

The Triumph of White Men's Democracy

The 1820s and 1830s witnessed the rise of popular democracy and a swelling of national political involvement. European visitors were amazed at the equalizing tendencies that were exposed in everything from hotels to the legal and clerical professions.

Democracy in Theory and Practice

The nation's founders had believed that "democracy" contained dangerous impulses, but by the 1820s and '30s the term had become more acceptable and applicable to American institutions. **Alexis de Tocqueville** noticed the decline of deference and the elevation of popular sovereignty in America. "Self-made" men could now rise in stature.

- **Social equality** became the dominant principle of the age. Special privilege and family connections could no longer be counted on to guarantee success. **Industrialization**, however, perpetuated inequality, not in the traditional sense of birth or privilege, but rather in terms of wealth and attainment.
- **Romanticism in American literature** often appealed to the feelings and intuitions of ordinary people. A mass reading audience developed, and poets, writers, and artists directed their work to a democratic populace. **American artists** (although striving to elevate popular tastes) were encouraged to contribute to the general welfare by supporting virtue and middle-class sentiments.
- **Property requirements** for **manhood suffrage** had been eliminated by 1820, and as public political involvement swelled, a **permanent two-party system** became a forum for political ideas. It became understood that a **loyal opposition** was essential to democratic government.
- Loans extended freely by the Bank of the United States were recalled suddenly, which played a role in the **Panic of 1819**.
- **Economic questions** (prompted by the Panic of 1819) and the role of the federal government were major concerns that assisted a great swelling of popular political interest.
- **Workingmen's parties and trade unions** emerged as workers became convinced that the government should protect the rights of labor as well as those of the producers.
- **Abolitionists** sought an end to slavery and supported the civil rights of free African Americans and women.

Jackson and the Politics of Democracy

Andrew Jackson symbolized the triumph of democracy and egalitarianism from the 1820s to the 1840s.

- **Popular hero Andrew Jackson**, a “common man,” rose to prominence as a result of “popular sovereignty.” **Despite winning a plurality of popular votes**, Jackson was denied the presidency in **1824** by the House of Representatives, in favor of Adams. Rumors of a **corrupt bargain** between Adams and Henry Clay and controversy over tariff policy (**the tariff of abominations**) damaged Adams’ administration.
- **Supported by the new Democratic party**, Jackson returned to defeat Adams convincingly in **1828** in an election that featured a massive popular turnout. Possessed of indomitable will, Jackson became one of the most forceful presidents in history. He endorsed the **spoils system** as a way to provide himself with loyal advisors.
- **Beginning in 1830**, Jackson ordered the swift and forceful **removal of all Indian tribes** to reservations located west of the Mississippi River. Jackson ignored humanitarian and practical protests. In 1832, he joined Georgia’s defiance of the Supreme Court’s decision in *Worcester v. Georgia* that denied the right of a state to extend its jurisdiction over tribal lands. By **1838**, the last of the southeastern tribes, **the Cherokee**, were forced to abandon ancestral grounds and embark on the “**Trail of Tears**.”
- **Jackson** regarded **nullification (the right of a state to set aside federal laws)** as a major threat to federal authority. After **South Carolina nullified the Tariff Acts of 1828 and 1832** in defiance of federal authority, Jackson threatened forceful intervention to bring the nullification crisis to an end. Appeased by the protests of lower tariffs, South Carolina suspended its nullification ordinance in **1833**.

The Bank War and the Second Party System

Jackson’s successful attack on the **Bank of the United States** aroused great controversy and called into question the president’s power over the nation’s finances.

- **Nicholas Biddle**, president of the Bank of the United States, sought rechartering in **1832**, and Jackson promptly declared war on this “monster” corporation, which he was convinced violated the fundamental principles of a democratic society.
- **Jackson’s response** to an early recharter bill through Congress included **vetoing** the bill and calling on the people for support. Jackson’s overwhelming victory in the **1832 election** was considered to be a mandate for the Bank’s destruction.
- **Jackson** ordered that federal deposits in the Bank be removed and deposited in selected “**pet banks**.” Strong opposition to Jackson’s fiscal policy developed in Congress as fear spread that the destruction of the Bank would be disastrous for the nation’s economy.
- **The Whigs** emerged in Jackson’s second term. Led by **Henry Clay and Daniel Webster**, the Whigs **opposed the growth of presidential power** and prerogative under “King Andrew.” When over-speculation and currency devaluation staggered the country’s economy, Jackson ordered the **specie circular**, as economic depression set in.

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- **Martin Van Buren**, with Jackson's endorsement, gained the presidency in **1836**. Van Buren attempted to improve the faltering economy with his creation of an **independent sub-treasury**, but the persistent depression was beyond the control of governmental policies. The state of the economy cost Van Buren reelection in **1840** to the Whig candidate **William Henry Harrison**.

Heyday of the Second Party System

Promoting the idea of the “**positive liberal state**,” the Whigs challenged the Democrats on equal terms in the 1840s. The Whigs called for a government that was active and responsive in economic affairs. Although they supported a market economy, the Whigs wanted to restrain disorder and selfish individualism by calling on the government to enforce high moral standards and community values. The Democrats appealed to small farmers, workers, rising capitalists, immigrants, and Catholics with their support for individualism and personal liberty.

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. The nullification controversy occurred in the state of
(A) Pennsylvania.
(B) Georgia.
(C) New York.
(D) South Carolina.
(E) New Jersey.
2. _____ came to symbolize the triumph of democracy.
(A) Henry Clay
(B) John C. Calhoun
(C) Daniel Webster
(D) Martin Van Buren
(E) Andrew Jackson
3. _____ denied states the right to take Native American tribal lands.
(A) *McCulloch v. Maryland*
(B) Southern legislatures
(C) *Worcester v. Georgia*
(D) *Fletcher v. Peck*
(E) *Wallace v. Tennessee*
4. Andrew Jackson killed the national bank
(A) by withdrawing federal deposits from it.
(B) through further legislation.
(C) through the actions of the Supreme Court.
(D) by letting it expire in 1836.
(E) by accusing Nicholas Biddle of treasonous acts.
5. From Jackson's response to the nullification crisis, one can conclude that he
(A) was a strong supporter of states' rights.
(B) believed in the limited use of federal power but also that states were not truly sovereign.
(C) supported the unlimited use of federal power.
(D) supported higher tariffs.
(E) supported lower tariffs.
6. Andrew Jackson's attitude toward Native Americans was that
(A) they should be removed to areas beyond white expansion.
(B) they should be allowed to remain on their tribal lands.
(C) they should be assimilated into white society.
(D) they should be treated as equals to the white man.
(E) they should be exterminated.
7. John Quincy Adams' victory in 1824 was aided by
(A) Martin Van Buren.
(B) John C. Calhoun.

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- (C) Henry Clay.
(D) William Crawford.
(E) Nicholas Biddle.
8. The most obvious indicator of the supremacy of democracy in the United States was
(A) the high percentages of people who voted.
(B) the widespread use of the “spoils system.”
(C) the absence of any kind of social or economic classes.
(D) the development of universal manhood suffrage.
(E) the increase in the number of appointed officials.
9. The “Trail of Tears” refers to
(A) the destruction of the national bank.
(B) the forced relocation of the Cherokees to Oklahoma.
(C) passage of the tariff of abominations.
(D) the nullification controversy.
(E) the Oregon Trail and westward expansion.
10. Between 1824 and 1840, voter participation in elections
(A) changed little.
(B) increased dramatically.
(C) increased slightly.
(D) declined somewhat.
(E) declined precipitously.

Free-Response Question

Illustrate why the 1830s should be referred to as “the Age of Democracy.”

ANSWERS AND EXPLANATIONS

Multiple-Choice Questions

- **1. (D) is correct.** The nullification crisis was pushed by Vice President Calhoun. The idea of nullification was that any state could nullify any federal act or law that it disagreed with.
- **2. (E) is correct.** Andrew Jackson’s election was viewed as the success of democracy. Jackson’s election started with his loss in 1824 to Adams. Jackson started a “grassroots” campaign. He had a committee in every county and city of significance in every state by the time of the election of 1828.
- **3. (C) is correct.** *Worcester* was a hollow victory. Although it was a victory for the Native Americans, it was largely ignored by the states. This behavior was encouraged by President Jackson himself.
- **4. (A) is correct.** Jackson vowed that the bank had nearly killed him. He would in turn kill the bank by withholding deposits.
- **5. (B) is correct.** Jackson did not want to have full federal sovereignty nor did he believe the states were above the federal government.
- **6. (A) is correct.** Jacksonian policies were clear. He successfully pushed the Natives beyond the boundaries onto the reservations beyond the majority of settlements.
- **7. (C) is correct.** The Election of 1824 was thrown into the House of Representatives. Adams was elected after one of his competitors in the General Election, Henry Clay, threw his support behind Adams. There was controversy over this action as Adams then appointed Clay as his Secretary of State.

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- **8. (D) is correct.** As the democracy that is the United States has developed, so too has the development of universal manhood suffrage. The longer this idea has developed the more participatory the democracy has become.
 - **9. (B) is correct.** The “Trail of Tears” was the forced movement from the areas of Georgia and Tennessee to the reservation in Oklahoma. This push was accelerated after gold was discovered on the Cherokee’s lands.
 - **10. (B) is correct.** The population grew during this period. The idea of Universal Manhood Suffrage changed to include more of the middle and eventually lower classes. Once the voting privileges were earned, they were used.

Free-Response Essay Sample Response

Illustrate why the 1830s should be referred to as “the Age of Democracy.”

The 1830s was the era of Jacksonian Democracy. The people’s choice had been elected to the Presidency in Andrew Jackson. He had not been born of an aristocratic family, nor had he been a Washington insider.

The decade also brought more voting rights to more citizens. This in turn meant more people voting in elections. Many historians believe that this is what the Founding Fathers intended for the Republic.

