

Electing a President

# Adams v. Jackson: The Election of 1824

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*by Edward G. Lengel*

James Monroe's two terms in office as president of the United States (1817–1825) are often called the “Era of Good Feelings.” The country appeared to have entered a period of strength, unity of purpose, and one-party government with the end of the War of 1812 and the decay and eventual disappearance of Federalism in the wake of Alexander Hamilton's death.

Thomas Jefferson, living his final years in retirement at Monticello, might well have taken satisfaction in 1824 at the total dominance of Republicanism, or the Democratic-Republican Party, in American political life. Every major candidate for public office designated himself a Republican and derided factionalism. But the “good feelings” were illusory. Beneath the veneer of unity seethed a bubbling cauldron of factionalism and political rivalry that, in the upcoming presidential election, would put the less-than-fifty-year-old United States to a severe test.

This was a transitional period in American politics, made evident in the selection of presidential candidates in 1824. No system for nominating candidates had developed. The caucus system was in decline as the electorate grew, and essentially any party or group could nominate a candidate for the presidency. Some candidates, such as Andrew Jackson, were nominated almost simultaneously by different groups in different places. Nor was there anything like today's presidential campaigns. Candidates did not tramp the countryside giving speeches or offer well-defined platforms. More often they sparred through the press or through local supporters.

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Campaigning by press and proxy encouraged the politics of insinuation and slander. Journalists and political cronies could trumpet the most scurrilous accusations against their opponents while the candidates themselves stood serenely above the dirty fray. Forged documents and outrageous rumors were disseminated to destroy reputations; reports even hit the press in 1824 that John Quincy Adams, one of the major candidates, didn't wear underclothes and went to church barefoot!<sup>[1]</sup> The focus on personalities did not, however, wholly obscure issues of substance. Candidates, voters, and electors all had serious views on issues such as government spending and corruption in public life.

As politicians and their supporters jockeyed for position in 1824, four major candidates for the presidency came to the fore. Of them, none craved victory more than Henry Clay (1777–1852). Born in



*John Quincy Adams, lithograph published by P. S. Duval, Philadelphia, ca. 1840s. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division)*

Virginia but now hailing from Kentucky, where he rivaled Andrew Jackson for the role of “candidate of the West,” Clay had served since 1811 as Speaker of the House of Representatives. But he had no intention of stopping there. Though Clay had failed to displace his rival John Quincy Adams as Monroe’s secretary of state, the office that was traditionally regarded as the last step before the presidency, he determined to run for president in 1824. Clay advocated what he called the “American System,” an economic policy of internal improvements for transportation and agriculture funded by taxation; a protectionist tariff on behalf of American industry; and preservation of a national bank.

Andrew Jackson (1767–1845) competed with Clay for support in the West, but lacked his opponent’s political experience. Jackson had served briefly as a judge, governor of the Florida Territory, and member of the House of Representatives, and was in 1824 a US senator; but his public service had been undistinguished on the whole. Feisty and charismatic, he attracted supporters as a military hero and supposed advocate of the common man, but repelled others who regarded him as an ignorant frontiersman and opportunist who sought dictatorial power. Both supporters and detractors could agree on one thing: Jackson had a vicious temper, and woe to the man who crossed him. Although he lacked a well-defined political platform—he supported a somewhat more moderate version of Clay’s American System—Jackson garnered wide support in Pennsylvania and in the South and West.

William H. Crawford of Georgia (1772–1834) represented a small group known as Old Republicans or Radicals. Passionate advocates of states’ rights who considered themselves true Jeffersonians, the Radicals strongly distrusted the central government and argued for limited budgets and against protective tariffs. They were therefore violently opposed to Clay’s American System. Despite his hardline platform, Crawford usually was affable and easygoing enough, although he sometimes betrayed a temper every bit as violent as Jackson’s. While secretary of the Treasury under Monroe, Crawford had reputedly brandished his cane angrily at the President, who had responded by snatching up a pair of fire tongs and driving Crawford out of the White House. He was popular in Congress despite his reputation for being politically unscrupulous. Unfortunately, Crawford had suffered a debilitating stroke in September 1823, and his attending physicians then brought him to death’s door by bleeding him mercilessly. Despite his physical weakness, Crawford refused to abandon his candidacy.

On paper, no candidate was more qualified for the presidency than John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts (1767–1848). Son of the second president of the United States, Adams had studied at Harvard and served under James Madison as US minister to Russia. After his recall in 1814, he played a major role in crafting and negotiating the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the War of 1812. Adams had reached his political pinnacle as secretary of state under Monroe, helping to shape the Monroe Doctrine, and he seemed destined for the presidency.

Adams lacked only one ingredient for success: charisma. Bald, short, and rotund (despite being an avid swimmer), he felt most comfortable among books and struck others as dour and stand-offish. Among intellectuals or when inspired by a topic of interest—such as slavery, which he firmly opposed—Adams sometimes let down his guard; and when he had imbibed enough wine, he became positively loquacious. A part of him always yearned to leave politics and become a professor or professional man of letters, but his strong sense of duty held him back. A workaholic, Adams took pride in devoting himself thoroughly to his public duties.

The Adams platform closely approximated Clay’s American System, with its spending on internal improvements and a tariff. Adams tried to stay aloof from partisan politics, though, believing that his

record of service should be sufficient inducement for votes. Above all, Adams loathed the gutter tactics employed by his opponents and their supporters. Like George Washington, he felt it beneath him to angle openly for office. Adams responded to frustrated supporters of his candidacy by quoting a line from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me, / Without my stir."<sup>[2]</sup> All of which is not to say that Adams lacked ambition: his pursuit of the presidency was driven by his desire to live up to the family name; a semi-Messianic feeling that he was a man of destiny who could benefit mankind; and a genuine fear of what would happen to the country if any of his detested opponents won the presidency.

There was no single election day in 1824. Instead, votes accumulated through the autumn as voters cast ballots for individuals or slates of electors who typically pledged to support a certain candidate in the Electoral College. In six states—Delaware, Georgia, Louisiana, New York, South Carolina, and Vermont—legislatures chose the electors, while elsewhere they were chosen by popular vote. Some electors were not even pledged to a specific candidate, while others were pledged but subsequently changed their minds.

The results of the voting exposed the fragmented nature of American politics despite the appearance of unity and heralded a full-fledged political crisis. Among the four major candidates, Jackson won 99 electoral and 152,901 popular votes; Adams won 84 electoral and 114,023 popular votes; Crawford won 41 electoral and 46,979 popular votes; and poor Henry Clay trailed the field with 37 electoral votes even though he had received 47,217 popular votes. Since none of the four held an actual majority, by the terms of the Twelfth Amendment to the Constitution, the House of Representatives would have to choose among the three candidates with the most electoral votes: Jackson, Adams, and Crawford.

The results were especially galling to Clay, since by a narrow margin he had missed having a chance at election through the House of Representatives, where his enormous influence as Speaker might have made the difference. Even so, he remained in an important position—not quite as kingmaker, but still having a critical role in swaying the balance of power. Another man in a position of influence was John C. Calhoun of South Carolina (1782–1850), who served as secretary of war under Monroe. Calhoun had originally sought the presidency, but when his candidacy failed to gain traction he entered the race for vice president and won easily (unlike today, that office was filled by separate election).

Calhoun hesitated. He did not feel entirely comfortable with either Jackson or Adams; but on the other hand, he and Crawford absolutely loathed each other. Crawford's Radicals suspected that Calhoun was a secret Jackson man, however; and that alone was sufficient to convince them not to support the colorful Tennessean and guarantee his victory as they might otherwise have done. Instead, the Radicals decided to hold out against both Jackson and Adams in what they expected to be a protracted balloting process in the House of Representatives. In preventing either of the two main candidates from winning, they hoped to force the House to choose Crawford as a third option.

A period of furious lobbying and canvassing for votes gripped the House during the autumn and early winter of 1824–1825 as state representatives measured the candidates. Meanwhile the Marquis de Lafayette, hero of the Revolutionary War, embarked on his tour of the United States and brought a nostalgic tone to Washington politics. Lafayette and Jackson entered into a genial and public correspondence that benefited the Tennessean's standing. In the public eye, Jackson absorbed some of the Frenchman's aura of Revolutionary heroism, setting him further apart from the cynical Crawford and the dyspeptic Adams.

On January 8, 1825, Clay, as a member of the House, transformed the character of the debate by officially throwing his support behind Adams despite nonbinding instructions from the Kentucky legislature to back Jackson. Clay announced his decision publicly two weeks later. The declaration was not unexpected and was easily justifiable in terms of policy. Adams and Clay agreed on the fundamentals of the American System, to which Crawford was unalterably opposed. Clay also thought Crawford's physical debility should preclude him from the presidency. And while Clay did not lack regard for Jackson, he thought Old Hickory insufficiently experienced for such high public office. Moreover, since Clay and Jackson competed for support in the West, a combination with Adams seemed more calculated to vault Clay, in 1828 or 1832, into the presidential office he craved. Rumors flew, however, that Adams had made some underhanded deal to secure Clay's support. If Adams won, his subsequent treatment of Clay would be closely watched.

Snow blanketed Washington on February 9, 1825, as the House of Representatives convened to choose the president for the first time since 1801. Up to the last moment delegates scurried back and forth across the chambers for hurried conferences, and Clay had to call for order as the polling began. Each state then cast a ballot that was determined by its delegation, with a majority of ballots being required for election.

There were several important "battleground states." Daniel Webster of Massachusetts (1782–1852) played a vital role in bringing Maryland over to Adams; and Clay helped to entice Kentucky, Ohio, and Louisiana away from Jackson and to the secretary of state. Missouri's vote, determined by a single delegate, was essentially bought for Adams, who promised to maintain the delegate's brother in judicial office. No state was more important than New York, however, where the delegates remained deadlocked between Adams and Crawford. One man, Stephen Van Rensselaer, held the balance that would turn the vote either way, and he nearly broke down under the pressure of making his decision. Deeply religious, Van Rensselaer bowed his head to pray and, upon looking up, saw a ballot for Adams lying on the floor before him. That evidently made up his mind—or so the story went—and with New York in the Adams camp the final piece fell into place.

On the first and only ballot, Adams won a clear majority of thirteen states against seven for Jackson and four for Crawford. The Radicals' hopes of preventing a quick decision thus failed disastrously while Jackson, who had seemed to hold the inside track after winning the popular majority, found himself empty-handed. Learning of his son's election, old John Adams sent him a note invoking "the blessing of God Almighty" on his presidency.[3]

Jackson at first accepted the news of John Quincy Adams's election with good grace, and even greeted the incoming president cordially at a reception given by Monroe on the night of the election. Unfortunately for Adams, it all went downhill from there. His decision to appoint Clay secretary of state seemed to confirm rumors that the two men had struck a deal, and cries of a "corrupt bargain" flew around the country. Jackson, meanwhile, returned to Tennessee but grew increasingly convinced that he had been cheated. Proclaiming that "the *Judas* of the West [Clay] has closed the contract and will receive the thirty pieces of silver," Jackson declared his undying enmity to the new regime.[4]

Instead of seeking allies, the stubborn Adams only incited the growing political combination against him by refusing to conciliate Crawford and his Radicals, pushing immediately for an aggressive program of public works that drove them into the Jackson camp. Calhoun and his followers likewise aligned themselves with Jackson. In a twinkling, Adams found himself surrounded by an increasingly well-

organized political party determined to obstruct his policies and make him a one-term president. Clay would later rue his decision to accept the secretary of state's office as political suicide, for he never again came within a sniff of the presidency.

John Quincy Adams's victory in the election of 1824 would turn to bitter gall. Subject to savage political attacks and blocked at every turn by an obstructionist Congress and vindictive political enemies, he grew increasingly bitter as his presidency stagnated. He sought reelection in 1828 out of sheer stubbornness, but fully expected and even looked forward to losing to Jackson—which he did. Adams's subsequent career as a Massachusetts delegate in the House of Representatives would be serene compared to the ordeal of the election of 1824 and its aftermath.

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[1] Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 25.

[2] Bemis, *John Quincy Adams*, 20.

[3] Paul C. Nagel, *John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, a Private Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 297.

[4] Robert V. Remini, *The Life of Andrew Jackson* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 155.

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## SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Professor Lengel recommends the following books to learn more about the election of 1824 and the main players:

Bemis, Samuel Flagg. *John Quincy Adams and the Union*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.

Heidler, David S., and Jeanne T. Heidler. *Henry Clay: The Essential American*. New York: Random House, 2010.

Mooney, Chase C. *William H. Crawford, 1772–1834*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1974.

Nagel, Paul C. *John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, a Private Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997.

Remini, Robert V. *The Life of Andrew Jackson*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

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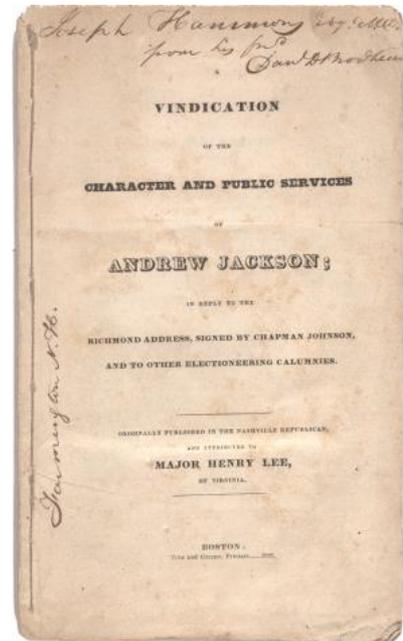
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**ANDREW JACKSON AND HIS WORLD**

# Andrew Jackson's Shifting Legacy

by Daniel Feller

Of all presidential reputations, Andrew Jackson's is perhaps the most difficult to summarize or explain. Most Americans recognize his name, though most probably know him (in the words of a famous song) as the general who "fought the bloody British in the town of New Orleans" in 1815 rather than as a two-term president of the United States from 1829 to 1837. Thirteen polls of historians and political scientists taken between 1948 and 2009 have ranked Jackson always in or near the top ten presidents, among the "great" or "near great." His face adorns our currency, keeping select company with George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and the first secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton. Jackson is the only president, and for that matter the only American, whose name graces a whole period in our history. While other presidents belong to eras, Jackson's era belongs to him. In textbooks and in common parlance, we call Washington's time the Revolutionary and founding eras, not the Age of Washington. Lincoln belongs in the Civil War era, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson in the Progressive era, Franklin Roosevelt in the era of the Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II. But the interval roughly from the 1820s through 1840s, between the aftermath of the War of 1812 and the coming of the Civil War, has often been known as the Jacksonian Era, or the Age of Jackson.



*A Vindication of the Character and Public Services of Andrew Jackson, by Henry Lee (Boston: True and Greene, 1828). (Gilder Lehrman Collection)*

Yet the reason for Jackson's claim on an era is not readily apparent. Washington was the Father of his country. Lincoln, Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt were war leaders who also (not wholly coincidentally) presided over dramatic changes in government. But besides winning a famous battle in the War of 1812 years before his presidency—and at that, a battle that had no effect on the war's outcome, since a treaty ending it had just been signed—just exactly what did Andrew Jackson do to deserve his eminence? He led the country through no wars. No foreign policy milestones like Thomas Jefferson's Louisiana Purchase or the "Doctrines" of James Monroe or Harry Truman highlighted Jackson's presidency. He crafted no path-breaking legislative program like Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal or Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. Indeed Jackson's sole major legislative victory in eight years was an 1830 law to "remove" the eastern Indian tribes beyond the Mississippi, something more often seen today as travesty rather than triumph. That measure aside, the salient features of Jackson's relations with Congress were his famous vetoes, killing a string of road and canal subsidies and the Bank of the United States, and Jackson's official censure by the United States Senate in 1834, the only time that has yet happened. On its face, this does not look like the record of a "top ten" president.

An exception might be claimed for Jackson's handling of the Nullification Crisis of 1832–1833. Most southern states in Jackson's day vehemently opposed the "protective tariff," an import tax that provided most of the government's revenue and also aided American manufacturers by raising the price of competing foreign (mainly British) goods. In 1832 the state of South Carolina declared the tariff law unconstitutional and therefore null and void. In assuming this right, independent of the Supreme Court or

anybody else, to judge what the US Constitution meant and what federal laws had to be obeyed, South Carolina threatened the very viability of the federal union. Although he was himself a southerner, no great friend of the tariff, and a South Carolina native, Jackson boldly faced down the nullifiers. He first confronted nullification's mastermind (and his own vice president), John C. Calhoun, with a ringing public declaration: "Our Federal Union—It must be preserved." He then responded officially to South Carolina's action with a blistering presidential proclamation, in which he warned that nullification would inexorably lead to secession (formal withdrawal of a state from the United States), and secession meant civil war. "Be not deceived by names. Disunion by armed force is *treason*. Are you really ready to incur its guilt?" Bloodshed was averted when Congress passed a compromise tariff that South Carolina accepted and Jackson approved. Although he played no direct role in its passage, Jackson took much credit for the compromise, and even many political opponents conceded it to him.

For his own generation and several to come, Jackson's defiance of nullification earned him a place in the patriotic pantheon above the contentions of party politics, at least in the eyes of those who approved the result. In the secession crisis thirty years later, Republicans—including Abraham Lincoln, an anti-Jackson partisan from his first entry into politics—hastened to invoke his example and quote his words. In 1860 James Parton, Jackson's first scholarly biographer, managed to praise Jackson's unionism while providing a negative overall assessment of his character.

Still, though not wholly forgotten, Jackson's reputation as defender of the Union has faded distinctly in the twentieth century and hardly explains historians' interest in him today. Secession is a dead issue, and commitment to an indivisible and permanent American nationhood is now so commonplace as to seem hardly worth remarking.

Rather, Jackson's continuing prominence, and the source of continuing controversy, lies in something much less concrete: his place as an emblem of American democracy. He is remembered less for specific accomplishments as president than for his persona or image, his role as America's first presidential Representative Man. That image has deep roots. In 1831–1832, midway through Jackson's presidency, a French aristocrat named Alexis de Tocqueville toured the country. Returning home, he published *Democracy in America*, still the most penetrating analysis of American society ever penned. De Tocqueville organized his exposition (which in many respects was not at all flattering) around two themes. One was "the general equality of condition among the people." The other was democracy, which gave tone to everything in American life: "the people reign in the American political world as the Deity does in the universe." De Tocqueville saw democracy, for good or ill, as the future of Europe and the world. "I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought there the image of democracy itself, with its inclinations, its character, its prejudices, and its passions, in order to learn what we have to fear or to hope from its progress."

America, then, was democracy embodied—and Andrew Jackson was its exemplar. Born poor, half-educated, self-risen, he was the first president from outside the colonial gentry, the first westerner, the first with a nickname ("Old Hickory"), the first to be elected in a grand popular plebiscite—all in all, the first living proof that in America, anyone with enough gumption could grow up to be president. He furnished the plebeian template of humble origins, untutored wisdom, and instinctive leadership from which would spring "Old Tippecanoe" William Henry Harrison, "Honest Abe" Lincoln, and a thousand would-be imitators down to the present day.

The image of Jackson as a quintessential product of American democracy has stuck. Yet always complicating it has been the interplay between the personal and the political. If Jackson is a potent democratic symbol, he is also a conflicted and polarizing one. In his own lifetime he was adulated and despised far beyond any other American. To an amazing degree, historians today still feel visceral personal reactions to him, and praise or damn accordingly.

Jackson's outsized, larger-than-life character and career have always offered plenty to wonder at and to

argue about. His lifelong political antagonist Henry Clay once likened him, not implausibly, to a tropical tornado. Jackson's rough-and-tumble frontier youth and pre-presidential (mainly military) career showed instances of heroic achievement and nearly superhuman fortitude. Mixed in with these were episodes of insubordination, usurpation, uncontrolled temper, wanton violence, and scandal. Jackson vanquished enemies in battle everywhere and won a truly astonishing victory at New Orleans. He also fought duels and street brawls, defied superiors, shot captives and subordinates, launched a foreign invasion against orders, and (disputably) stole another man's wife. As president he was, depending on whom one asked, either our greatest popular tribune or the closest we have come to an American Caesar.

An adept manipulator of his own image, Jackson played a willing hand in fusing the political and the personal. First as a candidate and then as president, he reordered the political landscape around his own popularity. Swept into office on a wave of genuine grassroots enthusiasm, Jackson labored successfully through eight years as president to reshape his personal following into an effective political apparatus—the Democratic Party, our first mass political party, which organized under his guidance. Significantly, the party's original name was the American Democracy, implying that it was not a party at all but the political embodiment of the people themselves. Democrats labeled their opponents, first National Republicans and then Whigs, as the “aristocracy.” But the initial test of membership in the Democracy was less an adherence to a political philosophy than fealty to Andrew Jackson himself.

A generation after Jackson's presidency, biographer James Parton found his reputation a mass of contradictions: he was dictator or democrat, ignoramus or genius, Satan or saint. Those conundrums endure, and the facts, or arguments, behind them would fill a book.

There are a few focal points upon which Jackson's modern reputation has turned for better or for worse. One is his attack on corporate privilege and on the concentrated political influence of wealth. In his famous Bank Veto of 1832, Jackson juxtaposed “the rich and powerful” against “the humble members of society—the farmers, mechanics, and laborers,” and lamented that the former “too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes.” No president before and few since have spoken so bluntly of economic antagonisms between Americans. Jackson went on, in his Farewell Address in 1837, to warn of an insidious “money power,” made up of banks and corporations, that would steal ordinary citizens' liberties away from them. (It said something of Jackson's sense of his own importance that he presumed to deliver a Farewell Address, an example set by Washington that no previous successor had dared to follow.)

Jackson's Bank Veto was so riveting, and so provocative, that in the ensuing presidential election both sides distributed it as a campaign document. Foes of bankers, corporations, Wall Street, and “the rich” have turned to it ever since. Populists and other agrarian insurgents in the nineteenth century, and New Deal Democrats in the twentieth, claimed it as their birthright. Writing in the wake of the Great Depression and the New Deal, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. made the Bank Veto the centerpiece of *The Age of Jackson* (1945), the foundational work of modern Jacksonian scholarship.

In the late twentieth century, Jackson's strictures attracted some historians who were articulating a class-based analysis of American history, and who used them to interpret Jackson as a foe not only of capitalist abuses and excesses, but of capitalism itself. To other recent scholars, though, the Bank Veto has seemed merely demagogic, while to most people outside the academy the whole Jacksonian struggle over banking grew to appear baffling and arcane, divorced from our present concerns. All of that has suddenly changed. Since the financial collapse of 2008, Jackson's warnings seem not only urgently relevant but eerily prescient. They are again often quoted, and his reputation has enjoyed, at least for the moment, a sharp uptick.

The other framing issue for Jackson's recent reputation—one that Schlesinger did not even mention, but which has come since to pervade and even dominate his image—is Indian removal. The symbolic freight of this subject can hardly be overstated. Just as Jackson—child of the frontier, self-made man,

homespun military genius, and plain-spoken tribune of the people—has sometimes served to stand for everything worth celebrating in American democracy, Indian removal has come to signify democracy's savage and even genocidal underside. It opens a door behind which one finds Jackson the archetypal Indian-hater, the slave owner, the overbearing male patriarch, and the frontiersman not as heroic pioneer but as imperialist, expropriator, and killer.

To Schlesinger (who was no racist) and to others who have seen Jackson's essential importance in his championship of the common man, the "little guy," against corporate domination, Indian removal appeared to be an aside, at worst a regrettable failing, but to many today it shows Jackson and his white man's democracy at their core. There is no doubt that removing the American Indians, particularly those in Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, was centrally important to Jackson. Together with purging the federal bureaucracy of his political opponents and instituting what he called "rotation in office" (and what his enemies dubbed the "spoils system"), it stood at the head of his initial presidential agenda. Jackson's motives and methods in pursuing Indian removal were deeply controversial at the time and remain so today. He claimed to be acting only on impulses of duty and philanthropy. American Indians could not, without violating the essential rights of sovereign states, remain where they were; their own self-preservation required quarantine from pernicious white influences; and the terms offered for their evacuation were reasonable and even generous. Critics, then and since, have branded these as artful rationalizations to cover real motives of greed, racism, and land-lust.

Connecting directly to our widely shared misgivings about the human cost of Euro-American expansion and the pejorative racial and cultural attitudes that sustained it, the recent debate over Jackson's Indian policy has gone mainly one way. A handful of defenders or apologists—most notably Jackson biographer Robert V. Remini—have dared to buck the tide, but for most scholars the question is not whether Jackson acted badly, but whether he acted so badly as to exclude considering anything else he might have done as palliation or excuse. Both inside and outside the academy, at least until the sudden resuscitation of Jackson as anti-corporate champion, the arch-oppressor of Indians had become Jackson's prevalent image. Far more American schoolchildren can name the Cherokee Trail of Tears (which actually happened in Martin Van Buren's presidency, though in consequence of Jackson's policy) than the Bank Veto, the Nullification Proclamation, or perhaps even the Battle of New Orleans.

No simple conclusion offers itself. Jackson's reputation, like the man himself, defies easy summary. The one thing that seems certain is that Americans will continue to argue about him.

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