president's wife, Floride Calhoun, recoiled at the idea they would have to invite the lowly Mrs. Eaton to their functions. Jackson saw the attacks on his friend as similar to the attacks on his own marriage. Moreover, Jackson firmly believed the Calhouns were responsible for the snubbing. Jackson, along with the help of Van Buren, did everything in his power to support the Eatons.

The issues surrounding the Eaton affair festered until 1831. At that point, the president decided to remove the members of his cabinet he perceived as loyal to Calhoun. To keep up appearances, Jackson also asked Eaton and Van Buren to resign, with the intention of shifting them to other positions in the government. In the coming years, Jackson relied less on the cabinet for advice and more on his political friends who did not serve in any official capacity, in what his opponents labeled the "Kitchen Cabinet."²⁶ Only after the cabinet shakeup did Andrew Jackson fully devote his attention to promoting his democratic agenda and addressing the major public policy issues of the day: Indian removal, the tariff, and the bank.

12.3.3 Indian Removal

The roots of Jackson's Indian removal policy stretched back to the Jeffersonian era. Jefferson had reasoned that too much land was a bad thing for Indians, as the abundance of land gave them no reason to become "civilized." Instead, they would continue to utilize the land in a way which white society considered inefficient, wasteful, and "uncivilized." To this end, his administration stressed a policy of assimilating native peoples into American ways of life. In particular, he sought to transform Indians

into sedentary, intensive agriculturalists like the American yeoman farmer. Jefferson saw this policy as beneficial in two ways: first, it would “speed up” what he saw as a natural and inevitable process as Indian ways and beliefs gave way to American ones. Secondly, converting Indians to intensive agriculture would mean that thousands of acres across the east coast would be freed for white settlement.

Jackson came to the presidency as a renowned Indian fighter with knowledge of nations like the Cherokee and Creek. He quickly set the tone for his administration’s Indian policy, calling for all Indian groups living east of the Mississippi River to be moved west of the river. Civilization and progress, he argued, demanded that Indians be removed. At Jackson’s urging, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830 by a narrow margin, an indication of developing tensions between Whigs and Democrats in Congress. Theoretically, removal was supposed to be voluntary for native peoples, but in reality, tremendous pressure was applied to groups all over the east coast to remove. This was especially true in the South, where white Americans cast a keen eye to lands held by the Five Civilized Tribes: the Cherokee, Creek (Muskogee), Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole.

Removal in the South

The Five Civilized Tribes were thus called because, in response to Jefferson’s policies, they had in many ways acculturated to American society. The Cherokee provide an excellent example of the ways in which the nations acculturated in the interests of survival. In 1827, the Cherokee adopted a government modeled on the American system. They adopted a written constitution which outlined a three-branch system of government including a principal chief, a two-house legislature, and an independent judiciary with a Supreme Court. Most Cherokee lived and dressed like the average American, and some converted to Christianity. Most Cherokee, moreover, became literate after the development of a written Cherokee syllabary; the nation published their own newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix* (ᎠᎯᎩᎠᎵᎠᎵᎠᎵ). The wealthiest Cherokee owned plantations and slaves and grew cotton. Like their American counterparts, the group developed and improved the land, building grist mills, saw mills, blacksmith shops, and tanning yards. By most standards and measures, the Cherokee had acculturated in all significant ways to an American way of life; instead of ensuring the survival of the group, however, it intensified the desire of white settlers for this improved Indian land. Georgians and the state of Georgia were among the biggest proponents of removal, and the pressure that the state exerted on the Cherokee to relocate was tremendous. Moreover, Indian removal would further the economic development of the region, as Tennessee and Georgia sought to implement internal improvements, such

as easier river navigation, which would more closely connect the region and stimulate the economy.

The Choctaw, however, were the first of the Five Civilized Tribes to agree to move. For decades, the Choctaw had been pressured to give up lands to white settlers; in the period between 1801 and 1825, the nation signed seven treaties with the U.S. government, ceding some 15,000,000 acres. On September 15, 1830, the nation met with Secretary of War John Eaton and General John Coffee to negotiate the terms for removal west of the Mississippi. The Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek was the result. It guaranteed that in exchange for Choctaw lands east of the Mississippi (about 11 million acres), the nation would receive 15 million acres in what is now the state of Oklahoma, then known as Indian Territory. It also established the boundaries of the relationship between the U.S. government and the government of the Choctaw nation. It also agreed to continue to pay annuities established in previous treaties the Choctaw had made with the United States; for instance, Choctaw who had fought in the American Revolution would continue to receive annuities. After the signing of the treaty, many reluctantly prepared to leave the Choctaw homeland. In his "Farewell Letter to the American People," George Harkins voiced this frustration, saying, "We as Choctaws choose to suffer and be free, than live under the degrading influence of laws, where our voice could not be heard in the formation...Much as the state of Mississippi has wronged us, I cannot find in my heart any other sentiment than an ardent wish for her prosperity and happiness."²⁷ Removal began in the fall of 1831 and was scheduled to end in 1833. Since this was the first, Jackson was anxious to make this the model for Indian removal. Nearly 15,000 Choctaw made the trip; some 2,500 died on the journey. The Choctaw removal came to be called "the trail of tears and death," a phrase which was used to describe the removal of other nations as well.

Other nations did not remove as willingly. After initial negotiations with the U.S. government, many of the leaders of the Seminoles of Florida renounced their agreements, saying that they had been forced to sign the documents. A few groups and villages did remove to Indian Territory, but most chose to remain in Florida. In late December 1835, a group of Seminole ambushed a U.S. Army company, killing 107 of 110 men; the event became known as the Dade Massacre and began the Second Seminole War, with the Third Seminole War following a few years later. Over the next ten years, the Seminole attempted to resist removal with mixed success. Under the leadership of Osceola, the war was largely fought using guerilla tactics against the army, which vastly outnumbered the Seminole forces. Ultimately, some 4,000 people were forcibly removed to Indian Territory, but between 100 and 400 Seminoles remained in the Everglades, having

resisted and eluded the American military. The wars were tremendously expensive for the United States, costing approximately \$40,000,000.²⁸

The Cherokee chose very different means of resisting removal. They had been under increasing pressure from the state of Georgia since the 1790s, which intensified in the wake of the discovery of gold in 1827, resulting in the nation's first gold rush as prospectors and settlers began pouring into Cherokee land. The state responded by passing a resolution that declared its sovereignty over Cherokee lands within the state and asserted that state laws were to be extended to Cherokee land. Georgia passed a series of laws specifically targeting the Cherokee and created a special police force called the Georgia Guard to patrol Cherokee lands and harass and intimidate the population. The Guard arrested principal chief John Ross and closed down and seized the press for the *Cherokee Phoenix*. The state simultaneously attempted to undermine and weaken the Cherokee governing structure, closing down the tribal courts and preventing the council from meeting. Finally, in 1832, after the Indian Removal Act but before the Cherokee had signed any treaties ceding land, Georgia created a state land lottery to distribute Cherokee lands to white settlers.

The Cherokee decided to contest removal legally, asserting that it was illegal for Georgia to enforce state laws on Cherokee lands. But the Marshall court found that *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) was out of their jurisdiction, as the Cherokees were not U.S. citizens and were a "domestic dependent nation" to the United States. The nation tried again the next year when a missionary from Vermont was arrested by the Georgia Guard. Since the plaintiff was a U.S. citizen, the Court could rule in the case of *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832). The Court decided in favor of the Cherokee, ruling that only the national government, not the states, had authority in Indian affairs.

Despite this ruling, both Jackson and the Georgia state government were determined to enforce removal for the Cherokee and continued to pressure the Cherokee to migrate. After the landslide reelection of Jackson in 1832, a minority of Cherokee leaders began to question how long the nation could hold out against Jackson and Georgia. A small group, mostly elite Cherokee, decided that they now had no choice but to remove. This group, known as the Treaty Party, led by Major Ridge, his son John, and family members Elias Boudinot, editor of the *Cherokee Phoenix*, and Stand Watie, began unauthorized talks with Washington. Principal Chief John Ross, the majority of Cherokees, and the Cherokee government remained staunchly against removal. The Ridges and their followers responded by forming a breakaway council government, and in December 1835 they signed the Treaty of New Echota. The treaty gave up all Cherokee lands east of the Mississippi in return for lands in Indian Territory, five million dollars, and compensation for property left in the east. It also provided for a two-year

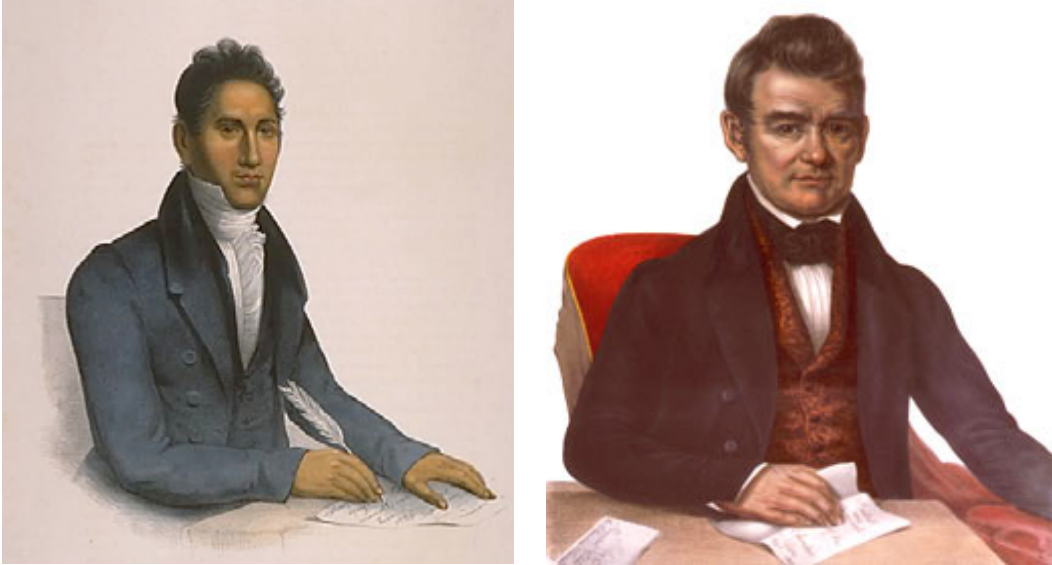


Figure 12.7 John Ridge and John Ross | John Ridge (left), along with his father Major, believed the Cherokee had no choice but to accept removal and concluded the Treaty of New Echota with the United States in 1835. As principal chief, John Ross (right) led the fight against removal after 1835.

Author: John Bowen (both images)
Source: Library of Congress

period to voluntarily leave. Soon after the signing, members of the Treaty Party, along with a few hundred Cherokee, migrated to the new lands. John Ross and the majority of the Cherokee population remained, protesting that the Treaty Party had no authority and the document was a fraud. Of 17,000 members of the nation, only about 500 had joined the Treaty Party. Ross and his followers refused to migrate. Many Americans were deeply uneasy about the nature of the treaty. This was reflected in the Senate's vote to approve the treaty, which passed by only one vote. In the spring of 1838, Martin Van Buren, Jackson's successor, sent General Winfield Scott and 7,000 troops to Georgia. Over a period of almost a month, troops forcibly removed thousands of Cherokee from their homes at gunpoint. Most were held in internment camps for much of the summer, awaiting removal. Hundreds died of dysentery and other diseases. Several hundred Cherokee managed to escape to the mountains of North Carolina, evading removal. Some 17,000 people were removed over what became known as the Trail of Tears. An estimated 2,000-6,000 people died along the Trail. Although we cannot know with absolute certainty how many died, 4,000 deaths, nearly one-fourth of the tribe in total, is the most cited and well-supported figure.²⁹

The aftermath of removal was dramatically played out on the new Cherokee lands near Tahlequah, Oklahoma. Soon after the majority of the Cherokee arrived in Tahlequah, John Ross was once again elected as principal chief. On the night of his election, many of the leading members of the Treaty Party were assassinated, including Major Ridge, John Ridge, and Elias Boudinot.

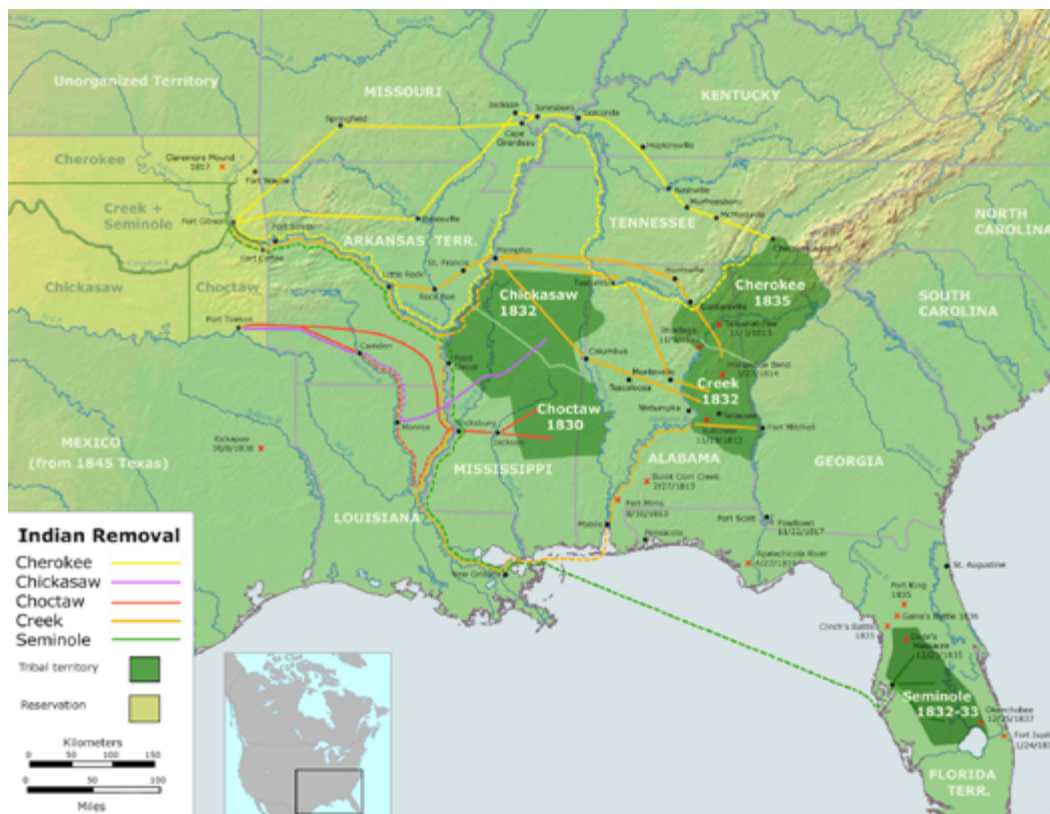


Figure 12.8 Indian Removal | This map shows the paths the southern tribes took in the 1830s as they made their way to their new homes in Oklahoma.

Author: Wikipedia User "Nikater"
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Aftermath of Indian Removal

Native peoples all over the East Coast were relocated, voluntarily and forcibly. In the North, groups such as the Sauk, Shawnee, and Ottawa signed agreements to relocate to Indian Territory. Some, like the Potawatomi, experienced significant casualties along the route of removal. Others, like the Iroquois (Haudenosaunee), were able to escape when the land company that was supposed to purchase land in the west failed to do so. This allowed the Iroquois to renegotiate and keep most of their reservations. Others attempted to escape removal, such as Sauk leader Black Hawk, who attempted to lead a breakaway group of Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo back to Illinois homelands. Settlers claimed that they were being invaded, and the militia and federal troops were called in. Most of Black Hawk's followers were defeated at the Battle of Bad Axe as they tried to cross back over the Mississippi River. Fragmentation of many groups was a lasting legacy of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. As groups resisted removal, they often broke apart geographically, resulting in two separate groups. These groups include the Oklahoma Cherokee Nation (those that removed, forcibly and voluntarily) and the Eastern Band of Cherokee (those that escaped and

remained in North Carolina), and the Oklahoma Seminole (those who willingly removed and those who were captured by the Army) and the Florida Seminole (those who resisted, fled the Army, and remained in the Everglades).

12.3.4 The Nullification Crisis

In 1829, the members of the Jackson administration began to divide over the future of the Tariff of 1828. Martin Van Buren pushed Congress to adopt higher import taxes in 1828. The new tariff increased duties on raw wool, flax, molasses, hemp, and distilled spirits, which assisted farmers in the North. Van Buren reasoned that the South would vote for Jackson regardless of the tariff. However, without the tariff the North might vote for Adams. Grumbling could be heard throughout the South about the “tariff of abominations.” Many southerners thought tariffs harmed their interests because they sold their cotton on the unprotected world market, whereas most northerners sold goods on the protected national market. Southerners also believed tariff revenues funded government projects that benefitted only the North. John C. Calhoun quieted the protests in 1828 by suggesting he could push Jackson to reverse the tariff once he took office. Van Buren’s risk and Calhoun’s promises proved effective, and southerners turned out for Jackson in November.³⁰

After the election, the South began to demand a reduction of the tariff. To southerners, import taxes only brought economic misery. Furthermore, they worried about the potential consequences for slavery if the North and the West banded together against the South. Frustrated southerners turned to Calhoun to help them make a reasoned argument against the measure. The vice president secretly drew up the *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*. He maintained the tariff was unconstitutional because it did not set uniform duties and it clearly benefited one region over another. Far more importantly, he suggested how states could fight objectionable federal laws. Calhoun argued that the Constitution was a compact between sovereign states, based on Article VII indicating that the states, not the people, would ratify the document. Therefore, the states had a right to determine the constitutionality of federal laws. When a state found a law objectionable, a special state convention could declare said law null and void within its borders. The other states then had the right to clarify the law’s validity through a constitutional amendment. If one or more states still objected, they had the right to secede from the union.³¹ Calhoun believed once the *Exposition and Protest* emerged, he could work with Jackson to reduce the tariff rates and avoid the need for nullification. The vice president, however, could not have known that the Eaton affair would drive a wedge between

himself and the president. Moreover, he misread Jackson's views on the relationship between the federal government and the states. For Jackson, any talk of nullification or secession undermined the principles of the American Revolution.³²

In 1830, a congressional discussion on the sale of federal lands sharpened the debate between the supporters and opponents of nullification. In assessing the merits of a bill covering the sale of federal land, Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina and Daniel Webster raised the issue of states' rights. Hayne suggested the southern opposition to the tariff reflected a desire "to preserve, not destroy the union" from "federal dominance." Webster, on the other hand, thought that in affirming the Constitution, the states agreed the laws of the United States would be the "supreme law of the land."³³ After the Hayne-Webster debate, Jackson and Calhoun outlined their position on nullification and made public their growing feud at a Lincoln Day banquet in April. After a series of speeches on the importance of states' rights, Jackson rose to give a toast. The president intoned, "Our federal union, it must be preserved." The vice president, seemingly stunned by his assertion, responded, "The Union, next to our liberties most dear." Jackson publically challenged Calhoun because he saw an important political issue at stake. The president shared Calhoun's concern about reducing the tariff, but he could not acquiesce in labeling the tariff unconstitutional or in suggesting states could nullify federal laws.³⁴

Once Andrew Jackson stated his preference for a strong union, he needed to work out a compromise before he ran for reelection in 1832. If he could secure a reduction in the tariff levels that still supported the principle of protectionism, then he could paint himself as a moderate should the nullifiers choose to act. In July, Congress passed the Tariff of 1832, cutting tariff levels in half.³⁵ Jackson's plan worked brilliantly up to a point; he placated enough people to win reelection, but he did not entirely silence the concern of some southerners. To them, the tariff was only one of many signs of their growing isolation in the union and their growing concern about the interference of outside authority.

That same year, John C. Calhoun, realizing he no longer had the president's support, resigned the vice presidency to seek a seat in the Senate, where he hoped to destabilize Jackson's political agenda. Even after his break with the president, Calhoun remained reluctant to publicly support his own doctrine. He thought the South needed more time to build its case before taking drastic action. However, radical sentiment was rising in his home state, so Calhoun joined the radicals rather than lose his political influence. The South Carolinians moved one step closer to nullification when they elected their new state legislature in November; two-thirds of the members supported calling for a state convention to discuss nullifying

the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832. Once in session, the convention approved an ordinance of nullification scheduled to take effect on February 1, 1833. They also suggested they would reaffirm the union, if Congress instated a non-protective tariff. South Carolina hoped once they took action, other states would follow suit.³⁶

Fully expecting South Carolina to move toward nullification, the president increased the naval presence in Charleston to collect tariff revenues before the ships docked. Then in his annual message, Jackson rejected nullification but also proposed to lower the tariff to only cover necessary federal expenses such as national defense. When the nullifiers opted not to back down, Jackson released a special proclamation on December 10, 1832 declaring South Carolina on the “brink of insurrection and treason.” While the president supported the principle of states’ rights, at heart his vision for the nation centered on majority rule. He had pledged himself to follow the will of the people not long after he took office. South Carolina’s nullification, if allowed to stand, would allow the minority to dictate public policy. Jackson also hoped his proclamation would isolate South Carolina. To that extent it succeeded, as no other southern states joined in the protest, though some states expressed sympathy for the doctrine of nullification.³⁷

Andrew Jackson also called on Congress to give him direct power to collect the tariff revenues, which his critics labeled the Force Bill. Meanwhile, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, delighted for once with Jackson’s strong support for nationalism, began to lay the groundwork for a compromise with John C. Calhoun who publicly would not back down but privately wanted a compromise. By the end of December, Congress was debating a proposal to drastically lower the tariff over two years. When the members deadlocked over continuing protectionism, Clay introduced a compromise measure to gradually lower the tariff over ten years and give manufacturers some time to adjust to an unprotected market.³⁸

Henry Clay’s proposal eventually won support from all sides of the debate. On March 2, 1833, the president signed both the Tariff of 1833 and the Force Act into law. Calhoun headed to South Carolina to present the measures to the state convention, which subsequently withdrew its nullification of the tariff. In a final move to support minority rights, it nullified the Force Act. The federal government simply ignored the latter move, and the crisis passed peacefully. Both sides, however, claimed victory. Jackson had defended the union, while South Carolina showed a single state could force Congress to revise objectionable laws. However, according to historian Harry Watson, neither side emerged clearly victorious given that the “underlying constitutional questions” remained unanswered, paving the way for another, perhaps larger crisis in the future.³⁹

12.3.5 The Bank War

While Andrew Jackson strongly supported the federal union during his first term, he made a bold statement on interpreting the Constitution's "necessary and proper" clause when it came to the future of the Second Bank of the United States. The country's business community, centered in the Northeast, liked the bank because it provided a stable currency system and provided easier access to credit. Yet many average Americans, especially in the South and West, despised the BUS; as a privately run institution, it concentrated too much power in the hand of too few and was not accountable to the people. Jackson, who had distrusted banks for years, sided with the common people and looked for ways to destroy the BUS. To Jackson, both the bank and the paper currency it issued were unconstitutional. He thought the only safe currencies were gold and silver (specie). Jackson's war on the bank fit perfectly with his view that the government served to protect the majority, not the privileged few.

Although the bank helped bring general prosperity to the nation after the Panic of 1819, political divisions in the 1820s increased hostility toward any form of national authority. To some extent, the anti-bank coalition was correct that the bank and its director, Nicolas Biddle, wielded an enormous amount of power. In 1830, the Second Bank of the United States issued just under 20 percent of the nation's loans and 40 percent of the nation's currency. Those percentages only increased in the 1830s. Additionally, the bank had the ability to determine the overall amount of money in circulation by demanding the state bank notes it accepted be redeemable in specie. When Biddle took over the bank in 1823, he worked to rebuild its reputation after the Panic of 1819 as well as to limit the federal government's control over his institution. Although the bank's charter allowed the government to appoint five of the twenty-five directors, Biddle minimized the involvement of the government's directors in decisions about the bank's operations.⁴⁰

Jackson's attack on the bank started slowly, as initially the Easton affair, Indian removal, and other issues required his attention; additionally, the bank's charter did not expire until 1836, giving him time to develop a plan for the future of government deposits. In 1831, after replacing his Cabinet, Jackson began to focus on the bank issue. Louis McLane, his new secretary of treasury, proposed a compromise that would not eliminate the bank, but restructure it. McLane tied it to the president's desire to reduce the national debt, and the president approved the scheme. Jackson asked only that McLane wait until after his reelection campaign to follow through. Inadvertently, McLane undermined his own proposal in December when he penned his annual report that called for re-chartering the bank and raising the tariff. The anti-bank members of the Kitchen Cabinet opposed McLane's proposal because it included a tariff proposal. The window for

compromise quickly passed, and Jackson recommitted himself to oppose the bank in any form.⁴¹

Around the same time, the National Republicans chose Henry Clay to oppose Andrew Jackson in the upcoming presidential election. In 1830, Biddle had approached Clay and Daniel Webster for help in working out an agreement with the Jackson administration that would preserve the Second Bank of the United States. With the hopes of compromise waning in early 1832, Clay and Webster convinced Biddle to apply for re-charter early, rather than waiting for the bank's charter to expire in 1836. Biddle, knowing that Jackson wanted to keep the bank out of the campaign, hesitated at first. But Clay and Webster convinced him Congress would vote in favor of the bank, and asserted Jackson would not risk vetoing the measure because the bank was so popular with the American people. If he took that risk, Congress would override the veto, and Clay would win the presidency. Biddle acquiesced. On June 11, the Senate voted in favor of the measure. On July 3, the House did the same. From Clay's perspective, all seemed to be going according to plan.⁴²

When Andrew Jackson learned about the vote, he decided not just to veto the measure but to prematurely destroy the bank, reportedly telling Martin Van Buren "The bank...is trying to kill me, *but I will kill it.*"⁴³ Over the next several days, Jackson's advisers drafted the text of his veto message in such a way as to appeal to diverse political groups who only had hatred for the bank in common. The administration decided to speak directly to the people in order to prevent Congress from overriding Jackson's veto. The message, says historian Sean Wilentz, "combined Jackson's constitutional views with his larger democratic outlook" especially as it related to the president's desire to eliminate artificial inequality in American life.⁴⁴ On the bank question, Jackson better understood the desire of the American people. Congress decided not to override the veto, leaving Clay without an issue on which to campaign. Thus, the National Republicans opted to paint the president as a power-mad executive. Try as they might, they could not undermine the popularity of Andrew Jackson and his running mate, Martin Van Buren. Not even the presence of a third-party candidate, William Wirt representing the Anti-Masonic Party, could derail Jackson's reelection. He easily won the popular (55 percent) and the Electoral College (77 percent) votes.



Figure 12.9 The Bank War | This political cartoon (from the early 1830s) shows Andrew Jackson seeking to destroy the Second Bank of the United States, the "Many Headed Monster."

Author: H.R. Robinson

Source: Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library

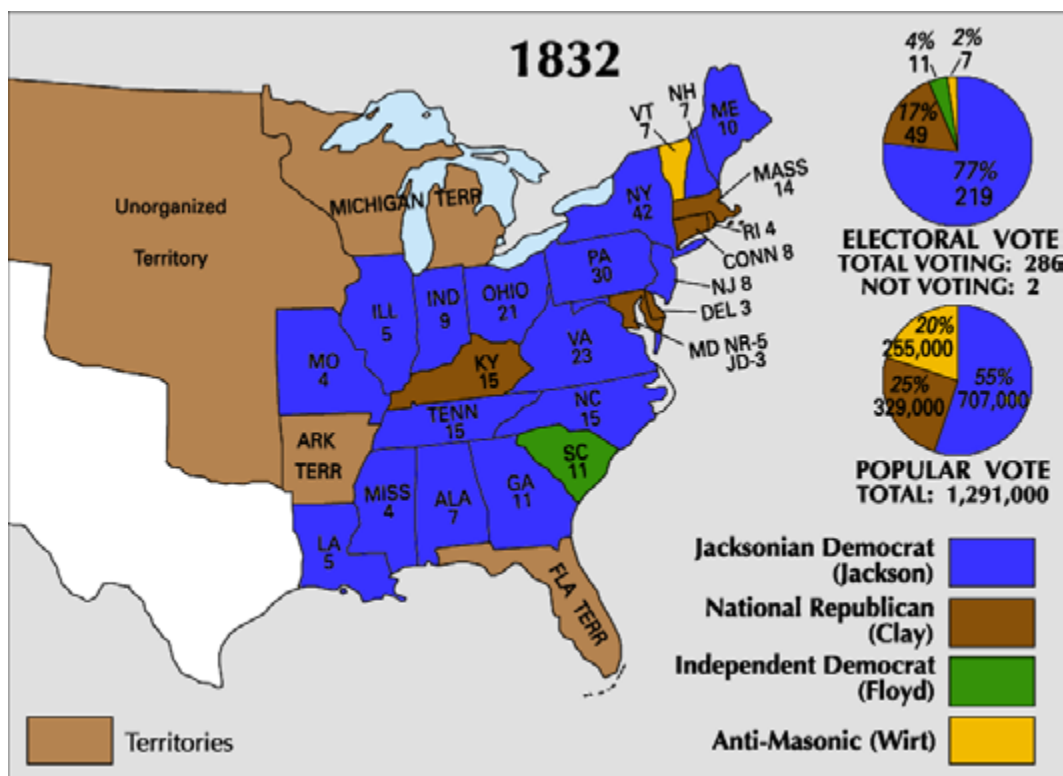


Figure 12.10 Presidential Election Map, 1832 | Henry Clay had hoped to use the issue of the bank to his advantage in 1832, but Andrew Jackson easily won the popular and Electoral College votes. After his reelection, he vowed to destroy the BUS and its director Nicolas Biddle.

Author: National Atlas of the United States
Source: Wikimedia Commons

After his reelection, Andrew Jackson made it his personal mission to destroy not only the bank, but also Nicolas Biddle. To speed the bank's demise, Jackson proposed withdrawing the government deposits (totaling about \$10 million) from the BUS before its charter expired in 1836. Jackson planned to deposit the government's money in carefully-selected state banks, later called the "pet banks" by their opponents. The plan, in Jackson's opinion, would end the bank's ability to control the nation's currency and credit system, as well as prevent Biddle from mounting an effective challenge to the veto.⁴⁵

Most of Jackson's cabinet worried about his decision, but the president was determined to follow through with his plan. When Louis McLane refused to withdraw the government's funds from the Second Bank of the United States, Jackson shifted him to the vacant position of secretary of state and appointed William J. Duane to fill the vacancy in the treasury department. When Duane refused to remove the funds, Jackson fired him. Finally, Jackson appointed Roger B. Taney, his attorney general, to head the treasury department. Slowly, Taney began to remove the federal government's deposits and shift them to the state banks. Biddle did not go down without a fight. As soon as the withdrawals began, he began to contract

the bank's credit, claiming he needed to put the bank's books in order before the charter expired. His efforts caused a slight economic downturn but did not derail the effort to kill the bank.⁴⁶

Although Jackson would feel the sting of the Senate's censure and their rejection of Taney as the secretary of treasury in his second term, Congress did begin a shift toward a hard money policy, something Jackson supported, when it passed the Coinage Act in 1835. The measure substituted gold coins for paper currency in commercial transactions. For Jackson, shifting to hard money was a more equitable system because it helped avoid the boom and bust cycle caused by speculation and inflation, which had increased after the federal deposits moved to state banks. Jackson also encouraged Congress to pass legislation that would ban banks from issuing paper currency worth less than five dollars. When Congress declined to follow through, the treasury department told its deposit banks not to accept small bills; later they required on-demand convertibility of paper notes to specie.⁴⁷

The end of the Second Bank of the United States and Jackson's proposal to shift to hard money certainly did not please all of his supporters. Even so, several factions approved of his decisions, at least in part. Western farmers disliked the bank because it tended to limit the amount of paper currency in circulation and, in turn, the amount of credit available. They wanted a currency system based on cheap money, or paper currency, not backed by specie. Diehard states' rights advocates sought an end to the bank because they viewed it as an unconstitutional exercise of power, and they distrusted paper currency. Working people in Northeastern cities also disliked all banks in general. They believed that paper currency brought economic misery to the working class; thus, they wanted to end the use of all paper currency.⁴⁸

Conservative Democrats, who supported the maintenance of paper currency, increasingly found themselves at odds with the president. They seemed to have more in common with the economic nationalists. The president's opponents tried to stop his move to hard money policies after 1835 by supporting a proposal Henry Clay made during Jackson's first term. Clay had proposed to keep the price of land high so the government could disperse the revenue back to the states for internal improvements. Simultaneously, John C. Calhoun proposed a measure to regulate the pet banks. The Senate wove the two proposals together in the Deposit Bill, which Congress passed in mid-1836. After the act took effect, speculation began to rise, which worried Jackson's hard money supporters. The president responded with the Specie Circular, which required payment in hard currency for all federal land transactions and made millions of dollars of currency almost worthless.⁴⁹ The currency debate was far from over as Jackson's presidency ended. One thing seemed clear by 1836: the bank war helped pave the way for the second party system.

12.3.6 Before You Move On...

Key Concepts

In 1828, Andrew Jackson defeated John Quincy Adams in the presidential election. His victory ushered in the era of Jacksonian Democracy—a time that promoted the common man, states' rights, and strict construction. During his presidency, personal and political issues meshed in Jackson's mind as he strove to address questions about Indian removal, concerns over the tariff and nullification, and the future of the BUS. Fully living up to his southern supporters' expectations, Jackson oversaw the removal of the Five Civilized Tribes from the Southeast. Given the controversial nature of the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832, Jackson helped reduce tariff rates. At the same time, he took a strong stand in favor of the preservation of the union when South Carolina claimed the states had the right to nullify federal laws. Finally, Jackson underscored his belief in a literal interpretation of the Constitution when he worked to destroy the Second Bank of the United States. In 1832, largely based on his stance regarding the bank, Jackson defeated Henry Clay in the presidential election. However, the bank issue also increased hostility to his vision, paving the way for the creation of the second party system.

Test Yourself

1. Andrew Jackson's action in regard to the Indians was to
 - a. oppose their removal to the West.
 - b. refuse to enforce a Supreme Court decision in the Indian's favor.
 - c. defend Indian rights to disputed lands in Georgia.
 - d. send troops to slaughter the Indians.

2. Who was the author of the *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*?
 - a. John C. Calhoun
 - b. Henry Clay
 - c. Robert Hayne
 - d. Daniel Webster

3. Many critics of the Second Bank of the United States, including Andrew Jackson, charged that
 - a. it failed completely to meet its financial obligations.
 - b. it was a tool of the Democratic Party.
 - c. it was mismanaged by Nicholas Biddle.
 - d. it concentrated too much power in the hands of the privileged.

[Click here to see answers](#)

12.4 THE SECOND PARTY SYSTEM

In the 1820s, many states expanded the electorate when they dropped the property qualifications associated with voting rights. Aside from South Carolina and Delaware, the voters instead of state legislators chose their representatives to the Electoral College by 1882. Together these developments made people believe they possessed a greater say in their state and national governments. This expansion of democratic sentiment, coupled with the social and economic developments in the 1820s and 1830s, led to the rise of the second party system in the United States. Political leaders increasingly believed that parties served to mobilize voters behind certain candidates and policies. Nevertheless, it took time for these leaders to appreciate the full potential of partisanship as well as the possible problems of trying to build a national coalition of voters when local issues dominated the minds of most voters.⁵⁰

The Democrats emerged in 1828 to campaign for Andrew Jackson and continued during his presidency to define their vision and expand their support through partisan newspapers and patronage. The Whigs materialized in 1834 to oppose Jackson and his vision. These two parties dominated the political scene for almost twenty years, although several third parties captured the voters' attention for brief periods. However, the question of slavery and its expansion westward proved the death knell of the Whigs and the second party system in the early 1850s.

12.4.1 Democrats and Whigs

When Andrew Jackson ran for president in 1828, the campaign served not just as a vehicle to promote his election but as a vehicle for creating a lasting political coalition committed to the state's rights philosophy that had guided the Old Republicans in the Jeffersonian era. For supporters like Martin Van Buren, the creation of a national party would help keep political

issues on the forefront of the common voter's mind in the years between national elections. Furthermore, it would ensure that Jackson's vision outlasted his own presidency.

While during the campaign and in his first inaugural address Jackson promised to reform the national government, his statements had been somewhat vague. Therefore, partisan newspapers, especially the *Washington Globe*, helped define and spread the Democrats' message using Jackson's actions during the nullification crisis and the bank war as a guide. Historian Sean Wilentz observes that Democratic thought brought together three interrelated themes. One, they supported a "robust nationalism on constitutional issues" while also exercising some "restraint on federal support for economic development." Two, they distrusted the wealthy and the powerful, especially those people who possessed undue economic power. Three, they believed in the power of the people or that the will of the majority reigned supreme.⁵¹ In essence, the Democrats wanted the freedom to pursue individual interests with as little government interference as possible.

The opposition party took longer to develop in the early 1830s because Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and others struggled to find an effective means to arrest Jackson's growing support. According to historian Michael Holt, these men had the difficult task of "uniting the opponents of the majority and broadening that coalition until it was competitive." Initially, they thought they could wait Jackson out; they assumed incorrectly that once the people realized Jackson wanted to dismantle the American System his coalition would fall apart. As Jackson's popularity grew, Clay and Webster looked for a way to bring all of the president's opponents into one party. However, such an effort proved quite difficult. The question of the tariff affected their ability to appeal to southern voters. Meanwhile, the emergence of the anti-Masons (who tended to distrust all political leaders) made it difficult to appeal to northern voters.⁵²

Clay and Webster hoped to use the question of the bank to build up an opposition party going into the election of 1832. However, that effort failed when Jackson vetoed the re-charter bill and won a resounding reelection. Although Clay lost the election, he did not give up his effort to oppose Jackson. When Jackson moved to destroy the bank, Clay led a successful effort to censure the president in 1834, which helped lay the groundwork for a legitimate opposition party. The Whig Party finally found common ground in their opposition to Jackson—"King Andrew the First," as he had been labeled during 1832. The party took its name from a group of British politicians who had sought to defend their liberties from a power-hungry king, and whose writings had done much to inspire the American Revolution.⁵³ Whig thought centered on defending liberty against power.

Moreover, the party supported the maintenance of the economic and judicial nationalism seen in the Era of Good Feelings.

The two parties clearly differed on the meaning of the Constitution and the role of the federal government. The Democrats believed in a strong central government as evidenced by Jackson's position during the nullification crisis, but one that left most decisions to the states. When it came to the "necessary and proper" clause of the Constitution, they believed in strict construction. The Maysville Road veto in 1830 demonstrated the party's view on limiting the role of the government. Jackson saw the bill, which provided federal funding to build a road entirely in Kentucky, as beyond the scope of the powers granted to the federal government. The Whigs, on the other hand, saw a larger role for the federal government, especially when it came to economic development. In their view, funding for projects like the Maysville Road did not exceed the powers delineated to the federal government in the Constitution. Such funding would benefit the entire nation, making it a necessary and proper exercise of federal power.⁵⁴

For both parties, questions about territorial expansion complicated their ability to build national coalitions. The Democrats tended to favor territorial expansion, especially in terms of acquiring territory from Mexico (such as Texas, New Mexico, and California). The Whigs believed before the nation acquired more territory, the government should focus on the economic development of the existing states and territories. Complicating the question of territorial expansion was the expansion of slavery in new territories. The Missouri Compromise seemingly settled the issue of slavery in the existing territories, but not what might happen in any new territories. Both the Democrats and the Whigs in the 1830s wanted to avoid questions about slavery, whether in terms of expansion or abolition. The Whigs found themselves stymied by the slavery question; their economic program appealed to many large slaveholders, but their reform outlook appealed to many abolitionists. Opposing territorial expansion became the easiest way for the Whigs. If the United States did not acquire any more territory, then the question of the future of slavery in those territories could not divide their coalition.

To attract southern supporters, the Democrats avoided questions of slavery by emphasizing that states had the right to choose to allow slavery or to abolish slavery, which seemed to appease most supporters. Andrew Jackson, Martin Van Buren, and their followers looked for other ways to diffuse the slavery question, especially as antislavery sentiments began to increase in the 1830s and activists looked to the federal government to take a stand against the extension of slavery. Jackson gave tacit agreement for the postal service to interfere with the delivery of antislavery tracts to the southern states. Meanwhile, Congress implemented what became known

as the “gag” rule. As the antislavery cause gained ground in the North, the number of petitions requesting legislation to end slavery in federal territories, especially the District of Columbia, increased. Southern legislators despised these petitions, even though they knew the proposals would never amount to anything. They wanted to turn all antislavery petitions away without consideration, but Democratic Party leaders knew if they allowed that to happen then their opponents would charge them with impeding free speech. Therefore, Van Buren proposed a solution to the quandary; Congress would accept the petitions, but would table them without discussion.⁵⁵

As the Democrats and the Whigs built their coalitions, they attracted diverse voters to their parties. Voter loyalty stemmed from a complex set of factors. Voters in the South and the West tended to support the Democrats, whereas voters in New England, the Mid Atlantic, and the upper Midwest preferred the Whigs. Small farmers, urban workers, and artisans looked to the Democrats to represent their economic interests, whereas large southern planters, wealthy business owners, and middling farmers chose the Whigs. Immigrants tended to appreciate the Democrats’ ability to separate political and moral questions. This ability also made them appealing to Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, and free thinkers. Native-born Americans, especially those associated with the Presbyterian, Congregationalist, and Quaker churches, leaned in the other direction because the Whigs saw nothing wrong with the government weighing in on questions of morality. Sometimes regional or class factors determined voting patterns, but in other cases ethnic, religious, or cultural factors influenced party choice. In the end, the voters’ decisions came down to which party would best represent their interests at the local and national level.

Table 12.1
Second Party System: Leaders, Supporters, and Beliefs

| | Democrats | Whigs |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Leaders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andrew Jackson • John C. Calhoun • Martin Van Buren | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Henry Clay • Daniel Webster • William Henry Harrison |
| Supporters | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region: South and West • Class: Small farmers and urban laborers/artisans • Ethnicity: Scots-Irish, French, German, and Canadian • Religion: Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, and free thinkers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Region: New England and Upper Midwest • Class: Large southern planters, wealthy businessmen, and middling farmers • Ethnicity: English, New England Old Stock (WASPS) • Religion: Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Quakers |
| Political Beliefs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported States' Rights • Opposed government support for monopoly • Committed to Indian Removal • Wanted aggressive territorial expansion • Favored low-cost sale of federal land • Stressed class conflict • Opposed reform movements like prohibition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported National Power • Wanted government support for tariffs and internal improvements • Opposed territorial expansion • Opposed low-cost sale of federal land • Stressed harmony of interests among social classes • Supported reform movements like prohibition |

After the Whig coalition emerged, both parties began to prepare for the presidential election in 1836. Martin Van Buren of New York easily won the Democratic nomination. By all accounts, Van Buren had the political experience to be president. Not only had he been instrumental in the creation of the Democratic Party, but he also advised Jackson on a host of issues in the 1830s. For as influential as Van Buren was in his home state and in the nation's capital, however, he was not particularly well-known by voters around the country. The Whigs decided to run three candidates with strong regional bases—Daniel Webster of Massachusetts to appeal to the Northeast, Hugh Lawson White of Tennessee to appeal to the South, and William Henry Harrison of Indiana to appeal to the West. Given Van Buren's lack of popular appeal, the Whigs hoped to throw the election into the House of Representatives, where they could unite behind a single candidate.

During the campaign, the Whigs harkened back to the fears of partisanship among the nation's founders as an explanation for presenting voters with three candidates. The Democrats countered such anti-party sentiment by arguing their unity would help promote their principles and discourage abuses of power. The Democrats also implied to voters that the Whigs

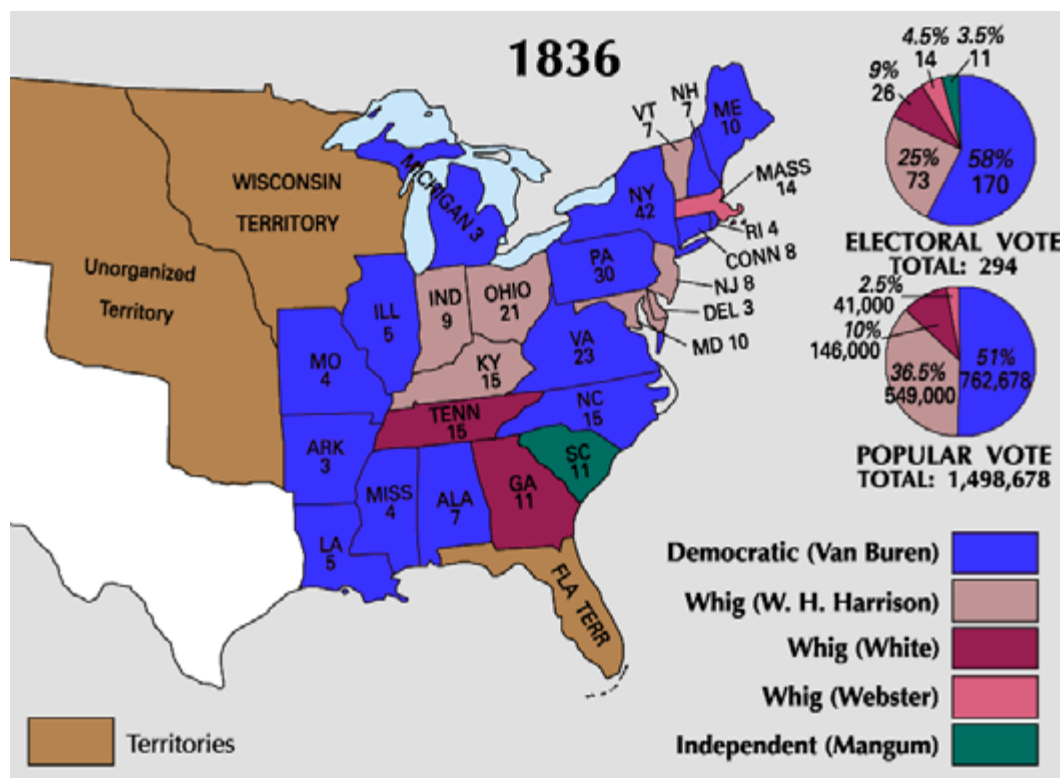


Figure 12.11 Presidential Election Map, 1836 | In an attempt to throw the election to the House of Representatives, the Whigs nominated three favorite son candidates—Daniel Webster, Hugh Lawson White, and William Henry Harrison. However, their strategy backfired and Democrat Martin Van Buren defeated all three opponents.

Author: National Atlas of the United States
Source: Wikimedia Commons

sought another “corrupt bargain” that would deny the will of the majority. Van Buren won the popular (51 percent) and Electoral College (58 percent) votes. Since Van Buren won just over a majority of the popular votes, the Democrats and the Whigs appeared almost evenly matched. The results further suggested that the two-party system had become firmly entrenched in American life.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the future of both parties seemed to rest on how well Martin Van Buren served as a custodian of Jacksonian principles.

12.4.2 The Trials of Martin Van Buren

A major economic depression prompted by the Panic of 1837 dominated Martin Van Buren’s presidency. Not long after he took office, the mid-1830s economic boom went bust, and the new president struggled in vain to come up with a solution to remedy the decline. Andrew Jackson’s attack on the bank planted the seeds for the crisis, but other factors played a role as well. Even before the bank’s demise, the amount of money in circulation was rising because Nicolas Biddle had hoped the inflation would help him fight the president’s initiative. When Jackson deposited the federal government’s revenue in the pet banks, all brakes on credit expansion disappeared and inflation followed.⁵⁷ Like the Panic of 1819, international factors also contributed to the economic collapse in late 1836 and early 1837. Rising commodity prices, especially cotton, worried British bankers. They began to demand payment in specie from firms that conducted business in the United States in order to stop the flow of British gold across the Atlantic. The decision caused a decline in the price of cotton. To cope with the bust, by 1837 leading banks in New York suspended specie payments and banks around the country followed suit.⁵⁸

Even before the banks suspended specie payments, the public felt the pressure of rising prices for flour, pork, coal, and rent. For example, flour sold for approximately \$7.75 a barrel in March 1836 and \$12.00 in March 1837, bringing distress to many workers who could not afford to feed their families. In New York City, a protest meeting organized by the Loco Foco faction of the Democratic Party quickly turned into a riot. The angry mob began to storm businesses and private residences to liberate hoarded flour. After several hours, the police finally managed to restore order. Although many people feared outbreaks in other cities, those protests never materialized. However, the suffering continued around the country.⁵⁹ Newspapers reported high levels of unemployment, perhaps as high as 30 percent by the end of 1837. For people who managed to hold onto their positions, wages declined anywhere from 30 to 50 percent.

As people agitated for relief, Martin Van Buren publicly blamed “luxurious habits founded too often on merely fancied wealth.” The president also

recognized the people's suffering, but he never considered putting more power in the hands of the federal government to deal with the problem.⁶⁰ Privately he weighed three options for ending the panic. One, he could reverse Jackson's hard money by repealing the Specie Circular and by advocating for the creation of a new national bank. Two, he could retain his predecessor's state deposit system but also promote more stringent government regulation of banks. Three, he could attempt to enact a complete separation of the government's fiscal affairs from the private banking system by creating an independent treasury system to hold federal government deposits.⁶¹

Van Buren called for a special session of Congress to convene in September; over the summer, he agonized over which proposal to recommend. While the president clearly wanted his policy to promote economic recovery, he also needed to find a plan all factions of the Democratic Party could accept. Not all Democrats supported the hard money banking policies that Jackson instituted after he destroyed the national bank; some preferred paper currency solutions. When Congress came into session, Van Buren recommended several measures to put the nation's financial house in order, including measures to allow for the deferment of tariff payments and to issue treasury notes to meet the government's obligations. He then called on Congress to create an independent treasury system. When Congress began to debate the bill, John C. Calhoun amended the proposal to require the government to only take payments in specie. Van Buren, a hard-money man, found the amendment perfectly acceptable, but the move slowed Congressional action.⁶²

Van Buren's proposal dominated political discourse for several years. The president perceived his policy to be an appealing solution to the country's currency and banking issues, but many conservative Democrats banded together with the Whigs to oppose the measure. Conservative Democrats tended to support continued use of the state banks, whereas the Whigs leaned toward the creation of a new national bank. However, they all agreed that Van Buren's solution had potentially dangerous consequences for the nation's financial health. Van Buren's supporters in Congress worked diligently to garner support for the Independent Treasury bill until it finally won approval in 1840. Meanwhile, according to historian Harry Watson, Van Buren "seemed to concentrate on the pleasures of being President," as opposed to working to further Jackson's agenda.⁶³

12.4.3 The Whigs Triumphant

The debate over the Independent Treasury bill set the stage for the presidential election of 1840. It provided the Whigs an opportunity to develop a cohesive statement on what they stood for that moved beyond

their hatred of Andrew Jackson. Whig leaders suggested the independent treasury would lead to further economic misery; they also depicted Martin Van Buren as nearly as power hungry as his predecessor in his attempts to push Congress to accept the proposal. Finally, the Whigs painted the federal government as a force for positive change, especially in times of economic crisis. They believed the government needed to take steps to stimulate economic growth by creating a sound currency managed by private banks. The depression also helped the Whigs draw in new supporters among conservative Democrats. With the exception of their position on a national bank, the conservatives had more in common with the Whigs than they did with the radicals in their own party.⁶⁴

The Democrats re-nominated Martin Van Buren for president, but since the economic crisis still plagued the nation, his chances for reelection seemed slim. Meanwhile, the Whigs concentrated on finding the most electable candidate. Henry Clay looked like a front-runner for the nomination; he could draw support from pro-development forces because he was the architect of American System and from southern Whigs because he was a Kentucky slaveholder. However, a younger generation of Whig politicians saw those qualities as negatives when voters looked for a candidate who could represent the common man; instead, they looked to Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, William Henry Harrison of Ohio, and Winfield Scott of Virginia. The Whigs eliminated Webster early on since it appeared he would not do well outside of the Northeast. Harrison (who had fought in the War of 1812) and Scott (who had eased tensions during a border conflict with Canada in 1838) could both draw on their military records to develop support.⁶⁵

William Henry Harrison eventually won the nomination after his supporters used some underhanded tactics to paint Scott as an abolitionist in order to break the deadlock at the Whigs' convention. To placate Henry Clay's supporters, the convention nominated Clay's longtime friend John Tyler for vice president. Tyler brought sectional balance to the ticket, but few of the delegates knew or seemed to care that his political views were more in tune with Andrew Jackson than with Henry Clay. In 1840, the Whigs relied on many of the same techniques the Democrats had used in 1828 to secure Jackson's election. An offhand comment by a Clay supporter about Harrison drinking hard cider in his log cabin turned into a major advantage for the Whigs. The party knew they needed to shed their elitist reputation and the image of Harrison as a frontiersman (even if the description did not fit) and a war hero aided in that effort. The Whigs held rallies around the country, including in Baltimore during the Democratic convention, to promote "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too." The Democrats certainly tried to overcome the support for Harrison, but it became increasingly difficult after the Whigs christened the president "Martin Van Ruin."⁶⁶

William Henry Harrison won both the popular (53 percent) and the Electoral College (80 percent) votes in an election that drew record numbers of voters to the polls. Approximately 80 percent of eligible voters cast ballots, which far exceeded the average of 57 percent in the three previous presidential elections. The Whigs had much to celebrate when Harrison arrived in Washington to take the oath of office in 1841. They had shown they could be a majority party, not simply an opposition party.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, their victory was short-lived. Harrison unwisely chose to give a two hour inaugural address in the freezing rain without a coat or hat. He contracted pneumonia and died a month later.

John Tyler, who disregarded all concerns about the legitimacy of his succession, took the oath of office shortly after Harrison's death. Then he proceeded to oppose the entire Whig legislative agenda since he was a committed states' righter and strict constructionist. Congressional Whigs were furious with Tyler when he vetoed their proposal for a new national bank twice and disregarded suggestions for increasing the tariff and providing federal funds for internal improvements. Tyler became a president without a party, while the Whigs lost their momentum when the Democrats took control of Congress after the midterm elections in 1842. By the mid-1840s, the Democratic agenda of territorial expansion replaced the Whig agenda of economic development, setting the stage for the Civil War.

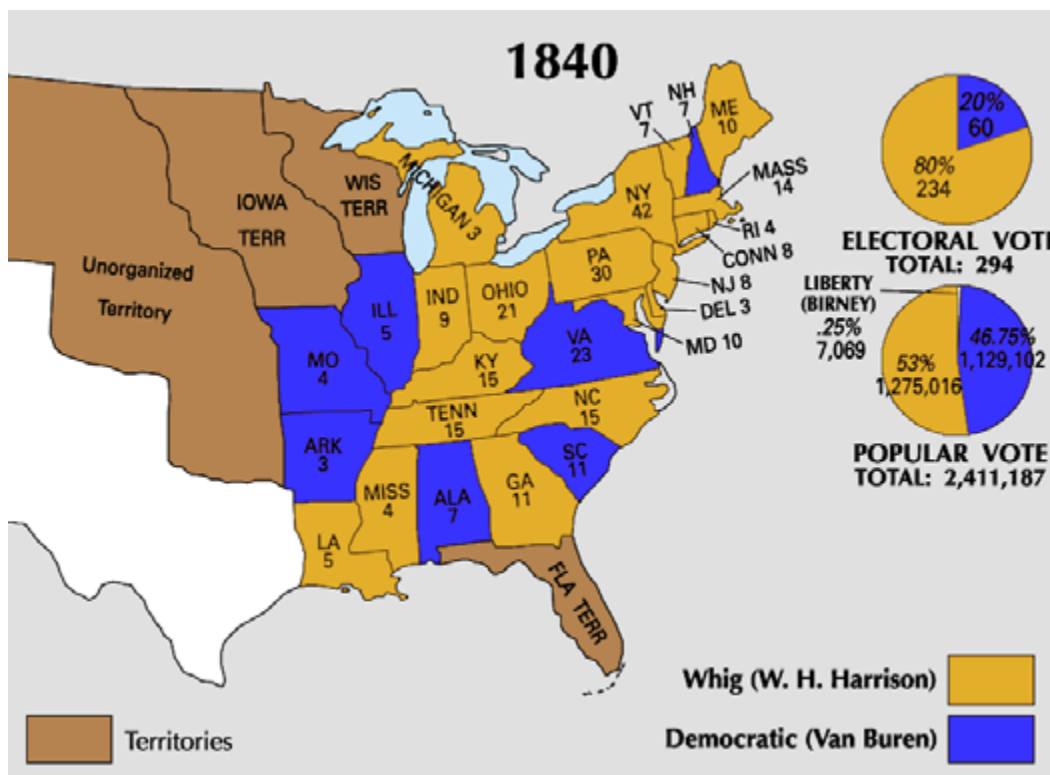


Figure 12.12 Presidential Election Map, 1840 | During the 1840 campaign, the Whigs held rallies around the country to promote “Tippecanoe and Tyler Too” over “Martin Van Ruin.” The tactic clearly proved effective when William Henry Harrison defeated Martin Van Buren on election day.

Author: National Atlas of the United States
Source: Wikimedia Commons

12.4.4 Before You Move On...

Key Concepts

While early American leaders seemed hostile to permanent political factions, by the 1830s parties appeared to be an integral part of the political process. The Democratic Party emerged in 1828 to support Andrew Jackson's bid for president. The Whig Party emerged in 1834 to oppose Jackson's vision and policies. The core difference between the two parties was how they interpreted the Constitution's "necessary and proper" clause. The Democrats wanted the freedom to pursue individual interests with as little government interference as possible. They deferred to the states on most issues. The Whigs promoted economic and judicial nationalism, which required a larger role for the federal government. By 1836, the second party system had taken hold as the Democrats and the Whigs squared off in the presidential election that year. Martin Van Buren, the Democrat, defeated his three Whig opponents, and he looked forward to promoting his predecessor's vision. However, the Panic of 1837 undermined his efforts because the crisis seemed tied directly to Jackson's decision to crush the Second Bank of the United States. Moreover, Van Buren struggled to come up with an effective solution to end the depression. In 1840, the Whigs triumphed at the national level, turning their party from an opposition party to a majority party. However, William Henry Harrison's death and the emergence of questions about territorial expansion and slavery left the future of the second party system unclear.

Test Yourself

1. The Second Party System consisted of which two political parties?
 - a. Federalists and Democrats
 - b. Democrats and Republicans
 - c. Democrats and Whigs
 - d. Republicans and Whigs

2. After the Panic of 1837, Martin Van Buren supported _____ to remedy the nation's economic problems.
 - a. the Second Bank of the United States
 - b. the Independent Treasury System
 - c. the Specie Circular
 - d. a new protective tariff

3. William Henry Harrison's defeat over Martin Van Buren in the presidential election of 1840 was a victory for the Democratic Party.
 - a. True
 - b. False

[Click here to see answers](#)

12.5 Conclusion

In many ways, both James Monroe and Andrew Jackson—both of whom lived through the Revolutionary Era—served as symbols for their age. Monroe represented the political elite of that generation who hoped through their government service to preserve some semblance of order in the United States. While good feelings pervaded his time in office, his presidency harkened back to the ceremony of the Federalist Era. Jackson represented the common individual of that generation who saw the break from Great Britain as an opportunity for social and economic mobility for average Americans. True, Jackson had travelled quite far from his humble origins, but he still managed to speak to and for those Americans who wanted democratic principles to mean something in their own lives.

From 1815 to 1840, the United States came of age economically and politically. The market revolution changed the way the American people related to one another and to their government, especially as that government sought to promote economic growth. The emergence of the second party system composed of the Democrats and the Whigs helped the American people to make sense of the changes affecting the nation. By 1840, they had accepted the idea that permanent political parties would help define the important political and economic issues of the day and provide a means for public debate on those issues. Moreover, they saw the political parties as the best way to safeguard democratic principles and personal liberties. However, the central debates over the rights of the states and the rights of the federal government left one question—the future of slavery—unanswered. And unanswered, that question became a dangerous and poisonous element in American life.

12.6 CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISES

- From 1815 to 1840, American leaders managed to limit the growing impact sectional differences had on economic and political issues. However, the fear of disunion remained an underlying threat. What major issues divided the nation in this period, and how were they resolved? In spite of efforts to minimize the divisions, why did these divisions ultimately bring disunion in the 1860s?
- For years, historians have pondered whether “Age of the Common Man” is an appropriate label for this period in American history. At the heart of the debate lies questions about the real level equality achieved by average Americans as the much-heralded democratic trends swept the nation. Who in American society benefitted most from the political and economic changes of the decade and why? What was the reality of the common citizen from the 1820s to the 1840s? Based on your responses to these questions, do you think we should continue to use “Age of the Common Man,” or should we attach another label to this period (and what should it be)?
- Oftentimes, when we think of political parties in the American past we draw parallels to our modern political parties. How do the Democrats and Whigs in the second party system compare to the Democrats and Republicans today? What similarities and differences do you see between these parties in terms of political philosophy and important public policy issues?

12.7 KEY TERMS

- John Quincy Adams
- Adams-Onís Treaty of 1819
- American System
- Bank War
- Nicholas Biddle
- John C. Calhoun
- The Cherokee Phoenix
- Henry Clay
- Coinage Act of 1835
- Corrupt Bargain
- Dartmouth College v. Woodward
- Democratic Party
- Distribution Act of 1836
- Eaton Affair
- Era of Good Feelings
- Five Civilized Tribes
- Force Bill
- “Gag” Rule
- Gibbons v. Ogden
- William Henry Harrison
- Robert Hayne
- Independent Treasury Act of 1840
- Indian Removal Act of 1830
- Andrew Jackson
- Jacksonian Democracy
- Kitchen Cabinet
- Martin Van Buren
- Maysville Road Veto
- McCulloch v. Maryland
- Missouri Compromise
- James Monroe
- Monroe Doctrine
- Nullification Crisis
- Panic of 1819
- Panic of 1837
- John Ross
- Rush-Bagot Agreement of 1817
- Second Bank of the United States
- South Carolina Exposition and Protest
- Specie Circular of 1836
- Tariff of 1816
- Tariff of 1828 (Tariff of Abominations)
- John Tyler
- Daniel Webster
- Whig Party

12.8 CHRONOLOGY

The following chronology is a list of important dates and events associated with this chapter.

| Date | Event |
|------|--|
| 1816 | Congress chartered the Second Bank of the United States; Congress adopted the Tariff of 1816, an overtly protective tariff; James Monroe elected President |
| 1819 | Supreme Court issued <i>Dartmouth College v. Woodward</i> decision; Supreme Court issued <i>McCulloch v. Maryland</i> decision; Adams-Onís Treaty signed by the United States and Spain; Panic of 1819 caused economic distress throughout the nation |
| 1820 | Congress approved the Missouri Compromise; James Monroe reelected President |
| 1823 | James Monroe issued the Monroe Doctrine |
| 1824 | Supreme Court issued <i>Gibbons v. Ogden</i> decision; John Quincy Adams elected President |
| 1828 | Congress adopted the Tariff of 1828 (Tariff of Abominations); Democratic Party formed to support Andrew Jackson; John C. Calhoun secretly published the <i>South Carolina Exposition and Protest</i> ; Andrew Jackson elected President |
| 1830 | Congress passed the Indian Removal Act; Hayne-Webster Debate occurred in Congress; Andrew Jackson vetoed the Maysville Road Bill |
| 1831 | Supreme Court issued <i>Cherokee v. Georgia</i> decision |
| 1832 | Supreme Court issued <i>Worcester v. Georgia</i> decision; Andrew Jackson vetoed the Second Bank of the United States Re-charter Bill; Congress adopted the Tariff of 1832; Andrew Jackson reelected President; South Carolina issued the ordinance of nullification for the Tariffs of 1828 |
| 1833 | Congress approved the Tariff of 1833 and the Force Act; South Carolina withdrew its nullification of the tariffs |
| 1834 | The Senate, led by Henry Clay, censured Andrew Jackson; Whig Party formed to oppose Andrew Jackson |
| 1835 | Congress passed the Coinage Act |

| Date | Event |
|------|---|
| 1836 | Congress adopted the Deposit Act; Andrew Jackson issued the Specie Circular; Martin Van Buren elected President |
| 1837 | Panic of 1837 launched an almost four-year long depression |
| 1840 | Congress approved the Independent Treasury Act; William Henry Harrison elected President |
| 1841 | William Henry Harrison died; John Tyler succeeded him as President |

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ANSWER KEY FOR CHAPTER TWELVE: JACKSONIAN AMERICA (1815-1840)

Check your answers to the questions in the Before You Move On Sections for this chapter. You can click on the questions to take you back to the chapter section.

Correct answers are **BOLDED**

Section 12.2.3 - p540

1. Which of the following did not represent the government's nationalist tendencies in the Era of Good Feelings?
 - a. Second Bank of the United States
 - B. TALLMADGE AMENDMENT**
 - c. Tariff of 1816
 - d. Gibbons v. Ogden
2. The Panic of 1819 increased the American people's faith in the Second Bank of the United States.
 - a. True
 - B. FALSE**
3. As a result of the "corrupt bargain,"
 - a. Henry Clay's plans for economic development were defeated.
 - B. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS BECAME PRESIDENT.**
 - c. the protective tariff rate increased.
 - d. Congress approved the Monroe Doctrine.

Section 12.3.6 - p559

1. Andrew Jackson's action in regard to the Indians was to
 - a. oppose their removal to the West.
 - B. REFUSE TO ENFORCE A SUPREME COURT DECISION IN THE INDIAN'S FAVOR.**
 - c. defend Indian rights to disputed lands in Georgia.
 - d. send troops to slaughter the Indians.
2. Who was the author of the South Carolina Exposition and Protest?
 - A. JOHN C. CALHOUN**
 - b. Henry Clay
 - c. Robert Hayne
 - d. Daniel Webster
3. Many critics of the Second Bank of the United States, including Andrew Jackson, charged that
 - a. it failed completely to meet its financial obligations.
 - b. it was a tool of the Democratic Party.
 - c. it was mismanaged by Nicholas Biddle.
 - D. IT CONCENTRATED TOO MUCH POWER IN THE HANDS OF THE PRIVILEGED.**

Section 12.4.4 - p570

1. The Second Party System consisted of which two political parties?
 - a. Federalists and Democrats
 - b. Democrats and Republicans
 - C. DEMOCRATS AND WHIGS**
 - d. Republicans and Whigs

CHAPTER TWELVE: JACKSONIAN AMERICA (1815-1840)

2. After the Panic of 1837, Martin Van Buren supported _____ to remedy the nation's economic problems.
- a. the Second Bank of the United States
 - B. THE INDEPENDENT TREASURY SYSTEM**
 - c. the Specie Circular
 - d. a new protective tariff
3. William Henry Harrison's defeat over Martin Van Buren in the presidential election of 1840 was a victory for the Democratic Party.
- a. True
 - B. FALSE**