**Chapter Nine**

**Jacksonian Democracy**

At 11 A.M. on March 4, 1828, a bright, sunny day, Andrew Jackson, hatless and dressed severely in black, walked up Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol. A few minutes after noon, before a throng of more than 15,000 people, he delivered an almost inaudible and thoroughly commonplace inaugural address. He then shouldered his way through the crush, mounted a splendid white horse, and rode off to the White House. A reception had been announced, to which "the officially and socially eligible as defined by precedent" had been invited.

**The "Coronation" of King Mob**

As Jackson rode down Pennsylvania Avenue, the crowds that had turned out to see the Hero of New Orleans followed--on horseback, in rickety wagons, and on foot. Nothing could keep them out of the executive mansion, and the result was chaos. Long tables laden with cakes, ice cream, and orange punch had been set up in the East Room, but they scarcely deflected the well-wishers. Jackson was pressed back helplessly as men tracked mud across valuable rugs and clambered up on delicate chairs to catch a glimpse of him. The White House shook with their shouts. Glassware splintered; furniture was overturned; women fainted.

Jackson was a thin old man despite his toughness, and soon he was in real danger. Fortunately, friends formed a cordon and managed to extricate him through a rear door. Only a generation earlier Jefferson had felt obliged to introduce pell-mell to encourage informality in the White House. Now a man whom John Quincy Adams called "a barbarian" held Jefferson's office, and, as one Supreme Court justice complained, "The reign of King 'Mob' seemed triumphant."

**"Democratizing" Politics**

Jackson's inauguration symbolized the triumph of "democracy." Having been taught by Jefferson that all men are created equal, the Americans of Jackson's day (ignoring males with black skin, to say nothing of women, regardless of color), found it easy to believe that every person was as competent and politically important as his neighbor.

The difference between Jeffersonian Democracy and the Jackson variety was more one of attitude than of practice. Jefferson had believed that ordinary citizens could be educated to determine right. Jackson insisted that they knew what was right by instinct. Jefferson's pell-mell encouraged the average citizen to hold up his head; by the time of Jackson, the "common man" had become so proud of himself that he gloried in his ordinariness and made mediocrity a virtue. The slightest hint of distinctiveness or servility became suspect. The word servant itself fell out of fashion, being replaced by the egalitarian help.

The Founding Fathers had not foreseen all the implications of political democracy for a society like the one that existed in the United States. They believed that the ordinary man should have political power in order to protect himself against the superior man, but they assumed that the latter would always lead. The people would naturally choose the best men to manage public affairs. In Washington's day and even in Jefferson's, this was generally the case, but the inexorable logic of democracy gradually produced a change. The new western states, unfettered by systems created in a less-democratic age, drew up constitutions that eliminated property qualifications for voting and holding office; the eastern states revised their own frames of government to accomplish the same purpose. Many more public offices were made elective rather than appointive.

Even the presidency, designed to be removed from direct public control by the electoral college, felt the impact of the new thinking. By Jackson's time only Delaware and South Carolina still provided for the choice of presidential electors by the legislature; elsewhere they were elected by popular vote. The system of permitting the congressional caucus to name the candidates for the presidency came to an end before 1828. Jackson and Adams were put forward by state legislatures, and soon thereafter the still more democratic system of nomination by national party conventions was adopted.

Certain social changes reflected a new way of looking at political affairs. The final disestablishment of churches revealed a dislike of special privilege. The beginnings of the free-school movement, the earliest glimmerings of interest in adult education, and the slow spread of secondary education all bespoke a concern for improving the knowledge and judgment of ordinary citizens.

These changes emphasized the idea that every citizen was equally important and the conviction that all should actively participate in government. Officeholders began to stress the fact that they were representatives as well as leaders and to appeal more frankly and much more intensively for votes. The public responded with a surge of interest. At each succeeding presidential election, a larger percentage of the population went to the polls. Roughly 300,000 ballots were cast in 1824, 2.4 million in 1840.

As voting became more important, so did competition between the candidates, and this led to changes in the role and structure of political parties. It took money, people, and organized effort to run the campaigns and get out the vote. Parties became powerful institutions; as a result, they attracted voters' loyalties powerfully. This development took

powerful institutions; as a result, they attracted voters' loyalties powerfully. This development took place first at the state level and at different times in different states. According to Richard P. McCormick, whose book The Second American Party System describes the process, the 1828 election stimulated party formation because instead of several sectional candidates, each dominant in his own region, competing for the presidency, it pitted two nationally known men against each other. This compelled local leaders to make a choice and then to organize their forces in order to convince local voters to accept their judgment. This was especially true in states where neither Adams nor Jackson had a preponderance of backers. Thus the new system established itself much faster in New York and Pennsylvania than in New England, where Adams was strong, or Tennessee, where the native son Jackson had overwhelming support.

Like most institutions, the new parties created bureaucracies to keep them running smoothly. Devoted party workers were rewarded with political office when their efforts were successful. "To the victors belong the spoils," said the New York politician William L. Marcy, and the image, drawn from war and piracy, was appropriate. Although the vigorous wooing of voters constituted a recognition of their importance and commitment to keeping them informed, campaigning-another military term frequently degenerated into demagoguery. The most effective way to attract the average voter, politicians soon decided, was by flattery.

**1828: The New Party System in Embryo**

The new system could scarcely have been imagined in 1825 while John Quincy Adams ruled over the White House; Adams was not well equipped either to lead King Mob or to hold it in check. Indeed, it was the battle to succeed Adams that caused the system to develop. The campaign began almost on the day of his selection by the House of Representatives. Jackson felt that he, the man with the largest vote, had been cheated of the presidency in 1824 by "the corrupt bargain" that he believed Adams had made with Henry Clay, and he sought vindication.

Relying heavily on his military reputation and on Adams's talent for making enemies, Jackson avoided taking a stand on issues and on questions where his views might displease one or another faction. The political situation thus became monumentally confused, one side unable to marshal support for its policies, the other unwilling to adopt policies for fear of losing support.

The campaign was disgraced by character assassination and lies of the worst sort. Administration supporters denounced Jackson as a bloodthirsty military tyrant, a drunkard, and a gambler. His wife Rachel, ailing and shy, was dragged into the campaign, her good name heartlessly besmirched. Previously married to a cruel, unbalanced man named Lewis Robards, she had begun living with Jackson before her divorce from Robards had been legally completed. When this fact came to light, she and Jackson had to remarry. Seizing on this incident, an Adams pamphleteer wrote: "Ought a convicted adulteress and her paramour husband be placed in the highest offices of this free and Christian land?"

Furious, the Jacksonians (now calling themselves Democrats) replied in kind. They charged that while American minister to Russia, Adams had supplied a beautiful American virgin for the delectation of the czar. Discovering that the president had purchased a chess set and a billiard table for the White House, they accused him of squandering public money on gambling devices. They translated his long and distinguished public service into the statistic that he had received over the years a sum equal to $16 for every day of his life in government pay. The great questions of the day were largely ignored.

All this was inexcusable, and both sides must share the blame. But as the politicians noticed when the votes were counted, their efforts had certainly brought out the electorate. Each candidate received far more votes than all four candidates had received in the preceding presidential election.

When inauguration day arrived, Adams refused to attend the ceremonies because Jackson had failed to pay the traditional preinaugural courtesy call on him at the White House, but the Old Puritan may have been equally, if unconsciously, motivated by shame at tactics he had countenanced during the campaign. Jackson felt vindication, not shame, but in any case, deep personal feelings were uppermost in everyone's mind at the formal changing of the guard. The real issues, however, remained. Andrew Jackson would now have to deal with them.

**The Jacksonian Appeal**

Some historians claim that despite his supposed fondness for "the common man," Andrew Jackson was not a democrat at all and anything but a consistent friend of the weak and underprivileged. They point out that he was a wealthy land speculator and owner of a fine Tennessee plantation, the Hermitage, and of many slaves. Although his supporters liked to cast him as the political heir of Jefferson, he was in many ways like the conservative Washington: a soldier first, an inveterate speculator in western lands, a man with few intellectual interests, and only sketchily educated.

It is of small importance to anyone interested in Jacksonian Democracy to know exactly how "democratic" Jackson was or how sincere his interest in the welfare of the "common man" might have been. Whatever his personal convictions, he stood as the symbol for a movement supported by a new, democratically oriented generation that had grown up under the spell of the American and French revolutions. That he was both a great hero and in many ways a most extraordinary person helps explain his mass appeal. Perhaps he was rich, perhaps conservative, but he was a man of the people, born in a frontier cabin, familiar with the problems of the average citizen.

Jackson epitomized many American ideals. He was patriotic, generous to a fault, and natural and democratic in manner (at home alike in the forest and in the ballroom of a fine mansion). He admired good horseflesh and beautiful women, yet no sterner moralist ever lived; he was a fighter, a relentless foe, but a gentleman in the best American sense. That some special providence watched over him (as over the United States) appeared beyond argument to those who had followed his career. He seemed, in short, both an average and an ideal American, one the people could identify with and still revere. For these reasons, Jackson drew support from every section and every social class: western farmers and southern planters, urban workers, bankers, and merchants.

**The Spoils System**

Jackson took office with the firm intention of punishing the "vile wretches" who had attacked him so viciously during the campaign. The new concept of office as a reward for electoral success seemed to justify a housecleaning in the federal bureaucracy. Eager for "the spoils," an army of politicians invaded Washington. "I am ashamed of myself," one such character confessed when he met a friend on the street. "I feel as if every man I meet knew what I came for." "Don't distress yourself," his friend replied, "for every man you meet is on the same business."

There was nothing especially innovative about this invasion, for the principle of filling offices with one's partisans was almost as old as the republic. However, the long lapse of time since the last real political shift, and the recent untypical example of John Quincy Adams, who rarely removed anyone for political reasons, made Jackson's policy appear revolutionary. His removals were not entirely unjustified, for many government workers had grown senile and others corrupt. Even Adams admitted that some of those Jackson dismissed deserved their fate.

Aside from going along with the spoils system and eliminating crooks and incompetents, Jackson advanced another reason for turning experienced government employees out of their jobs-the principle of rotation. "No man has any more intrinsic right to official station than another," he said. Those who hold government jobs for a long time "are apt to acquire a habit of looking with indifference upon the public interests and of tolerating conduct from which an unpracticed man would revolt."

"Rotating" jobholders periodically meant that more citizens could participate in running the government, an obvious advantage in a democracy. The problem was that the constant replacing of trained workers by novices was not likely to increase the efficiency of the government. Jackson's response to this argument was typical: "The duties of all public officers are ... so plain and simple that men of intelligence may readily qualify themselves for their performance." Contempt for expert knowledge and the belief that ordinary Americans can do anything they set their minds to became fundamental tenets of Jacksonian Democracy. Actually, a solid majority of Jackson's appointments came from the same social and intellectual elite as those they replaced.

**President of All the People**

Jackson was not cynical about the spoils system. More than any earlier president, he believed that as the direct representative of all the people he was the embodiment of national power. From Washington to John Quincy Adams, his predecessors together had vetoed only nine bills, always on the ground that they considered the measures unconstitutional. Jackson vetoed 12, some simply because he thought the proposed legislation inexpedient. Yet he had no ambition to expand the scope of federal authority at the expense of the states. Furthermore, he was a poor administrator, given to penny-pinching and lacking in imagination. His strong prejudices and his contempt for expert advice, even in fields like banking where his ignorance was almost total, did him no credit and the country considerable harm.

Jackson's great success (not merely his popularity) was primarily the result of his personality. A shrewd French observer, Michel Chevalier, after commenting on "his chivalric character, his lofty integrity, and his ardent patriotism," pointed out what was probably the central element in Jackson's appeal. "His tactics in politics, as well as in war," Chevalier wrote in 1824, "is to throw himself forward with the cry of Comrades, follow me!"

**Sectional Tensions Revived**

Once in office, Jackson had to say something about western lands, the tariff, and other issues. He tried to steer a moderate course, urging a slight reduction of the tariff and "constitutional" internal improvements. He suggested that once the rapidly disappearing federal debt had been paid off, the surplus revenues of the government might be "distributed" among the states.

Even these cautious proposals caused conflict, so complex were the interrelations of sectional disputes. If the federal government turned its expected surplus over to the states, it could not afford to reduce the price of public land without going into the red. This disturbed some westerners, notably Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri. Western anxiety in turn suggested to southern opponents of the protective tariff an alliance of South and West. The southerners argued that a tariff levied only to raise revenue would increase foreign imports, bring more money into the treasury, and thus make it possible to reduce the price of public land.

The question came up in the Senate in December 1829, when Senator Samuel A. Foot of Connecticut suggested restricting the sale of government land. Benton promptly denounced the proposal as a plot concocted by eastern manufacturers to check the westward migration of their workers. On January 19, 1830, Senator Robert Y. Hayne of South Carolina, a spokesman for Vice President Calhoun, supported Benton vigorously, suggesting an alliance of South and West based on cheap land and low tariffs.

Daniel Webster then rose to the defense of northeastern interests, cleverly goading Hayne by accusing South Carolina of advocating disunionist policies. Responding to this attack, the South Carolinian launched into an impassioned exposition of the states' rights doctrine. Webster then took the floor again and for two days, before galleries packed with the elite of Washington society, he cut Hayne's argument to shreds. The Constitution was a compact of the American people, not merely of the states, he insisted, the Union perpetual and indissoluble. Webster made the states' rights position appear close to treason; his "second reply to Hayne" effectively prevented the formation of a West-South alliance and made Webster a national figure and a perennial presidential candidate.

**Jackson: "The Bank ... I Will Kill It!"**

In the fall of 1832 Jackson was reelected president, handily defeating Henry Clay. The main issue in the election, aside from Jackson's personal popularity, was the president's determination to destroy the second Bank of the United States. In the "Bank War" Jackson won a complete victory, yet the effects of his triumph were anything but beneficial to the country.

After McCulloch v. Maryland had presumably established its legality, the Bank of the United States had flourished. Its president, Nicholas Biddle, managed it brilliantly. Almost alone in the United States, Biddle realized that his institution could act as a rudimentary central bank, regulating the availability of credit throughout the nation by controlling the lending policies of the state banks.

Small banks possessing limited amounts of gold and silver sometimes overextended themselves in making large amounts of bank notes available to borrowers in order to earn interest. All this paper money was legally convertible into hard cash on demand, but in the ordinary run of business people seldom bothered to convert their notes so long as they thought the issuing bank was sound. Bank notes passed freely from hand to hand and from bank to bank in every section of the country.

Eventually much of the paper money of the local banks came across the counter of one or another of the 22 branches of the Bank of the United States. By collecting these notes and presenting them for conversion into specie, Biddle could compel the local banks to maintain adequate reserves of gold and silver-in other words, make them hold their lending policies within bounds.

Biddle's policies in the 1820s were good for his own institution, which earned substantial profits, for the state banks, and probably for the country. By making liberal loans to produce merchants, for example, rural bankers indirectly stimulated farmers to expand their output beyond current demand, which eventually led to a decline in prices and an agricultural depression. In every field of economic activity, reckless lending caused inflation and greatly exaggerated the ups and downs of the business cycle. It can be argued, however, that by restricting the lending of state banks, Biddle was slowing the rate of economic growth and that in a predominantly agricultural society an occasional slump was not a large price to pay for rapid economic development.

Biddle's policies acted to stabilize the economy. Many state bankers supported them. But they roused a great deal of opposition too. In part, the opposition originated in pure ignorance: The distrust of paper money did not disappear, and those who disliked all paper saw the Bank as merely the largest (and thus the worst) of many bad institutions. At the other extreme, some bankers chafed under Biddle's restraints because by discouraging them from lending freely, he was limiting g their profits. New York City bankers resented the fact that a Philadelphia institution could wield so much power over their affairs. New York was the nation's largest importing center; huge amounts of tariff revenue were collected there. Yet, because this money was deposited in the Bank of the United States, Biddle controlled it from Philadelphia. Finally, some people objected to the Bank because it had a monopoly of public funds, but was managed by a private citizen and controlled by a handful of rich men.

**Jackson's Bank Veto**

This formidable opposition to the Bank was diffuse and unorganized until Andrew Jackson brought it together. When he did, the Bank was quickly destroyed. Jackson belonged among the ignorant enemies of the institution; he was a hard-money man suspicious of all commercial banking. His attitude dismayed Biddle who, almost against his will, found himself gravitating toward Clay and the National Republicans, offering advantageous loans and retainers to politicians and newspaper editors in order to build up a following. Thereafter events moved inevitably toward a showdown, for the president's combative instincts were easily aroused. "The Bank," he told Van Buren, "is trying to kill me, but I will kill it!"

Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and other prominent National Republicans hoped to use the Bank controversy against Jackson. They reasoned that the institution was so important to the country that Jackson's opposition to it would undermine his popularity. They therefore urged Biddle to ask Congress to renew the Bank's charter. The charter would not expire until 1836, but by pressing the issue before the 1832 presidential election, they could force Jackson either to approve the recharter bill or to veto it (which would give candidate Clay a lively issue in the campaign). The banker yielded to this strategy reluctantly, for he would have preferred to postpone the showdown, and a recharter bill passed Congress early in July 1832. Jackson promptly vetoed it.

Jackson's message explaining why he had rejected the bill adds nothing to his reputation as a statesman. Being a good Jeffersonian-and no friend of John Marshall-he insisted that the Bank was unconstitutional. (McCulloch v. Maryland he brushed aside, saying that as president he had sworn to uphold the Constitution as he understood it.) The Bank was also inexpedient, he argued. Being a dangerous private monopoly that allowed a handful of rich men to accumulate "many millions" of dollars, the bank was making "the rich richer and the potent more powerful."

The most unfortunate aspect of Jackson's veto was that he could have reformed the Bank instead of destroying it. The central banking function was too important to be left in private hands. Biddle once boasted that he could put nearly any bank in the United States out of business simply by forcing it to exchange specie for its bank notes. He thought he was demonstrating his forbearance, but in fact he was revealing a dangerous flaw in the system. When the Jacksonians called him "Czar Nicholas," they were not far from the mark. Moreover, private bankers were making profits that in justice belonged to the people, for the government received no interest from the large sums it kept on deposit in the Bank. Jackson would not consider reforms. He set out to smash the Bank of the United States without any real idea of what might be put in its place-a foolhardy act. Biddle considered Jackson's veto "a manifesto of anarchy," its tone like "the fury of a chained panther biting the bars of his cage." Voters, however, approved of Jackson's hard-hitting attack.

Buttressed by his election triumph, Jackson acted swiftly. "Until I can strangle this hydra. of corruption, the Bank, I will not shrink from my duty," he said. Shortly after the start of his second term, he decided to withdraw the government funds deposited in its vaults. Under the law only the secretary of the treasury could remove the deposits. After two secretaries of the treasury had refused to do so, he appointed to the post Roger B. Taney, who had been advising him closely on Bank affairs. Taney carried out the order by depositing new federal receipts in seven state banks in eastern cities, while continuing to meet government expenses with drafts on the Bank of the United States.

The situation was extremely confused and slightly unethical. Set on winning the "Bank War," Jackson lost sight of his fear of unsound paper money. Taney, however, knew exactly what he was doing. One of the state banks receiving federal funds was the Union Bank of Baltimore. Taney owned stock in this institution, and its president was his close friend. Little wonder that Jackson's enemies were soon calling the favored state banks "pet" banks. This charge was not entirely fair, because Taney took pains to see that the deposits were placed in financially sound institutions. By 1836 the government's funds had been spread out in about 90 banks. But neither was the charge entirely unfair; the administration certainly favored institutions whose directors were politically sympathetic to it.

When Taney began to remove the deposits, the government had more than $9.8 million to its credit in the Bank of the United States; within three months the figure fell to about $4 million. Faced with the withdrawal of so much cash, Biddle had to contract his operations. He decided to exaggerate the contraction, pressing the state banks hard by presenting all their notes and checks that came across his counter for conversion into specie and drastically limiting his own bank's business loans. He hoped that the resulting shortage of credit would be blamed on Jackson and that it would force the president to return the deposits.

For a time the strategy appeared to be working. Paper money became scarce, specie almost unobtainable. A serious panic threatened. Jackson would not budge. He swore he would sooner cut off his right arm and "undergo the torture of ten Spanish inquisitions" than restore the deposits. When delegations came to him, he roared: "Go to Nicholas Biddle.... Biddle has all the money!" And in the end-because he was right-business leaders began to take the old general's advice. Pressure on Biddle mounted swiftly, and in July 1834 he reversed his policy and began to lend money freely. The artificial crisis ended.

**Jackson versus Calhoun**

The Webster-Hayne debate had revived discussion of John C. Calhoun's argument

about nullification. Although southern-born, Jackson had devoted too much of his

life to fighting for the entire United States to countenance disunion. Therefore, in

April 1830, when the states' rights faction invited him to a dinner to celebrate the

anniversary of Jefferson's birth, he came prepared. The evening reverberated with

speeches and toasts of a states' rights tenor, but when the president was called on to

volunteer a toast, he raised his glass, fixed his eyes on John C. Calhoun, and said:

"Our Federal Union: It must be preserved!" Calhoun took up the challenge. "The

Union," he retorted, "next to our liberty, most dear!"

Jackson and Calhoun were not far apart ideologically except on the ultimate issue of the right of a state to overrule federal authority. Jackson was a strong president, but he did not believe that the area of national power was large or that it should be expanded. His interests in government economy, in the distribution of federal surpluses to the states, and in interpreting the powers of Congress narrowly were all similar to Calhoun's.

Like most westerners, he favored internal improvements, but he preferred that local projects be left to the states. In 1830 he vetoed a bill providing aid for the construction of the Maysville Road because the route was wholly within Kentucky. There were political reasons for this veto, which was a slap at Kentucky's hero, Henry Clay, but it could not fail to please Calhoun.

**Indian Removals**

The president also took a states' rights position in the controversy that arose between the Cherokee Indians and Georgia. Although he shared many of the typical westerner's feelings about Indians, Jackson insisted that he did not hate them. He subscribed to the theory, advanced by Jefferson, that Indians were "savage" because they roamed wild in a trackless wilderness. The "original inhabitants of our forests" were "incapable of self-government," Jackson claimed, ignoring the fact that the Cherokee lived settled lives and had governed themselves without trouble before the whites arrived.

The Cherokee inhabited a region coveted by whites because it was suitable for growing cotton. Because most Indians preferred to maintain their tribal ways, Jackson pursued a policy of "removing" them from the path of white settlement. This policy seems heartless to modern critics, but most whites considered removal the only humane solution if the nation was to continue to expand. Many tribes resigned themselves to removal. Between 1831 and 1833, at least 15,000 Choctaw migrated from Mississippi to the region west of Arkansas territory.

In Democracy in America, the Frenchman Alexis de Toqueville described "the frightful sufferings that attended these forced migrations." He penned a vivid account of a group of Choctaw crossing the Mississippi in the dead of winter. The cold was unusually severe; the snow had frozen hard upon the ground, and the river was drifting huge masses of ice. The Indians ... possessed neither tents nor wagons, but only their arms and some provisions. I saw them embark to pass the mighty river, and never will that solemn spectacle fade from my remembrance.

A few tribes, such as Black Hawk's Sac and Fox in Illinois and Osceola's Seminoles in Florida, resisted being "removed" and were subdued by troops. The Cherokee instead sought to hold on to their lands by adjusting to white ways. They took up farming and cattle raising, developed a written language, drafted a constitution, and tried to establish a state within a state in northwestern Georgia. Several treaties with the United States seemed to establish the legality of their government. Georgia, however, would not recognize the Cherokee Nation. It passed a law in 1828 declaring all Cherokee laws void and the region a part of Georgia.

The Indians challenged this law in the Supreme Court. In Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831) Chief Justice Marshall had ruled that the Cherokee were "not a foreign state" and therefore could not sue in a United States court. However, in Worcester v. Georgia (18 32), a case involving two missionaries to the Cherokee who had not procured licenses required by Georgia law, he ruled that the state could not control the Cherokee or their territory. Later, when a Cherokee named Corn Tassel was convicted in a Georgia court of the murder of another Indian and appealed on the grounds that the crime had taken place in Cherokee territory, Marshall declared the Georgia action unconstitutional on the same ground.

Jackson backed Georgia's position. No independent nation could exist within the United States, he insisted. Georgia thereupon hanged Corn Tassel. In 1838 the United States forced 15,000 Cherokees to leave Georgia for Oklahoma. At least 4,000 of them died on the way; the route has been aptly named "The Trail of Tears."

Jackson's willingness to allow Georgia to ignore decisions of the Supreme Court persuaded extreme southern states' righters that he would not oppose the doctrine of nullification should it be formally applied to a law of Congress. They deceived themselves egregiously. Jackson did not challenge Georgia because he approved of the state's position. He was not the type to worry about being inconsistent. When South Carolina revived the talk of nullification in 1832, he acted in quite a different manner.

**The Nullification Crisis**

The proposed alliance of South and West to reduce the tariff and the price of land had not materialized. When a new tariff law was passed in 1832, it lowered duties much less than southerners desired. At once talk of nullifying it began to be heard in South Carolina.

In addition to the economic woes of the up-country cotton planters, the great planter- aristocrats of the rice-growing tidewater region, though relatively prosperous, were troubled by northern criticisms of slavery. In the rice-growing region, blacks outnumbered whites by two to one. Thousands of these slaves were African born-brought in during the burst of importations before Congress outlawed the trade in 1808.

In 1822 the exposure in Charleston of a planned revolt organized by Denmark Vesey, who had bought his freedom with money won in a lottery, had alarmed many whites. News of a far more serious uprising in Virginia led by the slave Nat Turner in 1831 added to popular concern. Radical South Carolinians saw protective tariffs and agitation against slavery as the two sides of one coin; against both, nullification seemed the logical defense. Yield on the tariff, editor Henry L. Pinckney of the influential Charleston Mercury warned, and "abolition will become the order of the day."

Endless discussions of Calhoun's doctrine after the publication of his Exposition and Protest in 1828 had produced much interesting theorizing without clarifying the issue. Admirers of Calhoun praised his "power of analysis & profound philosophical reasoning," but his idea was ingenious rather than profound. Plausible at first glance, the argument was based on several false assumptions: that the Constitution was subject to definitive interpretation; that one party could be permitted to interpret a compact unilaterally without destroying it; that a minority of the nation could reassume its sovereign independence, but that a minority of a state could not.

President Jackson was in this respect Calhoun's exact opposite. He brushed aside the South Carolinian's mental gymnastics, because intuitively he realized the central reality: If a state could nullify a law of Congress, the Union could not exist. "Tell ... the Nullifiers from me that they can talk and write resolutions and print threats to their hearts' content," he warned a South Carolina representative when Congress adjourned in July 1832. "But if one drop of blood be shed there in defiance of the laws of the United States, I will hang the first man of them I can get my hands on to the first tree I can find."

The warning was not taken seriously in South Carolina. In October the state legislature provided for the election of a special convention, which, when it met, contained a solid majority of nullifiers. On November 24, 1832, the convention passed an Ordinance of Nullification, prohibiting the collection of tariff duties in the state after February 1, 1833. The legislature then authorized the raising of an army and appropriated money to supply it with weapons.

Jackson quickly began military preparations of his own. He also made a statesmanlike effort to end the crisis peaceably. First he suggested to Congress that it lower the tariff further. On December 10, he addressed a "Proclamation to the People of South Carolina." Nullification could only lead to the destruction of the Union, he said. "Disunion by armed force is treason. Are you really ready to incur its guilt?" Jackson's reasoning shocked even opponents of nullification. His threat to use force would mean civil war if South Carolina did not back down and possibly the destruction of the Union the president claimed to be defending.

Calhoun sought desperately to control the crisis. By prearrangement with Senator Hayne, he resigned as vice president and was appointed to replace Hayne in the Senate, where he led the search for a peaceful solution. Clay was a willing ally. In addition, large numbers of people who admired Jackson feared that his threat to use force would mean a civil war if South Carolina did not back down.

Jackson was perfectly willing to see the tariff reduced, but he insisted that the law must be enforced. His determination sobered the South Carolina radicals. Their appeal for the support of other southern states fell on deaf ears; all rejected the idea of nullification. Calhoun, though a brave man, was alarmed for his own safety; Jackson had threatened to "hang him as high as Haman" if nullification were attempted. Suddenly eager to avoid a showdown, he joined forces with Henry Clay to push a compromise tariff through Congress. Ten days before the deadline, South Carolina postponed nullification pending the outcome of the tariff debate. Its passage early in March 1833 reflected the willingness of the North and West to make concessions in the interest of national harmony.

And so the Union weathered the storm. Having teetered on the brink of civil war, the nation had drawn hastily back. The South Carolina legislature professed to be satisfied with the new tariff (in fact, it made few immediate reductions, providing for a gradual lowering of rates over a 10-year period) and repealed the Nullification Ordinance.

However, the radical South Carolina planters were becoming convinced that only secession would protect slavery. The nullification fiasco had proved that they could not succeed without the support of other slave states. Thereafter they devoted themselves ceaselessly to obtaining it.

**Boom and Bust**

During 1833 and 1834, Secretary of the Treasury Taney insisted that the pet banks maintain large reserves. But other state banks began to offer credit on easy terms. Bank notes in circulation jumped from $82 million in January 1835 to $120 million in December 1836. Bank deposits rose even more rapidly.

Much of the new money flowed into speculation in land; a mania to invest in property swept the country. Chicago at this time had only 2,000 to 3,000 inhabitants, yet most of the land for 25 miles around had been sold and resold in small lots by speculators anticipating the growth of the area. Throughout the West, farmers borrowed money from local banks by mortgaging their land, used the money to buy more land from the government, and then borrowed still more money from the banks on the strength of their new deeds. As long as prices continued to rise, the process could be repeated endlessly. In 1832, when the Bank of the United States still regulated the money supply, federal income from the sale of land was $2.6 million. In 1834, it was $4.9 million; in 1835, $14.8 million; in 1836, it peaked at $24.9 million, and the government found itself totally free of debt and with a surplus of $20 million.

Finally Jackson became alarmed by the speculative mania. In the summer of 1836, he issued the Specie Circular, which provided that purchasers must henceforth pay for public land in gold or silver. The rush to buy land ground to a halt. When demand slackened, prices sagged. Hordes of depositors sought to withdraw their money in the form of specie, and soon the banks exhausted their supplies. Panic swept through the land in the spring of 1837 as every bank in the nation had to suspend specie payments. The boom was over.

Major swings of the business cycle can never be attributed to the actions of a single person, but there is no doubt that Jackson's war against the Bank exaggerated the swings of the economic pendulum if only by its impact on popular thinking. His Specie Circular did not prevent speculators from buying land-at most it caused purchasers to pay a premium for gold and silver. But it convinced potential buyers that the boom was going to end and led them to do things that in fact ended it. Old Hickory's combination of impetuousness, combativeness, arrogance, and ignorance rendered the nation he loved so dearly a serious disservice.

**The Jacksonians**

Jackson's personality had a large impact on the shape and tone of the second party system. He had ridden to power at the head of a diverse political army, but he left behind him an organization with a fairly cohesive, if not necessarily consistent, body of ideas. The newly formed Democratic Party contained rich citizens and poor, easterners and westerners, abolitionists and slaveholders. It was not yet a close-knit national organization, but most Jacksonians agreed on certain underlying principles. These included suspicion of special privilege and large business corporations, both typified by the Bank of the United States; freedom of economic opportunity, unfettered by private or governmental restrictions; absolute political freedom, at least for white males; and the conviction that any ordinary man is capable of performing the duties of most public offices.

Jackson's ability to reconcile his belief in the supremacy of the Union with his conviction that the area of national authority should be held within narrow limits tended to make the Democratic Party attractive to those who believed that the powers of the states should not be diminished. Alexis de Toqueville caught this aspect of Jackson's philosophy perfectly: "Far from wishing to extend Federal power, the president belongs to the party that wishes to limit that power."

Nearly all Jacksonians, like their leader, favored giving the small man his chance-by supporting public education, for example, and by refusing to place much weight on a person's origin, dress, or manners. "One individual is as good as another" (again we must insert the adjective white) was axiomatic with them. This attitude helps explain why immigrants, Catholics, and other minority groups usually voted Democratic. However, the Jacksonians showed no tendency either to penalize the wealthy or to intervene in economic affairs to aid the underprivileged. The motto "That government is best which governs least" graced the masthead of the chief Jacksonian newspaper, the Washington Globe, throughout the era.

**Rise of the Whigs**

The opposition to Jackson was far less cohesive. Henry Clay's National Republican Party provided a nucleus, but Clay never dominated that party as Jackson dominated the Democrats. Its orientation was basically anti-Jackson. It was as though the American people were a great block of granite from which some sculptor had fashioned a statue of Jackson, the chips from the sculptor's chisel, scattered about the floor of his studio, representing the opposition.

While Jackson was president, the impact of his personality delayed the formation of a true two-party system, but as soon as he surrendered power, the opposition, taking heart, began to coalesce. By 1834 dissident groups were calling themselves Whigs. The name (harking back to the Revolution) implied distaste for too-powerful executives, expressed specifically as patriotic resistance to the tyranny of "King Andrew."

This coalition possessed great resources of wealth and talent. Anyone who understood banking was almost obliged to become a Whig. Those spiritual descendants of Hamilton, who rejected the administration's refusal to approach economic problems from a broadly national perspective, also joined in large numbers. People who found the coarseness and "pushiness" of the Jacksonians offensive made up another element. The anti-intellectual bias of the administration drove many lawyers, ministers, and other well-educated people into the Whig fold. But Whig arguments also appealed to ordinary voters who were predisposed to favor strong governments that would check the "excesses" of unrestricted individualism.

The Whigs were slow to develop an effective parry organization. They had too many generals and not enough troops. It was hard for them to agree on any issue more complicated than opposition to Jackson. Furthermore, they stood in conflict with the major trend of their age: the glorification of the common man. Lacking a dominant leader in 1836, the Whigs relied on "favorite sons," hoping to throw the presidential election into the House of Representatives. This sorry strategy failed. Jackson's handpicked candidate, Martin Van Buren, won a majority of both the popular and the electoral votes.

**Martin Van Buren: Jacksonianism without Jackson**

Van Buren's brilliance as a political manipulator has tended to obscure his statesmanlike qualities. He made a powerful argument, for example, that political parties were a force for unity, not for partisan bickering. In addition, high office sobered him and improved his judgment. He fought the Bank of the United States as a monopoly, but he also opposed irresponsible state banks. New York's "Safety Fund System"-requiring all banks to contribute to a fund, supervised by the state, to be used to redeem the notes of any member bank that failed-was established largely through his efforts. Van Buren believed in public construction of internal improvements, but he favored state rather than national programs, and he urged a rational approach: Each project must be a useful and profitable public utility. He approached most questions rationally and pragmatically. In 1832 he was elected vice president and thereafter was conceded to be the "heir apparent." In 1835 the Democratic National Convention nominated him for president unanimously.

Van Buren took office just as the Panic of 1837 struck the country. Its effects were frightening but short-lived. Late in 1838 the banks resumed specie payments. But in 1839 a bumper crop caused a sharp decline in the price of cotton. Then a number of state governments that had overextended themselves in road- and canal building projects were forced to default on their debts. This discouraged investors, particularly foreigners. An economic depression ensued that lasted until 1843.

Van Buren was not responsible for either the panic or the depression. But his manner of dealing with economic issues was scarcely helpful. He saw his role as being concerned only with problems plaguing the government, ignoring the economy as a whole. "The less government interferes with private pursuits the better for the general prosperity," he pontificated. As Daniel Webster scornfully pointed out, Van Buren was following a policy of "leaving the people to shift for themselves," one which many Whigs rejected.

Van Buren's main goal was to find a substitute for the state banks as a place to keep federal funds. He soon settled on the idea of "divorcing" the government from all banking activities. His Independent Treasury Bill called for the construction of government-owned vaults where federal revenues could be stored until needed. To insure absolute safety, all payments to the government were to be made in hard cash. After a battle that lasted until the summer of 1840, the Independent Treasury Act passed both the House and the Senate.

Opposition to the Independent Treasury system had been bitter, and not all of it was partisan. Bankers and businessmen objected to the government's withholding so much specie from the banks, which needed all the hard money they could get to support loans that were the lifeblood of economic growth. It seemed irresponsible for the federal government to turn its back on the banks, when they so obviously performed a semipublic function.

These criticisms made good sense, but through a combination of circumstances the system worked reasonably well for many years. By creating suspicion in the public mind, officially stated distrust of banks acted as a damper on their tendency to overexpand. No acute shortage of specie developed because heavy agricultural exports and the investment of much European capital in American railroads beginning in the mid-1840s brought in large amounts of new gold and silver. After 1849 the discovery of gold in California added another source of specie.

The supply of money and bank credit kept pace roughly with the growth of the economy, but through no fault of the government. "Wildcat" banks proliferated, fraud and counterfeiting were common, and the operation of everyday business affairs was inconvenienced in countless ways. The disordered state of the currency remained a grave problem until corrected by Civil War banking legislation.

**The Log Cabin Campaign**

It was not his financial policy that led to Van Buren's defeat in 1840. The depression hurt the Democrats, and the Whigs were far better organized than in 1836. The Whigs also adopted a different strategy. The Jacksonians had come to power on the coattails of a popular general whose views on public questions they concealed or ignored. They had maintained themselves by shouting the praises of the common man. Now the Whigs seized on these techniques and carried them to their logical or illogical-conclusion. Not even bothering to draft a program, and passing over Clay and Webster, whose views were known and therefore controversial, they nominated General Harrison for president. To "balance" the ticket, the Whigs chose a former Democrat, John Tyler of Virginia, an ardent supporter of states' rights, as their vice presidential candidate.

The Whig argument was specious but effective: General Harrison is a plain man of the people who lives in a log cabin (where the latch string is always out). Contrast him with the suave Van Buren, luxuriating amid "the Regal Splendor of the President's Palace." Harrison drinks ordinary hard cider and eats hog meat and grits, while Van Buren drinks expensive foreign wines and fattens on fancy concoctions prepared by a French chef.

Harrison came from a distinguished family, being the son of Benjamin Harrison, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a former governor of Virginia. He was well educated and in at least comfortable financial circumstances, and he certainly did not live in a log cabin. The Whigs ignored these facts. The log cabin and the cider barrel became their symbols, which every political meeting saw reproduced in a dozen forms.

The Democrats used the same methods as the Whigs and were equally well organized, but they had little heart for the fight. Van Buren tried to focus public attention on issues, but his voice could not be heard above the huzzas of the Whigs. A huge turnout (four-fifths of the eligible voters, more than 2.4 million as against 1.5 million four years earlier) carried Harrison to victory by a margin of almost 150,000 votes. The electoral vote was 234 to 60.

The Whigs continued to repeat history by rushing to gather the spoils of victory. Washington was again flooded by office seekers; the political confusion was monumental. Harrison had no ambition to be an aggressive leader. He believed that Jackson had misused the veto and professed to put as much emphasis as had Washington on the principle of the separation of legislative and executive powers. This delighted the Whig leaders in Congress, who had had their fill of the "executive usurpation" of Jackson. Either Clay or Webster seemed destined to be the real ruler of the new administration, and soon the two were squabbling over their old general like sparrows over a crust.

At the height of their squabble, less than a month after his inauguration, Harrison died. John Tyler of Virginia, honest, conscientious, but doctrinaire, became president of the United States. The political climate of the country changed drastically. Events began to march in a new direction, one that led ultimately to Bull Run, to Gettysburg, and to Appomattox..