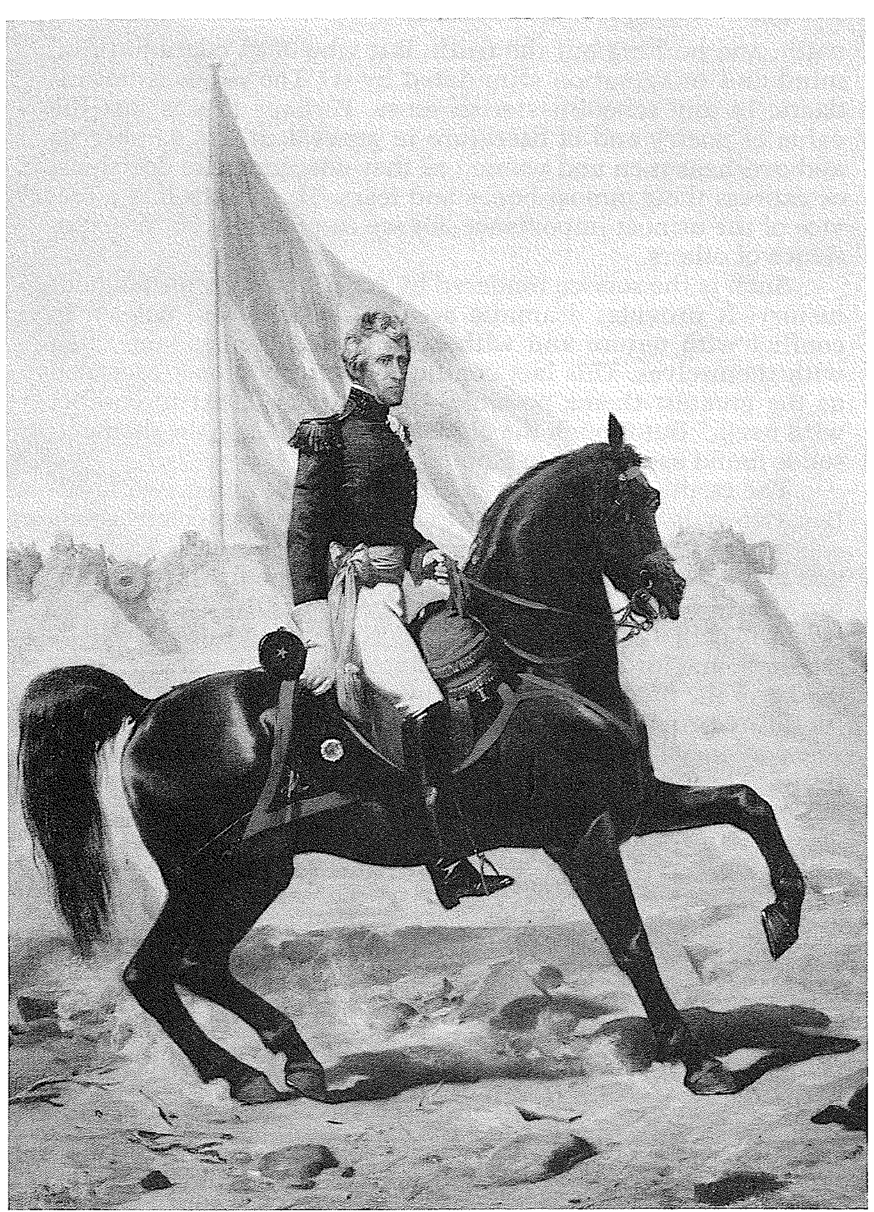

Nearly 150 years after his Presidency, Andrew Jackson remains a model of the "strong" Chief Executive. Alonso Chappel's painting of the victor of the Battle of New Orleans hints at the "native strength" Nathaniel Hawthorne saw in the general. It "compelled every man to be his tool that came within his reach; and the more cunning the individual might be, it served only to make him the sharper tool."

The Age of Jackson

Perhaps no American period has been more subject to reinterpretation by scholars than the 1829–1837 Presidency of Andrew Jackson. The craggy Tennessee general was the first man outside the colonial gentry to reach the White House. His life was tumultuous. (How many Chief Executives had once fought duels and even killed a man?) But so were his times. Modern political parties, corporations, and a vigorous press all emerged, as did something called Jacksonian Democracy. Yet what was that exactly? During the 1920s, historian Carl Russell Fish christened the era the "age of the common man." By the mid-1940s, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., was declaring Jackson to be (with Thomas Jefferson) the founder of American liberalism and, by implication, the patron saint of the New Deal. A debunking followed, as other scholars argued that Jackson and his crowd were mere opportunists. Now, a new biography by Robert V. Remini of the University of Illinois restores much of the Schlesinger portrait but celebrates Jackson's faith in liberty in terms that Reaganauts might applaud. Here, Harry L. Watson examines how Old Hickory became a president for all seasons.

OLD HICKORY'S DEMOCRACY

by Harry L. Watson

Still dressed in mourning for his recently deceased wife, a tall, erect, gray-haired figure emerged from the U.S. Capitol at noon on March 4, 1829. Waiting for him on the wide East Lawn that balmy day were some 15,000 spectators—ladies in plumes and brilliant silks, gentlemen in ruffled shirts and broadcloth, farmers in homespun, hunters in fringed buckskin. On seeing the man they variously called Old Hickory, the Old Hero, and the Old Chief, they roared their approval of the about-to-be-inaugurated seventh President of the United States.

Andrew Jackson, 61, the self-made soldier-senator from the Tennessee frontier, had whipped the outgoing John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, a crabbed and unpopular symbol of Eastern elitism. He had won 56 percent of the votes cast by an electorate that sensed wrenching change and sought fresh leadership. "I never saw anything like it before," marveled Daniel Webster, the august Bay State senator. "Persons have come 500 miles to see General Jackson, and they really seem to think that the country is rescued from some dreadful danger."

Rousing the Rabble

Surveying the sea of faces, even the doyenne of Washington society was flushed with democratic enthusiasm. The sight of "a free people," recalled Margaret Bayard Smith, "collected in their might, silent and tranquil, restrained solely by a moral power, without a shadow around of military force, was majesty." Jackson met the plaudits with grave dignity, bowed low, and completed the inaugural quickly. A short address, more cheering, another bow, and then back through the Capitol to mount a white horse for the ride up Pennsylvania Avenue.

What ensued has survived as the most enduring tableau of Jacksonian Democracy. The throng of spectators that followed the new President, Mrs. Smith recalled, was made up of "country men, farmers, gentlemen, mounted and dismounted, boys, women and children, black and white." Expecting entertainment and a handshake from "the Gineral," they crowded into the White House until the windows burst open. Well-wishers stood on the chairs and muddied the carpets. China and cut glass crashed to the floor as people stretched for drinks and ice cream, until someone thought to carry tubs of punch out to the lawn. After a while, worried aides spirited Jackson to his suite at Gadsby's Hotel. The raucous scene was more the result of poor planning than of some unleashed popular barbarism, but polite society did not remember it that way. As Mrs. Smith saw it, "The Majesty of the People had disappeared, and a rabble" took its place. "What a pity, what a pity!" Could the United States survive the reign of the people?

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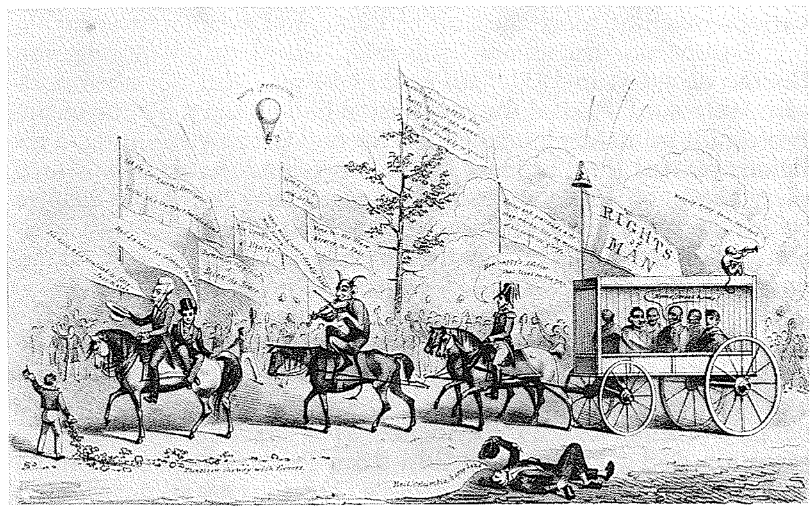
I

THE 'GET FORWARD' ERA

As Jackson took office, the country was being transformed anew. True independence had come with the British defeat in the War of 1812—the war that had made Old Hickory a national hero. That the Indians no longer posed any threat east of the Mississippi River was also in part a result of Jackson's military prowess. Americans were thus free to develop their empire, and movement and innovation were in the air. As Baltimore editor Hezekiah Niles observed in an 1815 piece in *Niles' Weekly Register*, the nation had an "almost *universal ambition to get forward*."

By the time of Jackson's inauguration, the U.S. population had reached nearly 13 million, many of these recent arrivals from Germany and Ireland; Jackson's own parents had come from northern Ireland to work a small farm in the Carolina backcountry. With Missouri's admission in 1821, the Union had crossed the Mississippi and now included 24 states.

Surging foreign demand for cotton and other raw materials, along with British investment, helped finance rapid develop-



Jackson's 1833 "Grand Triumphal Tour" of eight Eastern states. He insisted that "all must bow to public opinion" and was the first chief to assert that "the President is the direct representative of the American people."

ment. "Internal improvements" came swiftly.

Turnpikes were built; on the Cumberland Road, the coach travel time between Baltimore and St. Louis was cut from four weeks to 94 hours. The *Clermont*, Robert Fulton's 1807 marriage of the steam engine and the sailing vessel, led to fleets of churning sidewheelers. Within three years after the completion of the state-financed Erie Canal, linking New York City and the Great Lakes in 1825, a group of private investors broke the ground for the first railroad, the Baltimore and Ohio. Along with banks (there were 329 in business by Jackson's inauguration) and insurance firms, the companies formed to build such marvels became the first American corporations.

Emerson's Lament

The Transportation Revolution spurred growth. Textile factories rose beside the streams of New England, spinning cotton supplied by the planters who moved into Alabama and Mississippi following the defeat of the Indians there by Jackson's militiamen during the War of 1812. New river cities such as Cincinnati and Pittsburgh sprung up in the wilderness, while such older ports as Philadelphia and Boston grew apace and New York marched to urban supremacy. Demand would increase for all sorts of inventions—the telegraph, the mechanical reaper, various machine tools, the Colt revolver, and even anesthesia.

Europe was transfixed. "*Amerika*," Germany's Wolfgang von Goethe declared in 1831, "*du hast es besser.*" But not all Americans were sure. Fearful that expansion had loosed a plague of sin, Protestant ministers launched the Second Great Awakening, a religious revival that, at least in the hinterland, made evangelical piety the unofficial standard of respectability. (It would inspire reformers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and William Lloyd Garrison to try to erase remaining imperfections in an improving world.) Nascent unions joined a chorus of reform.

Self-doubt was spurred by generational change. America, as Alexis de Tocqueville would observe on his 1831–32 journey around the country, was losing "her greatest men." John Adams and Thomas Jefferson both died on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of American independence. Two years before, when the Marquis de Lafayette returned from France for a final tour, Americans welcomed the "Nation's Guest" with an outpouring of anxious commemoration. They yearned to show this old ally that the new nation's ideals still lived.

Concern about those ideals afflicted intellectuals. Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Herman Melville, and

Walt Whitman would all be fascinated by their age's vitality but often repelled by its materialism. James Fenimore Cooper, a squire from upstate New York who believed rural folk to be America's "heart," would return in 1833 from a long stay in Europe to be shocked by what the "get forward" ethic had wrought.

"The desire to grow suddenly rich has seized on all classes," sneered John Effingham, the embittered aristocrat in Cooper's 1838 novels *Homeward Bound* and *Home as Found*. Disgusted by the speculation in land and goods that gripped New York particularly, Effingham took perverse satisfaction in a great 1835 fire that wiped out Manhattan's warehouse area. The desire for gain has absorbed "all principles," he fumed. "National honor ... the ordinary rules of society, law, the constitution, and everything that is usually so dear to men, are forgotten, or are perverted in order to sustain this unnatural condition of things."

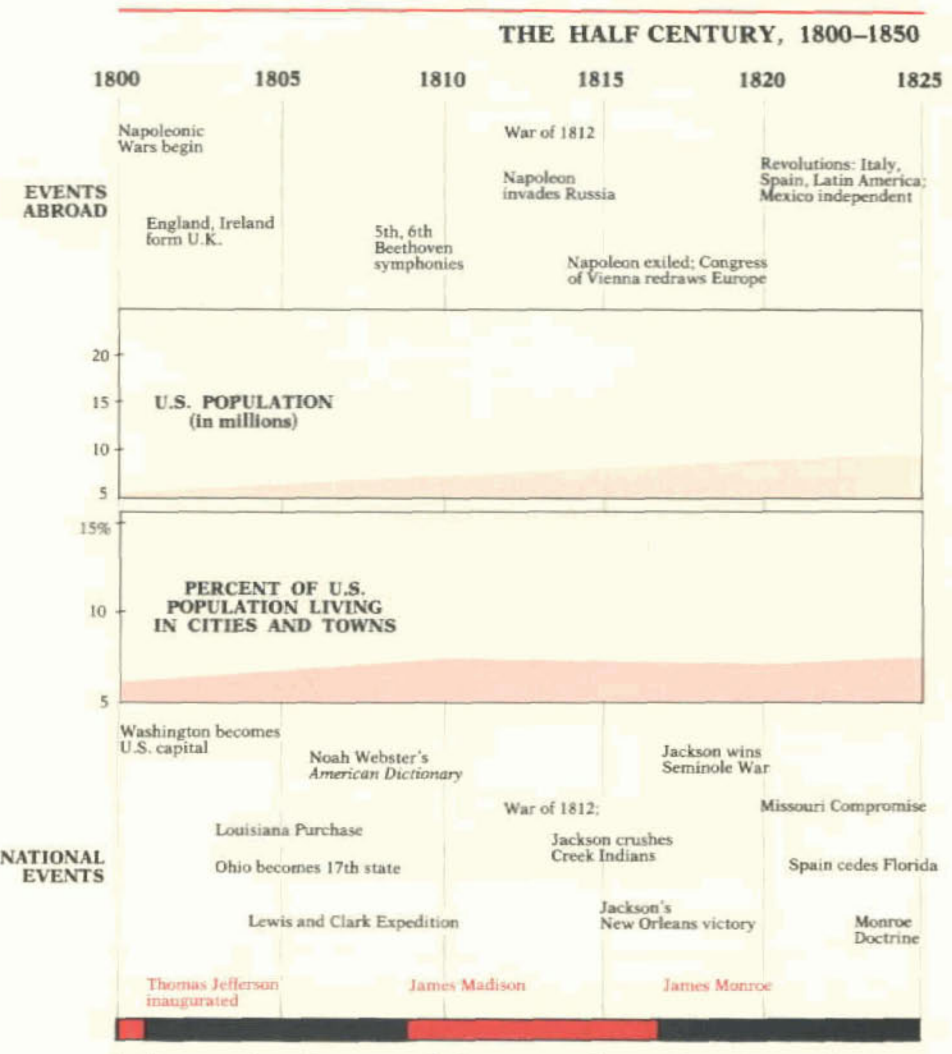
That burst of literary creativity known as the American Renaissance began to shape a combination of outward confidence and private skepticism that would be characteristic of American art. If Hezekiah Niles's readers were all looking forward, many writers noticed that some were secretly glancing over their shoulders. "Our age is retrospective," Emerson would lament in "Nature," his famous 1836 essay. "It builds the sepulchers of the fathers. . . . The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes."

II
'DANGEROUS' HERO?

The first six presidents—the Virginia Dynasty planters (Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe) and the Yankee Adamses of Massachusetts (John and John Quincy)—all came from prominent colonial families. Andrew Jackson stood apart.

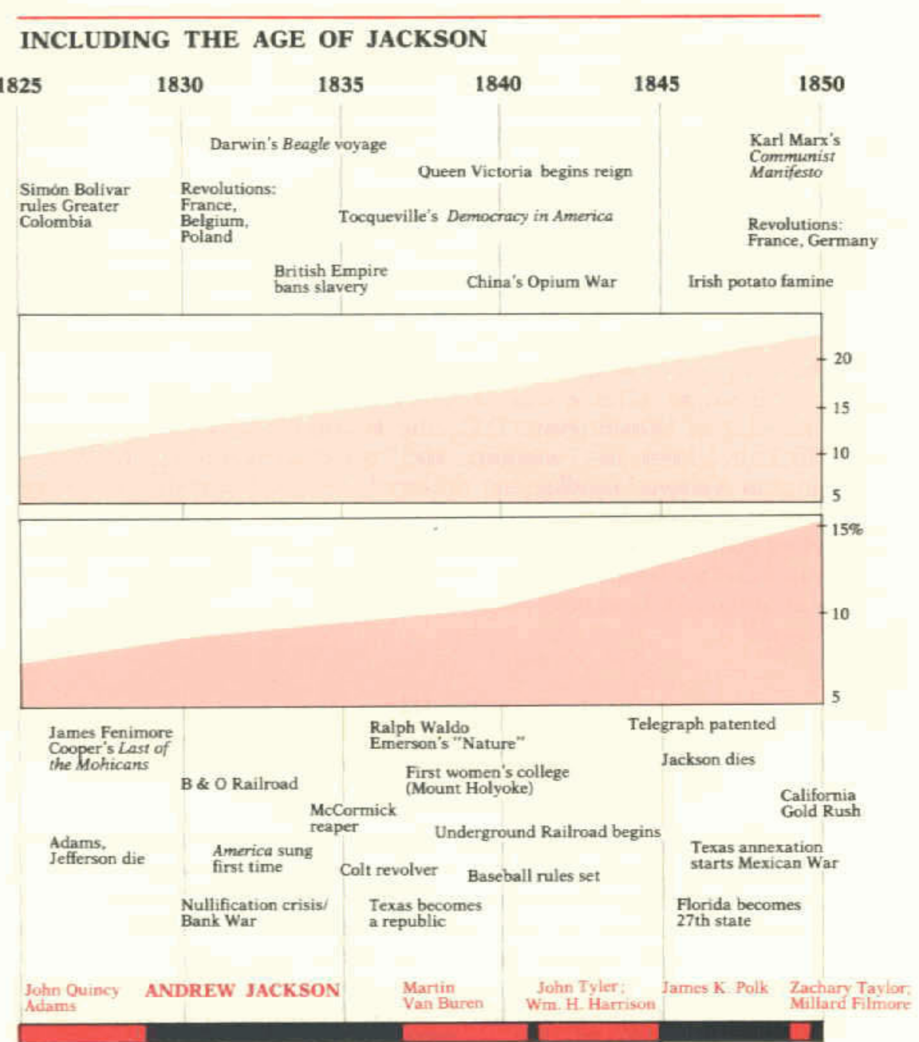
Born on a modest farm, he had been raised in the wild and had the combativeness to match. Jefferson had been heard to judge the willful Tennessean "dangerous" and "unfit" for the presidency. When in the early 1820s President Monroe asked Jefferson about appointing Jackson to the U.S. mission to Russia, the ex-President replied, "Why, good God! He would breed you a quarrel before he had been there a month!"

From newspapers, handbills, and a campaign biography, voters knew Jackson's story well: his early orphanhood, his wounding at age 13 during the Revolution, his bout of dissipation



before reading law in Salisbury, North Carolina, his early lawyering in burgeoning Tennessee. As a Nashville attorney who prosecuted debt cases and protected the land claims of big speculators, he won the trust of the rich men who were coming to dominate middle Tennessee, married into a leading family, and rose in politics. He invested in land and slaves until, by the 1790s, he could claim to be a planter and gentleman of substance.

Then came a brush with disaster in land speculation, after which he pulled back from the unbridled pursuit of wealth that absorbed most of his Nashville friends. Jackson had himself elected



Major General of the Tennessee militia in 1802 and worked at improving the troops while struggling to repair his fortunes. Undiminished was his reputation for volatility and violence. Forever "challenging" those who crossed him, he was wounded three times in duels and, in an 1806 encounter, killed his opponent.

Jackson was bedridden in Nashville—recovering from a pistol wound received in a brawl with Thomas Hart Benton, a future Missouri senator and Jackson ally—when he was called into service in the War of 1812. Within a month, he was leading Tennessee and Kentucky militiamen against Britain's Creek In-

dian allies. His forces got off to a sluggish start, and at one point he had six soldiers executed for desertion. But he swept the Creeks from vast expanses of Alabama. On his own authority, he then moved on to Spanish Florida, where he smashed a British force at Pensacola in November 1814.

His great stroke came in January, when he led 3,500 men in rebuffing a larger force of British regulars under Gen. Sir Edward M. Pakenham that had advanced on New Orleans to use it as a pawn in negotiations. In the final battle, his troops suffered just 71 casualties, versus more than 2,000 for the British. But his feat had no strategic effect; neither side knew that a peace treaty had been signed in Belgium three weeks earlier.

Even so, after a war of many disasters, especially the 1814 burning of Washington, D.C., the Battle of New Orleans made Jackson a hero. His "wisdom" and "personal example," the Washington *National Intelligencer* declared, "seemed to instil into every breast his own patriotism and heroic courage." The *New York Evening Post* argued, "If we had a Jackson everywhere, we should succeed everywhere." Exulted Kentucky senator Henry Clay: "*Now* I can go to England without mortification."

III

REDEFINING 'LIBERTY'

The second war of independence led to a new interest in the concept of liberty, national and personal, that would help to shape Jacksonian Democracy. Over the last two decades, historians have focused on the fact that those who led the Revolution and wrote the Constitution were driven not just by such concrete concerns as British taxation. They shared a complex set of attitudes that has come to be called "republican ideology" and that drew on the English tradition of dissent.

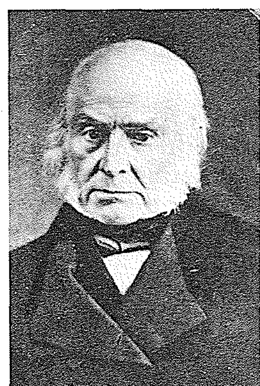
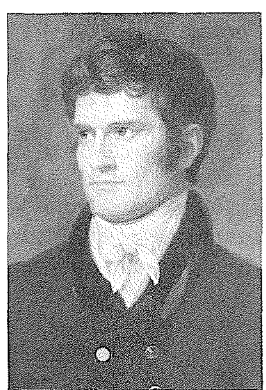
Since the days of John Locke and the Glorious Revolution of 1688–89, when the English Bill of Rights put parliamentary power over royal power, Englishmen had been used to thinking that liberty could only be protected by a balance in government between royal, aristocratic, and popular elements. While most politically active Englishmen were satisfied that such a balance had been achieved by the 18th century, there were dissident intellectuals who worried that the Crown had suborned Parliament by bribing its members with pensions, places, and other types of "preferment." These True Whigs warned that liberty

was endangered by corrupt royal ministers who served the "monied interests" more faithfully than the "common good."

True Whig writings were more popular in America than in England. The colonists, like the English dissidents, felt isolated from power. Viewing any expansion of government as an assault on liberty, they rebelled against efforts to consolidate England's sway in the New World; thus the Revolution. With the insistence in the Declaration of Independence that the "just powers" of government could derive only "from the consent of the governed," "republicanism" became the American creed. Even the lofty Webster spoke reverently of "the people's constitution, the people's Government; made for the people, made by the people; and answerable to the people."

Thus, presidents had a burden put upon them. They had to advance the common good, yet not be swayed by popular folly. The conventional wisdom was Jefferson's view that "there is a natural aristocracy among men," determined not by birth but by "virtue and talents." Good republican voters had to entrust affairs to these men, who had "the most precious gift of nature for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society."

The republican faith did not rest on leaders or constitutions, but on the virtue of the citizenry. As a typical Fourth of July orator pointed out to his rural North Carolina audience in 1824, "A system devised in heaven, would fail to command the respect of a licentious and abandoned people." Unless they clung to virtue, voters might sell their liberties, much as the English had been seduced by the glitter of royalty and aristocracy. America, as Samuel Adams said, had to be a "Christian Sparta" to survive.

John Quincy Adams, John C. Calhoun, and Henry Clay supported ideas about federally promoted commercial growth that Jackson opposed. When Harvard honored the Hero, Adams objected that he was a "barbarian."

The republicans felt that virtue would grow out of particular social conditions. "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God," Jefferson had intoned. That is, virtue flourished only among independent folk—farmers, artisans—who were neither rich enough to rule others nor so poor as to have to sell themselves into subservience. To have republican government, republican society must be preserved.

But what was republican society? That was the great issue as the Age of Jackson approached.

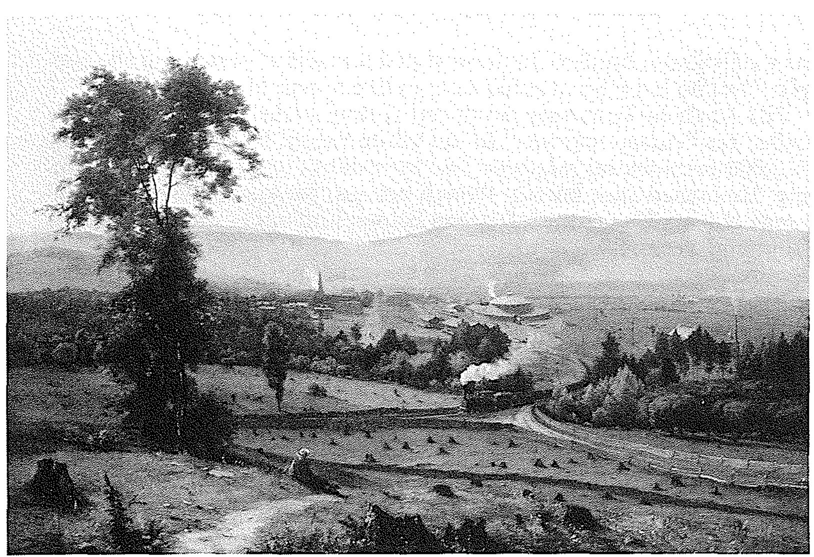
The answer depended on which republican you asked. Jefferson had looked to a society of simple yeomen, led by natural aristocrats who happened to resemble strongly the Sage of Monticello; like Britain's True Whigs, he opposed the "monied interests," which he associated with the urban commercial economy. Printer Thomas Paine and the artisans of Philadelphia pointed to themselves as exemplars of republicanism. Lawyer Alexander Hamilton, eager to create a commercial and manufacturing nation, drew up *his* plans for the republic with the needs of merchants and moneymen in mind. The competing definitions of the common good would give rise to conflict between debtors and creditors, Easterners and Westerners, Jeffersonians and Hamiltonians.

Fortunately for the Union, early America could tolerate such differences. Most people were fairly self-sufficient farmers. They owned land, or could hope to. Remembering his youth in 18th-century Virginia, Anglican minister Devereaux Jarrat wrote that "none of my ancestors, on either side, were either rich [or] great, but had the character of honesty and industry, by which they lived in credit among their neighbors, free from real want, and above the frowns of the world."

'Alabama Feaver'

Every rural town had a blacksmith and a miller, and cities like New York and Philadelphia had mechanics and craftsmen. But generally, families filled their own needs. Land gave most men a prized independence, a social analogue to the political independence that they had won from Britain.

Yet by Jackson's time all this was changing. The ratio of farm folk to city- and town-dwellers, 15 to 1 in 1800, was down to about 10 to 1 and falling. Businessmen developed a low-cost "putting-out" system in which workers made goods at home. This cut the need for artisans, as did factories. The Massachusetts shoe and textile workers were among the first Americans to experience a lifetime of wage earning.



A train in Pennsylvania's Lackawanna Valley in 1855. The U.S. rail network, just 23 miles long in 1830, would surpass 30,000 miles by the Civil War.

And even where the republican ideal was strongest, not all citizens were equal. The typical area had a few people who ran things. "Go into every village in New England," John Adams observed in 1797, "and you will find that the office of justice of the peace, and even [legislators], have generally descended from generation to generation, in three or four families at most." As a boy, Jarrat recalled, "we were accustomed to look up to what were called *gentle folks* as beings of a superior order. For my part, I was quite shy of *them*, and kept off at a humble distance."

Through marriage and business ties, the gentry were self-perpetuating. Families like the Adamses in Massachusetts and the Clintons and Livingstons in New York continued to dominate the politics of their states. In part, it was a desire to break their hold that united the upstart politicians who would be called "Jackson men" or "Jacksonians."

They would form the Democratic party, which would hold its first national convention (in Baltimore) in 1832, on the eve of Jackson's second term. But in the 1810s and '20s, they were just finding their paths to power. The smart, compact "Red Fox," the New York boss Martin Van Buren, was a tavern-keeper's son who sensed early that the old aristocracy could be "displaced" by parties organized at the grassroots and tightly disciplined; he

'I DO WHAT IS JUST AND RIGHT'

As a politician, Andrew Jackson styled himself a "servant of the people," but he lived (or wanted to live) like a man of privilege.

His lands in Tennessee produced cotton, picked by what he once called his "cursed negroes." In the White House, he spent much of his $25,000 presidential salary on fine furnishings and spirited entertaining. He owned race horses, though not just for sport: The 1805 winnings of a stallion named Truxton helped him out of one of his many financial scrapes. His pride was the Hermitage, his estate near Nashville. After an 1834 fire, he rebuilt the manse with a high false front—needed to frame a Greek revival portico like the ones he admired at the White House and at George Washington's Mount Vernon.

Jackson was born on March 15, 1767, in the Waxhaws, a wooded area on the border of North and South Carolina. Two weeks earlier, his father had died of an injury suffered while lifting a log. Jackson's mother hoped he would be "an ornament of the pulpit," but young Andrew was not so destined. A neighbor recalled him as a "roaring, rollicking, game-cocking, horse racing, card-playing, mischievous fellow." At age 13, during the Revolutionary War, he and a brother were captured while trying to take a British-held church. When he refused to polish a Redcoat's boots, the officer swung a saber at him, scarring his head and hand. As prisoners both boys had smallpox, and only Andrew survived. His other brother was killed in battle; his mother soon died. "I felt utterly alone," Jackson recalled.

Rachel Jackson

Of all the pains he suffered, few were as deep as those that came with his marriage to Rachel Donelson, whose mother owned the house where Jackson lived as a prosecuting attorney in Nashville. A pipe-smoking frontier lass known as "irresistible to men," Rachel had a husband, Captain Lewis Robards. But romance blossomed, and in 1790 she and Jackson eloped to Mississippi. Robards followed the pair, eventually into Kentucky, and at one point had Jackson arrested. In 1791, Jackson and Rachel married, thinking that Robards had divorced her. But he had not, a fact that forced the two to marry again (in 1794) and to suffer taunts about "adultery" ever after. Insinuations about Rachel helped trigger an 1806 duel between Jackson and Charles Dickinson, a noted marksman. Jackson coolly let Dickinson fire first and took a bullet near his heart (it was never removed). Then he killed Dickinson with *his* single shot.

Though Jackson professed to be the trustee of Thomas Jefferson's ideals, he was no Sage of Monticello. He read little and wrote poorly, preferred the comfort of cronies, and was forever smoking a pipe or chewing tobacco—the cause, perhaps, of the hacking cough and

headaches that long plagued him. Thin (140 pounds on a six-foot, one-inch frame) and wan, he was always trying nostrums: bloodletting, fasting, diets, doses of calomel, brandy, whiskey, and salt.

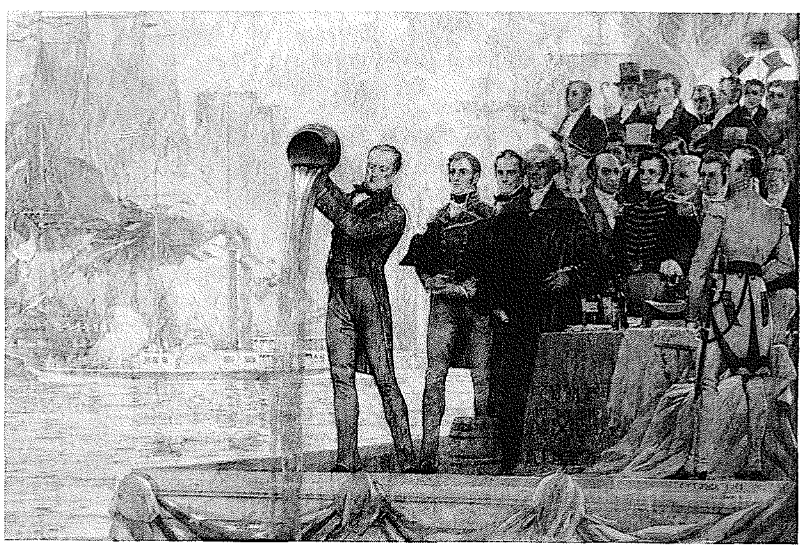
He was quick—"the most rapid reasoner I have ever met," said Louis McLane, one of his Treasury secretaries. Yet he cared little for "the niceties of language" (as another Cabinet member put it) or for detail in general. His life, wrote diplomat Nathaniel Niles, was "dictated by emotion in contradistinction to reason."

As Tennessee's first U.S. Congressman, he opposed a 1796 resolution thanking Washington for his farewell address, protesting that such speeches were only for "countries that have a king." Testifying in the 1807 trial of his friend Aaron Burr, who had lost the 1800 presidential race to Thomas Jefferson, killed Jefferson's ally Alexander Hamilton in a duel, and was now accused of a treasonous plan to break up the Union, Jackson said that Burr had been railroaded with the kind of hearsay "they used in the French Revolution when they wanted to cut a man's head off because he didn't agree with them."

As President in 1833, while traveling by steamboat to Virginia, Jackson was struck by a man he had discharged from the Navy for theft; had the fellow not been hustled away, Jackson swore, he "would never have moved with life from the tracks that he stood in." Two years later, at a Washington ceremony, a mentally deranged bystander aimed two pistols at Jackson, and both misfired. Instead of recoiling from the man—the first would-be presidential assassin, Richard Lawrence—the Hero lunged after him; Jackson was still "boiling with rage" when aides escorted him to safety. He believed that political mudslinging had hastened his ailing Rachel's death after his election in 1828; after her funeral he cried, "May God almighty forgive her murderers as I know she forgave them. I never can!"

Jackson knew he was uncommonly willful. When an aide warned in 1832 that Maine would raise a clamor about the way he had settled a territorial dispute with Canada, Jackson shot back, "I care nothing about clamors, sir, mark me! I do precisely what I think is just and right." His confrontational style was one key to his popularity. After Jackson's testimony at the Burr trial, a Richmond editor wrote admiringly that he "spared none. His style of speaking was rude but strong. It was not the political oratory Eastern audiences were accustomed to hear." Even his foes conceded his "magnetism."

Was Jackson's hickory-hardness a posture? He could be relaxed and genial. One observer described him and Rachel at an 1815 ball: "The general a long, haggard man, with limbs like a skeleton, and Madame le Générale, a short, fat dumpling bobbing opposite each other like half-drunken Indians, to the wild melody of 'Possum up de Gum Tree,' and endeavoring to make a spring into the air." During the controversy over the Bank, Jackson shocked several visiting businessmen with his vehemence on the issue. Afterwards, he chuckled, "They thought I was mad." No man, concluded a Jackson aide, knew better "when to get into a passion and when not."



The 363-mile Erie Canal linking the Hudson River and Lake Erie was opened in 1825. It brought immigrants to Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois.

would serve Jackson as Secretary of State, Vice President, and chief Kitchen Cabinet confidant. Other Jacksonians were men like the gruff David Henshaw, who parlayed a fortune made in wholesale drugs into a machine that challenged the Yankee old guard in Massachussetts; and the firebrand Sen. Isaac Hill of New Hampshire, who, as owner, editor, printer, and newsboy of the *New Hampshire Patriot*, had at 21 begun a long war against a state oligarchy he felt had kept his family poor.

The Jacksonians saw themselves as restorers of the Jeffersonian tradition. They found their chance to act in the time of flux that came with the Transportation Revolution.

People in the rural East, overcrowded with big families, rushed to the all-but-free land in newly opened Western areas. "*The Alabama feaver* rages here with great violence," fretted a North Carolina planter in 1817. "I am apprehensive, if it continues to spread as it has done, it will almost depopulate the country . . . Some of our oldest and most wealthy men are offering their possessions for sale and desirous of removing."

Hard decisions faced both the farmers who moved and those who stayed. Specializing in a cash crop like cotton or wheat meant losing self-sufficiency. The new methods urged by "book farmers" required sophistication; producing for the market might mean

borrowing to buy a reaper or a slave. Should a man risk his capital by taking on debt, or should he keep his independence? Would the new ways bring a bonanza or bankruptcy?

These came to be viewed as moral and political questions. Could liberty survive if artisans and farmers were in thrall to banks and other businesses? On the other hand, how could a poor nation remain free? Was not government obliged to build up the national welfare by fostering internal improvements?

Such questions had to be faced. Promoters of banks and transportation companies made change a political issue by seeking subsidies—privilege—from government. Many citizens felt that, as John C. Calhoun of South Carolina would write in 1826 to Jackson, "liberty never was in greater danger." An issue "has been fairly made . . . whether the real governing principle in our political system be the power and patronage of the Executive or the voice of the people."

The need to redefine liberty and virtue preoccupied the political energies of the 1820s. It would be Jackson's greatest achievement to set the terms of the debate and to propose a solution with which the nation would wrestle for years to come.

IV

'DESPOT' OR DEMOCRAT?

To many Americans, Old Hickory's War of 1812 feats had seemed a providential vindication of the republican ideal, and there had long been talk that he should be president. In 1817, James Monroe had prior claim, however, so Jackson waited. Meanwhile, he fought some more. On his own authority—Monroe's approval came later—he wrested more Indian territory in a series of ruthless negotiations and, while tracking a fugitive band of Seminoles, conquered Spanish Florida, hanged two British agents, and otherwise provoked international outrage.

Such exploits reinforced an image of Jackson as a hotheaded backcountry outlaw. A Richmond editor was said to scarcely ever retire "without apprehension that he would wake up to hear of some coup d'état by the General." But by 1823, when he became a Tennessee senator, Jackson was widely viewed as a statesman who combined the common touch of the self-made man with the poise and determination of a natural aristocrat. A Massachusetts man who met him in Washington wrote his wife that Jackson's reputation as "extremely rash and

. . . AND NOW THE NEWS!

James Fenimore Cooper found them "corrupting" and "vulgar." Alexis de Tocqueville felt that they made "coarse appeals" to popular passions, tended to "assail the characters of individuals," and employed crass editors who had no "weight in the eyes of the public."

What appalled such highbrows, but delighted the rising numbers of middle- and working-class Americans, was the Jackson era's boisterous "penny press," a new breed of cheap, wide-circulation newspapers. Starting in 1833 with the first successful one, Benjamin Day's *New York Sun*, these papers were to launch the prosperous, politically independent, and increasingly professional modern U.S. press.

In 1830, America had 650 weekly and 65 daily papers. But most were low-circulation "six-penny papers." Often put out by a lone editor, these were printed on large, unwieldy "blanket sheets" and sold by yearly subscription (about $8, a week's pay for a skilled worker) to a narrow readership. Some papers, with names such as the *New York Daily Advertiser* and the *Journal of Commerce*, catered to businessmen, with shipping news and items from the European press. Others were openly bankrolled by political parties, various splinter groups, and even individual politicians. Amos Kendall, an editorial writer at the *Washington Globe*, the "Jackson paper" in Washington, D.C., would take dictation at the White House from the President in the evening as he lounged on a couch and smoked and then rework his jottings into "news." He wrote letters to papers in the hinterland and cited them in the *Globe* as evidence of pro-Jackson public opinion.

The penny papers declared political independence and portrayed themselves as service journals. "The object of this paper," read the *Sun*'s first issue, "is to lay before the public, at a price within the means of everyone, ALL THE NEWS OF THE DAY, and at the same time afford an advantageous medium for advertising."

In two years, the *Sun* was selling 15,000 copies a day. It was followed by the *New York Transcript*, the *New York Herald*, started with $500 by the Scotsman James Gordon Bennett, and Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. Others appeared in Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. By 1840, the nation had 1,141 weeklies and 138 dailies. Total readership, then 300,000, rose faster than the population.

Urbanization played a role. So did technology—rotary presses, the telegraph (invented in 1844)—and such advances as a handy tabloid size, "newsboys" who hawked papers on the street for cash, and prepayment for advertising. But the penny press's most striking novelties were editorial. The papers described political events as

inconsiderate, tyrannical and despotic," was unfounded: "He is very mild and amiable . . . and his manners, though formed in the wilds of the West, exceedingly polished and polite."

In particular, Jackson was polished for the 1824 election, which was to choose a successor to Monroe, the last Virginian.

straight news items and meanwhile sought new fields of interest. They covered divorce and murder trials, reported crimes, carried birth announcements and obituaries, and gloried in "human interest" items. (A front-page story in the *Sun*'s first issue told of a Vermont boy who could not stop whistling, performing "with astonishing shrillness" even "when asleep.")

At the *Herald*, which would become the largest U.S. paper in the decades before the Civil War, the resourceful Bennett spiced up dull news of trade ("The spirit, pith, and philosophy of commercial affairs is what men of business want") and reported the doings of the rich. Earlier, he said, no one had covered "the graces, the polish, the elegancies, the bright and airy attributes of social life," which had "an originality" that Europe's "worn-out races" lacked.

All this required an innovation: paid newsmen. The editor of the *Transcript* observed in 1834 that none of the city's 11 established journals had a reporter, but the *Transcript* and another "NEWS paper" (namely the *Herald*) had four men "to obtain the earliest, fullest, and most correct intelligence of every local incident." By 1837, Bennett had two Washington staffers, reporters in Jamaica and Key West, and occasional correspondents in Philadelphia, Boston, and London. The "scoop," a word not coined until the 1880s, was prized.

The staid, old six-penny papers barred ads for, say, businesses that operated on the Sabbath, lotteries, and theaters. The penny sheets were less choosy. They took "want ads" and flogged patent medicines. Explained the *Boston Daily Times*: "One man has as good a right as another to have his wares, his goods, his panaceas, his profession, published to the world in a newspaper, provided he pays for it."

Not all publishers found such mold-breaking profitable. An early failure (too few ads) was the *Ladies' Morning Star*, a New York daily started in 1836 to champion the "claims and rights of that class of young women who live by their daily labor." But the broad impact of the penny press was great. In *Discovering the News* (1978), sociologist Michael Schudson argues that these papers advanced literacy by offering news that ordinary folk hungered to know. The brash, "read-all-about-it" upstarts also sped the nation's transformation from a land "still cradled in aristocratic values, family, and deference, to an egalitarian market democracy, where money had new power, the individual new standing, and the pursuit of self-interest new honor."

THE SUN.

In the absence then of disciplined national parties, several candidates stepped forward. Monroe's Treasury Secretary, Georgia planter William H. Crawford, was closest to the old presidential model: Virginia-born, popular with Congress, committed to patrician "politics as usual." Three other contenders

represented younger leadership with ideas about a much stronger federal role: Secretary of State John Quincy Adams, the stiff, erudite son of the second President and favorite of New England; the humorless Calhoun, now Secretary of War; and Kentucky's ebullient Clay, Speaker of the House of Representatives, advocate of an "American system" of protective tariffs and roads and canals that would help develop the country.

During the campaign, Crawford suffered a stroke, and the others fell into unseemly bickering. Enter Old Hickory, nominated by the Tennessee legislature.

The graying farmer/warrior, long in fragile health, had cast himself as a Cincinnatus, affecting disinterest while persuading himself and others that he alone could restore the purity of the old republic. Whatever his future, "I am perfectly at ease," he had written to his nephew in 1822. "I am fast going out of life, but my fervent prayers are that our republican government may be perpetual." The people, "by their virtue, and independent exercise of their free suffrage, can make it perpetual."

Blifil and Black George

But they did not make him president. His candidacy had caught the public imagination and that of the rising Jacksonian pols. Yet while he led the field, he fell short of an electoral vote majority. The election went to the House, an event which had taken place only once before (in the tied Thomas Jefferson–Aaron Burr race of 1800) and would never again. Clay threw his support to Adams, the second-place candidate, making him president by a narrow margin. Adams then named the Kentuckian his Secretary of State and appeared to anoint him as his successor. It was a perfectly logical transaction among Washington insiders, but Jacksonians were outraged. A "corrupt bargain," they charged, had violated "the will of the people."

Adams pushed on. If earlier Americans saw liberty threatened by power, he dared to assert that "liberty is power." He called for many federal projects—roads, canals, even an astronomical observatory. If the nation was to "slumber" and "proclaim to the world that we are palsied by the will of our constituents, would [we not] doom ourselves to perpetual inferiority?"

Congress was aghast. *Palsied* by their constituents? Had the man no shame? Wasn't the scandal of his election offensive enough? Did he *have* to show further contempt for the sovereign people?

For the next four years, Congress ignored Adams's proposals. The Virginia senator John Randolph likened the staid President

and the high-living Clay to the villains of Henry Fielding's 1749 novel, *The History of Tom Jones*. They were "Blifil and Black George," "the puritan and the black-leg." Clay asked for a duel with pistols. He and Randolph survived unharmed.

The growth that Adams championed threatened to make small farmers and artisans dependent on landlords, employers, and bankers. Southerners had other reasons to fear Adams's big-government ideas. Cotton had given new life to slavery, and planters would brook no interference with it. As recently as 1820, Northern congressmen tried to force abolition in Missouri as a condition for statehood. Later a rebellion almost erupted among the slaves of Charleston, underlining the slaveholders' vulnerability. Anything that strengthened the federal government might enable an antislavery majority to assault what Southerners delicately called their "peculiar institution." "If Congress can make banks, roads, and canals under the Constitution," warned North Carolina's senator Nathaniel Macon in 1824, "they can free any slave in the United States."

Increasingly, Southerners measured candidates by the degree of their commitment to human bondage. To many of them, Georgia's Crawford seemed ideal in 1824. In 1828, they could turn to Jackson. He owned some 150 slaves and was a known opponent of centralized power.

V

'THE GINERAL' IN COMMAND

Only Adams and Jackson ran in the 1828 race, but it too made history, as the most slanderous of U.S. election campaigns.

Jacksonians called the President a libertine, a would-be dictator, "King John II," a "pimp" who had procured a woman for the Russian Tsar, a Sabbath-breaker who rode "like mad" on Sundays. They charged that Adams, who bought a billiards table and a chess set for the White House, had used public funds to install "gaming tables and gambling furniture."

Adams's allies portrayed Jackson as a bloodthirsty adventurer. Pro-Adams papers called his previously married wife, Rachel, an "adultress"; a pro-Adams handbill described Jackson's shooting of militiamen for desertion in Alabama and asked if "this man, who carries a sword cane and is willing to run it through the body of anyone who may presume to stand in his

way, is a fit person to be our President."

Behind the mudslinging were real differences. Jackson's friends presented him as a limited-government man: Only as necessary for national security would he back the internal improvements and high tariffs on imported goods (costly to the South) that Adams favored. The Hero's vague talk of "reform" (he had no platform as such) appealed to those who had no fondness for the establishment and nothing to gain from a market economy. The election proved that fears of economic change, centralized power, and corruption were more compelling to voters than the federally guided progress that Adams offered. Jackson won not only 56 percent of the 1,155,340 votes cast, but also 178 electoral votes (to Adams's 83). He swept the South and West and also took Pennsylvania and most of New York.

Expanding the Empire

At the end of Jackson's eight-year Presidency, Clay would say that he had "swept over the Government . . . like a tropical tornado." But in the beginning there were few signs of approaching storms. Reflecting the nation's expansive mood, the Hero sent the sloop-of-war *Vincennes* off to show the flag on the first round-the-world cruise by a U.S. Navy ship. In his brief first inaugural, he was specific only about federal indebtedness, which he thought "incompatible with real independence" and promised to wipe out—and did, in 1835–36.*

Like many 19th-century thinkers, Jackson had an ideal of the republic as a feature of the "middle landscape," equally removed from the savagery of the wilderness and the decadence of the Old World. He had faced these enemies in his wars with Indians and the British. As President, he would restore republican values by fighting barbarism (Indians again) and decadence (now corruption).

His first opportunity came quickly. After the election, Georgia outlawed its Indian population's tribal government and declared tribal land to be state-owned. This action was an assault on the Five Civilized Tribes of the Old Southwest—the 50,000 or so Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles who sought peace with the white newcomers. They farmed, held black slaves, and often adopted Christianity. But the settlers wanted

*Though Jackson shaved spending down from $16,394,843 in 1828, by 1833 it was up to $23 million. What erased the federal debt were receipts from tariffs and sales of western lands. (By 1840, more than one-third of the population lived west of the Appalachian Mountains.) At a banquet marking the occasion, Sen. Thomas Hart Benton declared that the "long unseen" sight of a debt-free major nation at last stands "revealed to the astonished vision of a wondering world!" Federal indebtedness returned in 1837, never to be wiped out again.

Jackson's foes lampooned him after the expulsion of the Cherokees and other Indians as the "Great Father" with his "children" and crowned him "King Andrew" for vetoing Congress's recharter of the Bank of the United States.

them to leave, and Jackson agreed. The "children of the forest" had no right to their own government, he said. Like most whites, he assumed that North America had been given them by God to enable them to build a model society based on liberty for each householder. Land was needed to give new generations the chance to move west and expand "the empire of liberty."

Jackson, saying he had no power to intervene in Georgia, offered the tribes new lands beyond the Mississippi. Those who refused would be subject to the laws of their states, which generally allowed Indians ("free persons of color") few more rights than slaves. Most tribes departed for what later became Oklahoma. (The main body of the Cherokees balked, but a fraudulent treaty was used to expel them; nearly one-quarter of the 18,000 Cherokees subsequently died on the "Trail of Tears" to Oklahoma.) Jackson rejoiced that the "ill-fated" Indians had been "placed beyond the reach of injury or oppression." The government, he said, "will hereafter watch over them and protect them."

Corruption proved to be a tougher foe than the "savages." Jackson hunted out "Treasury rats" and other dishonest or incompetent officials. Insisting that most federal jobs, then seen as lifetime sinecures, could be made "plain and simple" enough to be filled by anyone, he announced a principle of "rotation in office." Government would no longer be "an engine of support for the few at the expense of the many."

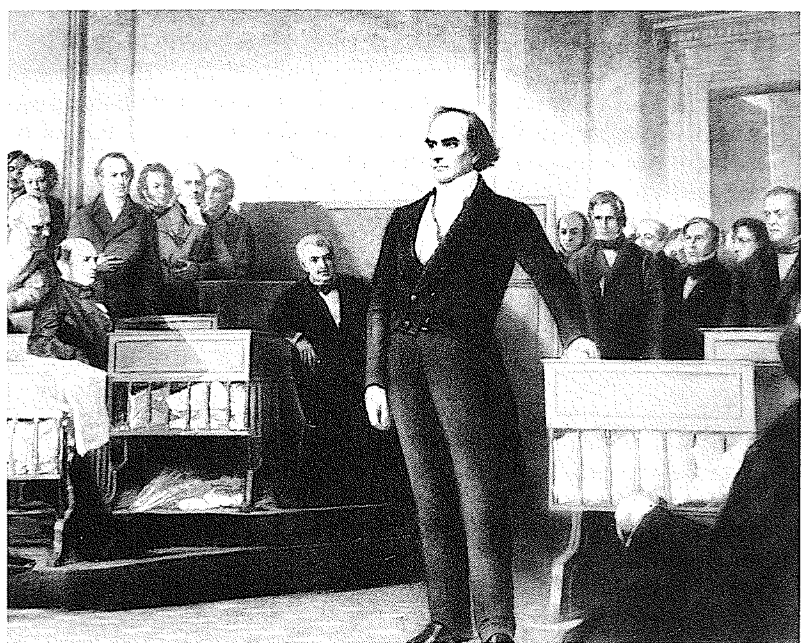
Yet the anticorruption drive was hit-or-miss. Eighteen months after the inaugural, a Jackson ally cited only 919 out of 10,093 officeholders removed, over half of them postmasters. Nor did Jackson devise systems for prosecuting embezzlers or examining nominees. A Jackson appointee, Samuel G. Swartwout, named Collector of the Port of New York in 1829 over the protests of local Jacksonians, was the first man found to have stolen more than $1 million from the Treasury. (He fled to England.)

Warring on Privilege

Jackson was convinced that Adams appointees had used their positions to electioneer for him, much as royal minions subverted the electoral process in 18th-century England. To root out this evil, he claimed "a duty to dismiss" all those who were appointed "against the will of the people" or had gotten involved in campaigning. This was translated by Sen. William A. Marcy, a power in Van Buren's New York machine, as meaning "to the victor belong the spoils of the enemy." But the number of Jackson appointees was not great, and most historians have agreed that, as Clinton Rossiter wrote in *The American Quest* (1971), the spoils system "did its share in developing a government that reflected and guarded the interests of the people."

Another source of corruption, in the republican tradition, was "commerce," and Jackson saw evidence all around him. Almost everywhere businessmen sought privileges—charters, exemptions, tariffs, monopolies—for planned investments in banks, canals, railroads, and factories. Jackson thought this intolerable: government favor being bid for by ambitious men operating, as Van Buren put it, "in conjunction with minor classes of politicians . . . and backed by a little army of cunning contractors." He signaled his aim to end such "unequal" support by vetoing an 1830 appropriation to a Kentucky firm, the Maysville Turnpike Road Company. When warned that his own advisers feared the political fallout from this assault on a practice much beloved by politicians, especially in the growing West, Jackson snapped, "Yes, but don't mind that!"

Jackson came to regard tariffs as the worst kind of unequal



South Carolina's "nullification" of tariff law led to a crisis and a rallying cry—Daniel Webster's 1830 call for "Liberty and *Union, now and forever," a principle for which hundreds of thousands of Americans would later die.*

legislation because they helped one area at the expense of another. Manufacturers wanted stiff government levies on foreign products. As a military man, Jackson saw the need to build up suppliers of textiles, munitions, and other essential items; he also needed votes from Northern industrial areas. In the campaign, he declared for a "judicious" tariff while opposing any system that favored one region.

During Adams's last year, Congress passed a high tariff that aided the North but hurt the agricultural South, which had to pay more for the goods it bought. After the election, Jackson's Southern supporters expected relief from the new President, but Jackson largely stayed out of the controversy.

Eventually, South Carolina rebelled. At an 1832 convention called by its states-rights leaders, the tariff was declared "nullified," and "King Andrew" was dared to attempt to collect in the port of Charleston. Jackson was already on bitter terms with the leading nullifier, Sen. John C. Calhoun, who while serving as his Vice President had secretly planned the South Carolina revolt.

While threatening to organize a 30,000-man army to invade the state to enforce the federal law, Jackson issued a proclamation declaring that "disunion by armed force is *treason*." Embracing a constitutional view usually associated today with Webster and Abraham Lincoln, he insisted that the Constitution "forms a *government* not a league." Because the nation was created by the people, individual states "cannot possess any right to secede."

Though Jackson always regretted not having had the "most base, hypocritical and unprincipled" Calhoun hung for treason,* cooler heads prevailed. Clay and Calhoun framed a compromise under which the tariff was gradually cut, and the crisis passed.

The Bank as Monster

By 1832, when he glided to an easy re-election (over Clay), Jackson was at war with another presumed evil: banks. Suspicious of financial manipulation since his early troubles in Tennessee, he once said that "ever since I read the history of the South Sea Bubble [an 18th-century British banking scandal], I have been afraid of banks." Their role became the greatest controversy of his administration.

In Jackson's day, the government issued no national paper currency, and there was no Federal Reserve System (it was not created until 1913). Hundreds of small banks (788 of them by 1837) set up under state charters issued their own money. The focus of Jackson's ire was the largest lender, the Philadelphia-based Bank of the United States (BUS).

The BUS was semi-official, chartered by Congress in 1816. Of its $35 million in capital, one-fifth was put up by the government. It had a monopoly on the government's banking business, and its notes—expected to become the basis for a stable national currency—were used in paying federal taxes. It presented notes issued by smaller banks for collection in gold or silver specie as soon as it received them; this discouraged the lesser banks from issuing more notes than they could redeem, a temptation that was strong in western areas where new arrivals liked to borrow cash to buy land from the government. The Supreme Court had upheld the bank's constitutionality, and under the leadership of the distinguished Nicholas Biddle, its key role in the nation's growing commerce seemed secure.

But not to Old Hickory: Like Jefferson and England's True

*He did not even duel with the "Nullie," except with a famous exchange of toasts. At an 1830 dinner commemorating Jefferson's birthday, Jackson rose and, glaring at Calhoun, hoisted a glass to "Our Federal Union—it *must* be preserved." To which Calhoun, reportedly trembling, responded: "The Union—next to our liberty, the most dear!"

Whigs, he resented the growing importance of intangible wealth and the seemingly irresponsible power of paper money financiers. He called the BUS a "Monster," a "hydra of corruption" that was "dangerous to our liberties" because it used its power to subvert the democratic process. It was known to advance funds to congressmen, keep key politicians on retainer (Webster, the bank's "counsel," borrowed nearly $18,000 from it during the 1830s), and lend freely to publishers (among them James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*). BUS officers were said to have tried to harass Jackson supporters and help Adams in the 1828 campaign. When, in 1832, Congress passed a bill extending the bank's charter for another 30 years, Jackson told Van Buren, "The bank is trying to kill me, but I will kill it." He vetoed the bill with what ranks as his most important policy statement.

Jackson versus the Bank of the United States. Proponents saw it as part of an "American system" fostering economic independence. The Jacksonian theorist William Gouge thought "government should have no more concern with Banking and brokerage than it has with baking and tailoring."

The bank's charter, Jackson said, was "a present of some millions" to private stockholders, many European. "Every man is equally entitled to protection by law," he wrote. Thus when lawmakers "grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society—the farmers, mechanics, and laborers . . . have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government."

Webster would charge that Jackson was "trying to inflame the poor against the rich." But Jackson truly saw himself as fighting for the "farmers, mechanics, and laborers," the bedrock of republican society, who had no need or opportunity to gain government favors. He would protect their liberty by destroying an institution that could reduce their political rights to insignificance.

A Charge of Tyranny

Public opinion divided sharply on the issue, and more so when Jackson in 1833 announced that he would withdraw government deposits from the BUS and place them in state banks. Jackson believed he had to cripple the BUS before it could use its power to obtain a new congressional charter. This was no idle fear: Biddle had called the veto "a declaration of war" and was fighting back hard—even causing a recession by calling in loans and refusing credit to persuade the business community that the BUS was indeed indispensible.

When Roger B. Taney, the Jackson-appointed Treasury Secretary (he was never confirmed by the Senate), withdrew the government's funds from the BUS, the step outraged merchants, bankers, commercial farmers, and other credit users who wanted a centralized banking system. They had accepted the veto, believing that another charter would be passed later. But they saw deposit removal as an assault on property rights. The *Boston Advertiser* thundered that "for the first time, perhaps, in the history of civilized communities, the Chief Magistrate of a great nation . . . is found appealing to the worst passions of the uninformed."

To his political opponents, Jackson's action seemed especially highhanded. The legislation that had created the Treasury Department required its Secretary to report not to the President but to Congress, suggesting that the Executive had only limited authority over the department. Arguing that the primary threat to republican liberties was not the rise of commerce but presidential usurpation of power, Clay led what would be a major congressional assault on executive power and authority—and the greatest until 1868, when Andrew Johnson's foes tried to impeach him for attempting to force out a Secretary of War who

was admired on Capitol Hill.

Proposing Senate resolutions censuring Jackson, Clay charged that a "hitherto bloodless" revolution was moving the nation from a republic to a dictatorship; if the "approaching tyranny" was not stopped, America would have an elective monarchy, "the worst of all forms of government." Three months of debate ensued, with Webster and Calhoun warning of "despotic power" in the White House. The resolutions finally passed in March 1834, but Jackson's Democrats were vindicated by smashing victories in the subsequent congressional elections.

Clay, Calhoun, and Webster established an opposition party. Claiming affinity to the English dissident tradition, they took the name "Whigs" and tried to rally voters against "King Andrew I." Yet the Whigs were at best loosely organized by the 1836 election. Jackson's chosen successor, Van Buren, edged out Webster and three other rivals. By the end of the Red Fox's term, however, two-party competition was firmly established.

The BUS was crippled, finally collapsing in 1843, but Jackson's victory meant little in the long run. Larger forces were at work. As he left office, a fire of speculation was spreading that would end with the Panic of 1837. This was a scare about the soundness of the banking system that drove many institutions to stop redeeming their notes in gold and silver specie, which in turn led to an economic depression that extended into the 1840s.

Van Buren subsequently created a complete divorce between Washington and banking through an "independent Treasury" plan; it remained in place until the creation of the Federal Reserve. Yet Jackson failed to eliminate the use of credit and paper money as the basis for the nation's business. With the demise of the Philadelphia "Monster," New York became the nation's financial center. Old Hickory's attacks on vested commercial interests had invigorated democratic ideology, but the growth of America's market economy continued uninterrupted.

VI

JACKSON'S LEGACY

In his farewell address, Jackson recalled Washington's warning. "You must remember, my fellow citizens," he said, "that eternal vigilance . . . is the price of liberty." Jackson was not referring to any foreign threat. "It is from within, among yourselves, from cupidity, from corruption, from disappointed

ambition and inordinate thirst for power—that factions will be formed and liberty endangered."

How to guard against all this? Jackson furnished a clue in an 1833 letter to Indiana district attorney Tilghman A. Howard. He called "equality among the people in the rights conferred by government" the "principle of freedom." As Jackson saw it, the ideological basis for democracy was laid in the need for strict legal egalitarianism to protect the republican union from the pull of hostile interests. Unlike James Madison, who in *The Federalist* (1787–88), essay No. 10, had explained his faith in a variety of competing factions, Jackson put his faith in the single interest represented by the "great body of the people."

Jackson believed that equality, to survive, required a perpetual defense; a grand coalition of voters who had more to gain from equality than from legislated favoritism was needed to stand against "the predatory portion of the community." He thought that this coalition had first appeared in Jefferson's time, under the Democratic-Republican (or just Republican) banner, and had reassembled to put him in office and rescue the republic from corruption. Though many Jefferson followers ended up as Jackson foes, Old Hickory continued to believe that he had only revived the Jefferson coalition. He was proud to have "labored to reconstruct this great Party and bring popular power to bear with full influence upon the Government."

Parties, Patronage, Parades

Here Jackson was repeating a lesson learned earlier, in the rough school of New York politics, by Van Buren. Building on "Little Van's" methods, Jacksonians organized clusters of activists in other states. They controlled patronage in the post office, customs, and other public jobs, and made loyalty essential to get them. They summoned voters to conventions, organized caucuses to keep local legislators in line, established newspapers to put out party views. (Motto of the Jackson paper in Washington, D.C., the *Washington Globe*: "The world is governed too much.")

To communicate with voters (and cow the opposition), the Jacksonians held mass meetings and parades. An outsized example was "The Grand Triumphal Tour" of 1833. To put the nullification war in the past, Jackson made a month-long trek from the Capital through New England by "steam car," boat, and horse carriage that, wrote biographer Robert Remini, "caused an emotional debauch. The delight, the happiness, the pure joy shown by the people in seeing their President had never been expressed in quite the same way before." Previously, only

Abolitionist agitation led to Virginia's Nat Turner Rebellion, an 1831 eruption of racial violence. Jackson, said one paper, brought "mobocracy."

Washington and Monroe had traveled the country, and neither worked crowds (or drew them) as the Hero did.

To many Americans these developments seemed highly ironic, even disgraceful. A man who had promised to sweep away corruption had wound up promoting it, through patronage. A man who had evoked the old republic laid the groundwork for machine politics. Partisanship was widely viewed as the very antithesis of republican morality—a judgment that, in one version or another, has persisted.

Old Hickory's foes found that they could not oppose Jacksonism successfully without embracing its methods. By 1840, the Democrats were confronted by a Whig party that was equally committed to political democracy*—and to winning at the Jacksonians' own game. The Whigs picked their own War of 1812 general, William Henry ("Old Tip") Harrison, 67, a farmer from North Bend, Ohio, and ran a race that would set the standard for all to follow. There were campaign songs, torchlight parades, much overblown rhetoric. Whig promoters turned Harrison's substantial farmhouse into a humble log cabin; a brand of Old Cabin Whisky (in cabin-shaped bottles) was put out by a Philadelphia company called E. C. Booz. The Whig Springfield (Massachusetts) *Republican* declared that Old Tip would "strike his plough into the soil of corruption in Washing-

*For white males, anyway. Even for them, broad suffrage was slow in coming; for example, it was not until the 1850s that property owning requirements for the right to vote disappeared everywhere. For women, the march toward the 19th Amendment, which in 1920 guaranteed their suffrage, began with small steps—such as Kentucky's 1838 move to grant limited voting rights to widows with school-age children.

ton, and turn it to the light of the sun." Van Buren was flayed as an "aristocrat" who offered workers "50 cents a day and French soup" instead of the Whigs' "$2 a day and roast beef."

Harrison defeated Van Buren with 53 percent of the popular vote. The old politics, that of the decorous jousting among candidates from the gentry, was gone.

While the Democrats looked back to the simplicity of the old republic, Whigs looked ahead to the promise of a business economy. They argued that development would help all and were more skeptical of the benefits of wide-open democracy. (John Quincy Adams, who would not be "palsied" by the popular will, became a Whig.) But the parties did not pit monolithic classes against each other. There were rich and poor in both, and in both men of average means were a majority. Background mattered: Northern Protestants tended to be Whigs, Catholics and German and Irish immigrants were often Democrats.

No Bodies, No Souls

Yet the "age of the common man" was far from an era of economic and political equality. Nor was it an interlude of classless government between the early aristocracy and the plutocracy of the Gilded Age during the 1880s and '90s. Jackson himself, in the Bank veto message, said that the aim of equal protection under the law was not to ensure an equal distribution of wealth but "the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue." What he opposed was government favor "to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful." Without such aid, he assumed, time and chance would break up large fortunes and prevent the growth of a permanent upper class. Individuals would then be free to gain wealth, but "aristocracy" could never gain a foothold in America.

Jackson also recognized implicitly that a degree of wealth or achievement was necessary to seek public office. Having his own aristocratic ambitions, he was undisturbed that officeholders (like those in every era) were better off than the average voter. Finally, the legal barriers that kept women, blacks, and Indians subordinate to white men concerned Jackson not at all. Criticism of such inequality was far more common in the Whig Party, which later inspired the Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln.

Andrew Jackson's democracy grew out of an attempt to preserve the kind of society in which republican virtue could flourish—a society based on small property holders who enjoyed liberty as freedom from monopolists or the holders of privileges. But he triumphed only at the polls; the commercial growth, in-

dustrialization, and urbanization that undercut his ideal rolled on, during his White House years and after.

It was once common among historians to explain this by asserting that Jacksonians were not opposed to economic development but only to a system that limited opportunity to a favored few. Jackson's own words would seem to belie this, as do those of some of his followers. Benton started out as a servant of John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. But during the 1820s and '30s, his experience as a Democratic politician turned him against the vision of a corporate economy, and the Missouri senator became a foe of paper money and the credit system. "I did not join in putting down the Bank of the United States to put up a wilderness of local banks," he cried in 1837. "I did not strike Caesar to make Anthony master of Rome!"

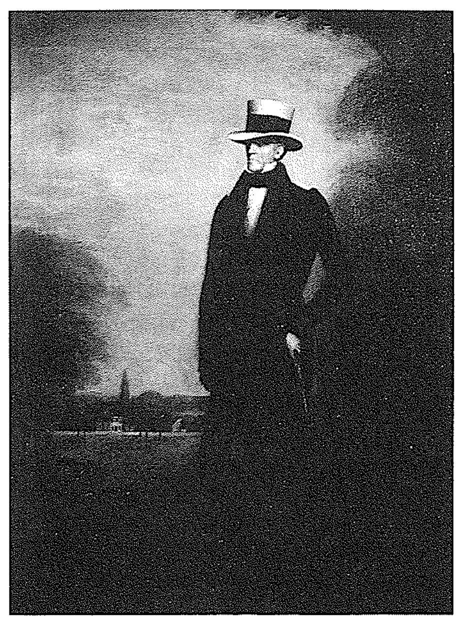
Some scholars, led by historian Marvin Meyers (*The Jacksonian Persuasion* [1957]), have also argued that the "Jackson men" were confused—that they rejected development in their speeches but furthered it in their behavior. This charge is not quite fair. Studies have shown that the leading promoters of economic change—bankers, industrialists, transportation magnates—normally joined the Whig party. Jacksonians who turned to business careers were usually exceptions or latecomers.

The Jacksonians wanted to prevent the rise of business, not just democratize it. They agreed with the influential economic theorist William M. Gouge, who campaigned against companies ("these artificial creatures") with an old aphorism: "Corporations have neither bodies to be kicked, nor souls to be damned." As the Jackson men understood it, a corporate economy would inevitably lead to an undemocratic society.

Stopping the Engine

The Jacksonian reform agenda was not lengthy. Special privileges were to be taken away from corporate enterprise and the vote was to be given to everyone who deserved to be included among the "people." That was about it. But over time the advantages of economic development became more and more obvious to the well-placed men who led the Democratic party. By the early 1850s, Democratic state legislators were chartering banks and subsidizing new railroads as willingly as any Whigs.

And development proceeded, though the Jacksonian yeoman farmer seemed unware that his ultimate fate was extinction. His outrage was not given voice until the Populist uprising, the 1890s rebellion of farmers who felt victimized by a hard-money policy designed to favor Eastern banks and business. But



Jackson at the Hermitage, 1829. After retiring there in 1837, he tended the estate's books, took up his late wife's Presbyterianism, and saw a stream of visitors, including, in January 1845, President-elect James K. Polk, whom he advised to "carry out all his principles." When he died that June at 78, his closest survivor was his adopted son, Andrew, Jr. The people, said Martin Van Buren, "were his blood relations—the only blood relations he had."

by then, America's industrial economy was in place.

Who are the legitimate heirs of Jacksonian democracy? Though liberals and conservatives may both lay claim to the Jackson mantle, it belongs exclusively to no one.

Jackson's talk of liberty, property, egalitarianism, and democracy in support of an older, purer society had conservative overtones. But he moved to his goal by developing an ideological justification of a wider democracy. The true conservatives of his day—men such as Webster, Clay, and Justice John Marshall—viewed all this with dismay. As late as 1834, the *Boston Courier* would declare that "it is as proper for a blacksmith to attempt to repair watches, as a farmer, in general, to legislate."

Liberals and reformers of subsequent times have been gratified to note that Jackson demanded that society's basic decisions be made by the "great body of the people." (No matter that he did not include women or blacks in "the body.") But conservatives have also drawn on the Jacksonian reform tradition. Persuaded that liberal social engineers became entrenched in government and flouted the popular will in their drive for "entitlements" during the 1960s and '70s, prophets of the New Right have used Jacksonian rhetoric in their war on Big Government.

The Jacksonians' lasting contributions have thus been procedural rather than programmatic. The people, they said, must

make the major decisions, and their will must not be filtered through a self-interested gentry. Today, these principles make the Jacksonian legacy available to any American with a message—liberal, conservative, or radical.

That legacy calls for a government committed to preserving "liberty," however defined. Jackson himself did not see government as *the* threat to liberty. He worried about the "aristocracy and monopoly" that government fostered. Americans who fear that overbearing bureaucrats are the main danger to liberty are faithful to certain strands of the Jacksonian message, though they may be forgetting Jackson's anticorporate theme. Likewise, those who see racial or sex discrimination—or pollution, exploitation on the job, deception of consumers, or the possibility of a nuclear holocaust—as the central hazards are not borrowing directly from Jackson, but they have not violated the basics of his legacy.

The language of Jacksonian Democracy may be so widely usable because it was so vague. Early in his second term, Jackson described his mission thus: "If only I can restore to our institutions their primitive simplicity and purity, can only succeed in banishing those extraneous corrupting influences which tend to fasten monopoly and aristocracy on the constitution and to make the Government an engine of oppression to the people instead of the agent of their will, I may then look back to the honor conferred upon me, with just pride."

Jackson's "restorationist" objectives were a response to the onset of serious economic change. But they offered no means of coping with change except removing government support for it. They spelled out a stirring demand for democratic participation in government, but they offered no definition of what a democratic and industrial future should be.

Thus, in a sense, the triumph of Jacksonian Democracy included a failure of democratic vision. The Jacksonian linkage of progressive methods and nostalgic objectives would both plague and inspire his admirers long after his Presidency.

In the end, perhaps without fully realizing it, Jackson was an innovator who took the nation in a dramatically new direction and, at least psychologically, set the framework for all subsequent national action. A generation earlier, George Washington played a similar role. A century later, so would Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Andrew Jackson