CHAPTER 13

The Rise of a Mass Democracy, 1824–1840

# Focus Questions

. How did the events related to the election of 1824 influence the election of 1828?

. Why did the tariff issue also become an issue of nullification?

. How were Native Americans treated during Jackson’s presidency?

. During the Bank War, how did Jackson increase the power of the presidency?

. What happened that eventually resulted in Texan independence from Mexico and why did the United States avoid immediate annexation?

. What distinguished the two-party system that resulted after the 1840 election from the earlier two-party system, and what were the philosophical and policy differences between the Democrats and the Whigs?

# Chapter Themes

**Theme:** The election to the presidency of the frontier aristocrat and common person’s hero, Andrew Jackson, signaled the end of the older elitist political leadership represented by John Quincy Adams. A new spirit of mass democracy and popular involvement swept through American society, bringing new energy, as well as conflict and corruption to public life.

**Theme:** Jackson successfully mobilized the techniques of the New Democracy and presidential power to win a series of dramatic political battles against his enemies. But by the late 1830s, his Whig opponents had learned to use the same popular political weapons against the Democrats, signaling the emergence of the second American party system.

**Theme:** Amidst the whirl of democratic politics, issues of tariffs, financial instability, Indian policy, and possible expansion in Texas indicated that difficult sectional and economic problems were festering beneath the surface and not being very successfully addressed.

chapter summary

Beginning in the 1820s, a powerful movement celebrating the common person and promoting the New Democracy transformed the earlier elitist character of American politics. The controversial election of the Yankee sophisticate John Quincy Adams in 1824 angered the followers of Andrew Jackson.

Jackson’s sweeping presidential victory in 1828 represented the political triumph of the New Democracy, including the spoils-rich political machines that thrived in the new environment. Jackson’s simple, popular ideas and rough-hewn style reinforced the growing belief that any ordinary person could hold public office. The Tariff of Abominations and the nullification crisis with South Carolina revealed a growing sectionalism and anxiety about slavery that ran up against Jackson’s fierce nationalism.

Jackson exercised the powers of the presidency against his opponents, particularly Calhoun and Clay. He made the Bank of the United States a symbol of evil financial power and killed it after a bitter political fight. Destroying the bank reinforced Jacksonians’ hostility to concentrated and elite-dominated financial power, but also left the United States without any effective financial system.

Jackson’s presidency also focused on issues of westward expansion. Pursuing paths of civilization, Native Americans of the Southeast engaged in extensive agricultural and educational development. But pressure from white settlers and from the state governments proved overwhelming, and Jackson finally supported the forced removal of all southeastern Indians to Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears.

In Texas, American settlers successfully rebelled against Mexico and declared their independence. Jackson recognized the Texas Republic but, because of the slavery controversy, he refused its application for annexation to the United States.

Jackson’s political foes soon formed themselves into the Whig party, but in 1836, they lost to Jackson's handpicked successor, Van Buren. Jackson’s ill-considered economic policies came home to roost under the unlucky Van Buren, as the country plunged into a serious depression following the panic of 1837.

The Whigs used these economic troubles and the political hoopla of the new mass democratic process to elect their own hero in 1840, following the path of making a western aristocrat into a democratic symbol. The Whig victory signaled the emergence of a new two-party system, in which the two parties’ genuine philosophical differences and somewhat different constituencies proved less important than their widespread popularity and shared roots in the new American democratic spirit.

# developing the chapter: suggested lecture or discussion topics

* Analyze the rise of mass politics and popular democracy. Focus on the increasing democratic American celebration of the people in opposition to entrenched elites, as well as specific political innovations: the end of property qualifications, political conventions, political machines, and the spoils system.

REFERENCE: Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America* (1990).

* Contrast Adams and Jackson as symbols of the old and new politics. Show how the Jacksonians used the elitist and corrupt election of 1824 to arouse popular feelings for their sweeping democratic victory in 1828.

REFERENCES: Samuel Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (1956); Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom* (1981).

* Develop the theme of rising sectionalism in the late 1820s and 1830s. Show how the assertion of states’ rights and nullification in the tariff controversies reflected growing southern fears of northern political and economic power.

REFERENCE: William J. Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828–1856* (1978).

* Connect Jackson’s political battles with the emergence of the second two-party system. Show how Jackson especially appealed to plain people who distrusted eastern bankers and capitalists, while the Whigs grew out of the various groups that disliked Jackson and the Democrats.

REFERENCE: Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833–1845* (1984).

* Explain both the Indian removal and the Texas rebellion as products of the expansionism and land hunger of the time. The emphasis might be on how, in both cases, the U.S. government essentially reacted to local political developments.

REFERENCES: Michael Green, *The Politics of Indian Removal* (1982); Anthony Wallace, *The Long, Bitter Trail: Andrew Jackson and the Indians* (1993).

* Show how the Whigs turned the Democrats’ own political techniques against them in the log-cabin and hard-cider campaign of 1840.

REFERENCE: Robert G. Gunderson, *The Log-Cabin Campaign* (1957).

# for further interest: additional class topics

* Contrast the earlier elitist method of selecting presidents (reflected in the four-way election of 1824) with the new, more democratic political methods, including national conventions and noisy popular campaigns.
* Discuss the political machines and the spoils system. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of Jackson’s democratic belief that any citizen could hold public office without special qualifications.
* Focus on Jackson’s personality, particularly his fierce animosities against his enemies and the secrets of his appeal as a symbol of democracy and the common person.
* Provide more material on the Five Civilized Tribes, particularly the Cherokees, and discuss their fate during and after the Trail of Tears.
* Examine the dramatic events of the Texas revolution, such as the Alamo and San Jacinto, in relation to the broad historical context of the Texas revolt. Explain the reasons so many northerners regarded the Texas revolt as a slaveholders’ conspiracy. Consider how the Texas developments might have looked from a Mexican perspective.

# character sketches

## David (“Davy”) Crockett (1786–1836)

Davy Crockett, the frontier congressman and hero who died at the Alamo, has remained a half-legendary symbol of western democracy and humor.

Crockett’s father was an Irish immigrant and revolutionary soldier who frequently beat his son, causing him to run away from home on several occasions. The young Crockett attended school for six months in order to please a girlfriend but left when she jilted him and never returned to school.

He became a legendary hunter in frontier Tennessee, once killing 105 bears in nine months. Crockett also served with Jackson in the Indian wars and became a justice of the peace, though barely able to read and write. He considered spelling and grammar “contrary to nature.”

The suggestion that he run for Congress was first made as a joke, but he was so popular with his pioneer neighbors that he was elected to three terms. A Whig who strongly opposed Jackson and defended the Indians in the Cherokee removal, he became a national hero during his tour of the North from 1834 to 1835, when he regaled big-city audiences with his frontier anecdotes. He headed for frontier Texas and the Alamo because of disappointment over his defeat in a bid for reelection to Congress.

**Quote:** “What a miserable place a city is.… I sometimes wonder they don’t clear out to a new country where every skin hangs by its own tail.” (Comment during his tour of the North, 1835)

REFERENCE: Walter Blair, *Davy Crockett* (1955).

## John Quincy Adams (1767–1848)

Adams was the secretary of state who proposed the Monroe Doctrine, the sixth president, and a noted opponent of slavery in the House of Representatives.

He grew up at his father’s side and, early on, began keeping detailed diaries that form a memorable record of his thoughts and experiences. In 1794, he became minister to the Netherlands, the first of his numerous diplomatic assignments.

Regarded as a traitor by Federalists for supporting Jefferson’s embargo, he also aroused Jackson’s hatred, even though he was Old Hickory’s only cabinet supporter in the Monroe administration.

After leaving the presidency, he planned to retire to write history but was elected to Congress and returned for eight successive terms. “Old Man Eloquent” was contentious and sarcastic in his speeches against the gag rule. In 1841, he won the famous *Amistad* court case on behalf of black slaves who had revolted and taken command of a slave ship.

**Quote:** “When I came to the Presidency the principle of internal improvement was swelling the tide of public prosperity.… The great object of my life therefore as applied to the administration of the government of the United States has failed. The American Union as a moral person in the family of nations is to live from hand to mouth, to cast away instead of using for the improvement of its own condition, the bounties of Providence, and to raise to the summit of power a succession of Presidents the consummation of whose glory will be to growl and snarl with impotent fury against a money broker’s shop, to rivet into perpetuity the clanking chain of the slave, and to waste in boundless bribery to the West the invaluable inheritance of the public lands.” (Letter, 1837)

REFERENCE: Samuel Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (1956).

## Daniel Webster (1782–1852)

Webster, a Massachusetts senator and U.S. secretary of state, was considered the greatest orator and lawyer of his time.

In childhood, fragile health compelled him to stay indoors and read much of the time. When he attended Dartmouth, “Black Dan” was frequently thought to be an Indian because of his swarthy appearance.

Not only was Webster’s law practice lucrative, often bringing in $65,000 a year or more, but he was also liberally subsidized by Massachusetts textile-mill owners. He lived in splendor and entertained lavishly at his estate at Marshfield, Massachusetts.

The debate with Robert Hayne came one month after Webster’s second marriage to New York socialite Caroline LeRoy. His eloquence was so renowned that huge crowds gathered for even minor occasions, and generations of schoolchildren memorized his most famous utterances.

**Quote:** “When my eyes shall be turned to behold for the last time the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on states dissevered, discordant, belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood! Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the glorious ensign of the republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and trophies streaming in their original luster, not a stripe erased or polluted, nor a single star obscured.…” (Webster-Hayne debate speech, 1831)

REFERENCE: Irving Bartlett, *Daniel Webster* (1978).

## Nicholas Biddle (1786–1844)

Biddle was the wealthy, learned financier who fought and lost the Bank War with President Jackson.

He graduated from Princeton as valedictorian in 1801, with honors in the classics. Although he became a lawyer, Biddle spent most of his time on literary endeavors, including writing a history of the Lewis and Clark expedition and composing poetry.

Having left the scholarly life for government service in 1819, at the request of his friend President Monroe, in 1822 he became president of the Second Bank of the United States. The charges of corruption against him arose partly because he represented the interests of the bank’s private stockholders as well as the government.

After losing the bank battle, he retired to Andalusia, his Delaware estate, and pursued his interest in classical Greece. He also wrote works on economics, in which he advocated such progressive policies as shorter hours and higher wages for workers.

**Quote:** “My own course is decided—all the other Banks and all the merchants may break, but the Bank of the United States shall not break.” (1834)

REFERENCE: Thomas P. Govan, *Nicholas Biddle* (1959).

## Black Hawk (1767–1838)

Black Hawk was the Sauk chief who led his people to defeat in Black Hawk’s War of 1832.

His bitterness toward Americans developed when William Henry Harrison obtained a treaty ceding the Indians’ land along the Mississippi by getting two lesser Sauk chiefs drunk. Black Hawk fought beside Tecumseh in the War of 1812 and after the war continued to seek British aid against Americans.

In 1831, he formed a war alliance with a Winnebago shaman, White Cloud, but when U.S. troops were called up, Black Hawk withdrew to Iowa. After his attempted recrossing of the Mississippi ended in disaster, he was imprisoned and taken to meet President Jackson. Those who saw them together claimed that the two old chieftains resembled each other.

While in federal custody Black Hawk dictated his life story to an interpreter. A journalist wrote it up and it became a minor classic.

**Quote:** “I surveyed the country that had caused us so much trouble, anxiety, and blood, and that now caused me to be a prisoner of war. I reflected upon the ingratitude of the whites, when I saw their fine houses, rich harvests…and recollected that this land had been ours, for which I and my people had never received a dollar, and that the whites were not satisfied until they took our villages and our grave yards from us and removed us across the Mississippi.” (Autobiography, 1835)

REFERENCES: Donald Jackson, ed., *Black Hawk: An Autobiography* (1964); Cecil Eby, *“That Disgraceful Affair”: The Black Hawk War* (1973).

## Sam Houston (1793–1863)

Houston was the military hero of Texas independence and later president of the Texas Republic.

He grew up with his widowed mother near Cherokee country in Tennessee, learning the Cherokee customs and language as a boy. Throughout his life, he had a strong sympathy for Indians.

In 1827, he became governor of Tennessee. In 1829, he married, but his bride returned to her parents after three months, and the subsequent scandal and divorce ruined his political career.

Houston first headed to Indian territory, where he became an Indian trader and married an Indian woman. In 1835, he moved to Texas and became commander of the tiny Texas army. Only six of his 783 men were killed in the decisive Battle of San Jacinto; Houston was badly wounded in the leg.

As U.S. senator from 1846 to 1860, he was almost the only southerner to support sectional compromise, even on slavery. As governor in 1861, he refused to recognize the authority of the secession convention or to swear allegiance to the Confederacy; he was therefore forced to resign the office.

**Quote:** “While an enemy to your independence remains in Texas the work is incomplete; but when liberty is firmly established by your patience and valor, it will be fame enough to say, ‘I was a member of the army of San Jacinto.’ ” (Message to Texas army, 1836)

REFERENCE: John Hoyt Williams, *Sam Houston* (1993).

## Martin Van Buren (1782–1862)

Van Buren was the New York politician who helped engineer Jackson’s presidential victories in 1828 and 1832, before being elected to his own unsuccessful term as president.

A tavern keeper’s son, Van Buren rose to power amid the fiercely competitive factional politics of New York. His own political machine, the Albany Regency, eventually achieved dominance by perfecting the techniques of patronage and spoils.

Van Buren was Jackson’s most intimate political associate and the only cabinet member to back him completely in the Peggy Eaton affair. In 1830, Jackson suggested that if Van Buren would become his vice president, he, Jackson, would resign and let Van Buren become president.

Although badly beaten in 1840 after his unsuccessful presidency, Van Buren probably could have been renominated in 1844 if he had not come out against annexing Texas. In 1847, he and other Barnburner New York antislavery Democrats broke away from the proslavery Hunkers who controlled the party. In 1848, he accepted the nomination of the Free Soil party for president.

**Quote:** “Why the deuce is it that they have such an itching for abusing me? I try to be harmless and positively good-natured, and a most decided friend of peace.” (Comment on newspapers, 1822)

REFERENCE: John Niven, *Martin Van Buren and the Romantic Age of American Politics* (1983).

# questions for class discussion

. What were the advantages and disadvantages of the new politics of mass democracy? Were such things as the spoils system, party machines, and hoopla-driven campaigns inevitable accompaniments of popular democracy, or could the people have been mobilized by a more open and less partisan system? (See boxed quotes on page 252 and 253 as well as Thinking Globally section on 254-255.)

. Did John Quincy Adams’s cold personality make him a less competent president than popular hero Andrew Jackson? Why did Americans come to expect their presidents to be charismatic “men of the people” as well as skilled political leaders or administrators? What American presidents fit well into the Jackson mold?

. Which side fared better as a result of the nullification crisis: the national government (and federal supremacy) or South Carolina (and states’ rights)? Why? (See boxed quotes on page 256 and 257.)

. How dramatically did President Jackson change the balance of power between the three branches of government? Did he dramatically expand the power of the executive branch?

. How would the following Founding Fathers assess Andrew Jackson’s presidency: George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson? Consider Jackson’s democratic views, his reaction to the nullification issue, his support for territorial expansion, and his attack on the Bank of the United States. (See boxed quote by Jackson on page 274.)

. How was Jackson able to make the Bank War such an effective symbol of democracy and of his presidency? Why were his opponents, like Clay and Biddle, unable to counter his appeals, even when their arguments appeared to have economics and stability on their side? (See boxed quotes on pages 262, 266–267 as well as Examining the Evidence section on page 265.)

. What were the causes and consequences of the Texas revolt? Why did Texas remain for a time an independent nation rather than become a state of the Union?

. How did the log-cabin and hard-cider campaign of 1840 demonstrate the nature of the two-party system in the New Democracy?

**CONTENDING VOICES: MARYLAND SUPPORTER VS. THOMAS JEFFERSON**

**Questions for Class Discussion**

1. How did the Maryland Supporter in 1824 view Andrew Jackson’s past?
2. How did Thomas Jefferson describe Senator Andrew Jackson in the same year?

# makers of america: Mexican or Texican?

## Questions for Class Discussion

. In what ways were the original Texas settlers like other westward-moving American pioneers and in what ways were they different?

. How have its unique beginnings made Texas different from most other American states?

## Suggested Student Exercises

* Examine a map of Texas for Hispanic place names. Find the parts of the state where such names are common and where they appear less often.
* The text notes that many of the Texas pioneers were originally Scots-Irish. Consider which of their qualities may have derived from their Scots-Irish ancestry. (See Chapter 5.)

# varying viewpoints

**Expanding the View**

* Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (1945).

A view of Jacksonian democracy as a product of class conflict:

“During the Bank War, laboring men began slowly to turn to Jackson as their leader, and his party as their party.… This conversion of the working classes to the hard-money policy injected new strength and determination into the hard-money party.… From it would come the impetus to carry through the second stage in the national struggles of Jacksonian democracy.”

* Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (1961).

A view of Jacksonian democracy as a product of ethnic and cultural conflict:

“A composition portrait of their [Whigs’ and Democrats’] social and economic backgrounds reveals striking similarities. Their most significant difference is that several Democratic leaders claimed Dutch or German ancestry, while the Whigs invariably claimed British ancestry (mostly by way of New England).”

# Questions for Class Discussion

. What does each of these historians see as the fundamental difference between the two major parties of the Jacksonian era?

. Why would Schlesinger think of the political conflicts of the day as real and critical to the national future, while Benson would tend to regard them as largely symbolic?

. How would each of these historians approach an event like Andrew Jackson’s attack on the Bank of the United States?

. How does Daniel Walker Howe’s synthesis support or challenge both Schlesinger’s and Benson’s views on the Jacksonian era?