

Andrew Jackson

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Andrew Jackson's time as president would mark a major historical **shift**, or change, for the United States.

Difficulty and Controversy in the Early Days as President

Just months before Jackson became President, his close friend and Secretary of War, John Eaton, married Margaret "Peggy" Timberlake. Washington socialites (rich "celebrities") disapproved because of rumors concerning her past. When the other cabinet members' wives refused to associate with Mrs. Eaton, Jackson defended Eaton and his wife, Peggy. John Eaton had defended Rachel Jackson, Andrew Jackson's wife, during the 1828 Presidential campaign. Andrew Jackson demanded that Mrs. Eaton be accepted into Washington's social circles. This became known as the "Eaton Affair."

At the same time, a few of Jackson's cabinet members, thinking he would only serve one term as President, were getting ready to run for the Presidency themselves. Because these cabinet members and those who did not treat Peggy Eaton nicely, Jackson showed favor **only** to those who socialized with the Eatons and **proved** their loyalty to him in other ways.

To get rid of the controversy swirling around his cabinet members, Jackson fired his entire cabinet in 1831- except for the Postmaster General. Jackson came to distrust his official cabinet members- even after this time, and he met with a *group of unofficial* (not part of the cabinet) advisors. Jackson's opponents labeled this group as his "Kitchen Cabinet" because of their "back door", informal access to the President and decision making.

When accused of constantly removing and adding cabinet members, as well as using his "Kitchen Cabinet" to make decisions, **Jackson said**,

"There has been a great noise made about removals. ... It is rotation in office that will perpetuate our liberty."

Time to Clean Up Corruption (Corruption means to misuse or abuse your power or position/job. An example of corruption is taking a bribe.)

Jackson took office with great expectations to fix the corruption and finances in the government. The people in power in Washington were afraid that Jackson would fire everyone that held government positions, even the ones that did their jobs well and were not corrupt, and replace them with people he trusted and knew. Jackson replaced only about ten percent of the government positions he could. It was a high percentage of positions compared to his Presidents that served before him.

The people he replaced were usually very bad at their jobs, corrupt, or were enemies of Jackson. For this reason, Jackson is credited with creating the "*the principle of rotation in office*," but others would label it the "*spoils system*."

Penny Pinching to Fix the Budget

Jackson kept a watchful eye over how the federal government spent money, especially how Congress spent money. In one instance, he vetoed a road bill passed by Congress. On top of costing too much money, the bill only benefitted one area of the country, and it didn't improve the nation's defenses. Before Jackson, Presidents had only vetoed legislation they believed to be unconstitutional. Jackson established a new principle of vetoing legislation according to policy. This meant that Jackson began the precedent of Presidents passing or vetoing bills based on their and their party's beliefs.

Jackson's tight control on government spending, along with increased revenue (money coming into the government), helped him to pay off the national debt in 1835. He continued to keep The U.S. government debt free for the remainder of his term. **This is the only time in the nation's history that the federal government did not have a national debt.**

Andrew Jackson is the only President in American history to pay off the national debt and leave office with the country showing a profit, not a loss.

A Devastating Decision

Jackson was in favor of removing Indian tribes from the East of the U.S.A. to west of the Mississippi River as one of his reforms.

Jackson's reasoning was that the United States policy of attempting to assimilate (make Native Americans adopt traditional American culture) the tribes into society had failed, and the Native Americans' way of life would eventually be destroyed if they didn't have their own tribal land. Furthermore, he recognized that white American citizens desired their lands, and feared if the Native Americans remained in those areas, they would eventually be exterminated by settlers. Opposition groups fought Jackson's *removal policy* in Congress, but their efforts failed by just a few votes. Congress' authorization of the *Indian Removal Act in 1831* gave President Jackson the power to make treaties with tribes to arrange for their their displacement (move from one place to another).

Though he had fought against government corruption in the past, Jackson ignored the shady and unfair treaties that the various tribes east of the Mississippi River were *forced* to accept. He also ignored the corrupt actions of government representatives. The almost complete removal of all tribes east of the Mississippi was completed two years after Jackson left office, and there was a great loss of Native American life due to this corruption, inadequate supplies, and removal by force.

Today, Jackson's *Indian Removal Policy* and its tragic consequences, which led to the Trail of Tears, is the most obvious negative characteristic of his presidency.

Trouble with the Bank

With the Eaton Affair behind him and his programs in full swing, Jackson gave his attention to an issue that would define him as President and forever change the office of the President of the U.S.A. In 1816, the United States Congress began the private *Second Bank of the United States* to hold the country's money, make loans, and regulate currency (money). This bank's profits were beneficial to private stockholders as well as the U.S. government, which owned stock in the bank. In its early years, the bank's workers and leaders were corrupt and there was poor financial management. This resulted in economic troubles in the U.S.A.

When the U.S. Bank's new president Nicholas Biddle took control, the Bank's fortunes were turned around. The nation's money was now being properly managed. This change in leadership at the Bank encouraged businesses, and the U.S. economy began to turn around.

Jackson realized the importance of the Bank of the U.S.A. in the U.S. economy, but he distrusted banks in general. This fact led him to believe the Bank of the United States had too much power, and it could greatly affect the U.S. economy in a negative way. Furthermore, he saw the Bank as a threat to national security since its stockholders were mainly foreign investors who were loyal and responsible to the governments of other countries.

The most important part of this issue for Jackson was what he saw as the never-ending battle between a person's liberty and how much power the government should have over a person. Jackson believed that people should sacrifice *some* individual liberty for the overall benefits for *everyone* created by government programs. However, he also believed that if any government institution became too powerful, it stood as a direct **threat** to individual liberty.

Jackson made known early on in his administration that he would *consider* re-chartering (renewing) the Bank of the U.S.A., but only if its powers were *limited*. In this way, the Bank could not become too powerful.

He eventually said, "The bank is trying to kill me, but I will kill it!"

Jackson is Easily Re-elected President

Jackson's opponents quickly tried to use the issue with the Bank of the U.S.A. to attack President Jackson. People that supported the idea of the Bank, led by Henry Clay, Jackson's chief opponent in the 1832 Presidential election, argued that the national bank played a critical role in the economy. He also argued that the true threat to individual liberty came from Jackson himself, and Jackson was abusing his Presidential powers. Clay decided that he would force Jackson to make the Bank a campaign issue in 1832, so he tried to have Congress re-charter (renew) the Bank earlier than expected.

Clay got Congressional approval of the re-charter. This forced Jackson to quickly **veto** the re-charter for constitutional **and** policy reasons. Clay and Jackson then put the issue of **who** or **what** was the greater danger to people's individual liberty. If the people thought Jackson was a danger to liberty, then they would vote for Clay. If the people felt the Bank of the U.S.A. was a danger to liberty, then they would choose to re-elect Jackson. *The people overwhelmingly re-elected Jackson.*

Jackson felt the people approved of his policies because they had re-elected him. Jackson prepared to finish his fight with the Bank in his second term, but first had to deal with a problem that may have affected the whole country.

Our Federal Union: It Must be Preserved!

People living in South Carolina, led by Jackson's *former* vice-president, John Calhoun, felt the Tariff (tax on goods and products imported from other countries into the U.S.A.) of 1832 harmed their state while it benefitted Northern manufacturing states- since it protected Northern manufacturers and businesses from foreign businesses and companies that offered products and goods that were less expensive for Americans to purchase.

Calhoun proclaimed that each state had the constitutional right to nullify (or not follow) any federal law, and that states could secede (choose to leave) from the Union.

In late 1832, South Carolina nullified the Tariff of 1832 and threatened to leave the United States and create its own country and government. Jackson rejected South Carolina's ideas, and promised the use of force to make the state follow federal law and remain a part of the Union. After these issues in South Carolina almost caused Jackson to use force, Congress passed a compromise tariff that satisfied South Carolina as well as a bill that authorized the use of force against nullifying federal laws.

Jackson's actions prevented a state from successfully seceding from the Union. His actions also set a precedent that Abraham Lincoln would later use to oppose secession of the Confederate states.

A True Representative of "The People"

With the South Carolina crisis over, Jackson returned to the Bank of the U.S.A. "War". His relationship with "the people" throughout his first term convinced him that he was the only elected official in the United States that represented the will of all "the people,," or citizens. *Jackson believed he had to **use** his office to carry out their will.*

He viewed his victory over Clay and the Bank in 1832 as “the people’s” wish and will to destroy the powerful bank and replace it with a less powerful and consolidated government banking system. Jackson *pushed* (made it known that he wanted something done) his banking plan through Congress. In the meanwhile, he lessened the Bank’s power and influence by ordering the removal of government deposits. In other words, he stopped the government from depositing (putting in) money in the Bank.

In response, the Bank created an economic panic by asking for all of its loans to be paid immediately. The Senate, which opposed Jackson, censured Jackson for removing the deposits without permission from Congress. Meanwhile, the old debate over liberty and power was again started, and Jackson, Congress, and the Bank of the U.S.A. were all accused of abusing their powers. Finally, in April 1834, the House of Representatives approved Jackson’s actions against the Bank.

As Jackson said, "I thank God that my life has been spent in a land of liberty and that He has given me a heart to love my country with the affection of a son."

Jackson Presidency Demonstrated Success with Foreign Affairs

While Jackson struggled with sorrow over the death of his wife, his health, personal finances, and policy issues here in the U.S.A., he enjoyed almost complete success in foreign affairs.

Jackson made it known at the beginning of his administration that he was not going to take aggressive action against any foreign country. He set his foreign policy with a simple thought, “*to ask nothing that is not clearly right, and to submit to nothing that is wrong.*”

With Jackson’s foreign policy ideas clear, accompanied with his success as a military leader, representatives of the U.S.A. government were able to win newly found respect for American rights and trade around the world. Jackson’s Presidential administration opened new cities and countries to American trade, won *most-favored-nation trading status* in other countries, and collected huge amounts of money owed to the United States by foreign governments.

Although, Jackson promised not to increase the land area of the U.S. through force, he did try repeatedly to buy Texas from Mexico. The Mexican government refused him time and time again. However, Texans declared and won their own independence from Mexico in 1836. Though Jackson wanted Texas to join the Union as a new state, he stuck to his principles and refused to interfere in Mexico’s internal affairs. He cautioned Congress to wait until the situation became stable and the will of the Texan people was known before declaring and recognizing Texas’s independence. Just days before he left the office of the President, Congress recognized Texas as independent from Mexico, and Jackson approved this Congressional declaration.

Reforming Currency

Jackson reformed the nation's currency. He argued the paper money system allowed speculators (people who would anticipate and predict things) to buy huge amounts of land. By doing so, prices of land went so high that "the people" could not afford it. To keep land prices from going up, Jackson issued his *Specie Circular*. This order required government land be purchased with gold or silver- unless the land was bought directly by people who intended to settle on the land they bought. In this way, speculators would have to use silver or gold to buy land, which was more difficult than using paper money.

Legacy of Jackson's Presidency

When Jackson left office in March 1837 after two terms as President, he left his mark and forever changed the course of American history.

Through his time and actions as President, Jackson made the Executive Branch equal to Congress in terms of power and ability to form and make laws and government policies.

Jackson preserved and defended the Union against people who wanted to nullify and ignore federal law as well as those who wanted to secede from the country. Countries around the world viewed the United States with respect due to Jackson's management of foreign affairs. Most importantly, however, Jackson pushed the nation further toward democracy (government that reflects the will of the people), although much work remained in giving equal rights and freedoms to those still not recognized as "equal" in the United States.