

# First Administration, 1829–1833

On March 4, 1829, thousands of people poured into Washington, D.C., to attend the inauguration of Andrew Jackson, the nation's seventh president. Among the excited throng were fur trappers and mountain men from the west, settlers and farmers, and common working people for whom Jackson was a hero.

## Inauguration Day

An informal reception was held at the White House after the inauguration ceremony. Perhaps as many as twenty thousand wildly cheering Jackson supporters tried to enter the White House, and a near riot ensued. In the confusion, an exhausted Jackson had to be whisked away through a side entrance for his own safety.

Shortly after becoming president, Jackson announced a policy of rotation for government officeholders. He replaced many government employees from the Adams administration with common people who had supported him. This method of rotating officeholders came to be known as the spoils system. Jackson justified this practice as necessary to give all citizens an equal opportunity to participate in self-government. Believing that officeholders should never feel that they or their children had a vested right to the office, he wrote, "It is rotation in office that will perpetuate our liberty."<sup>1</sup>

## Kitchen Cabinet

In addition to Jackson's official cabinet, which included Martin Van Buren as secretary of state, there was an informal group of advisers consisting of western newspaper editors and politicians who had helped elect Jackson. This group became known as Jackson's Kitchen Cabinet, because they were said to slip into the White House through the rear entrance, and Jackson would meet with them in the kitchen.

A major challenge to President Jackson and the Union arose over the issue of protective tariffs. The federal government had levied a tax on imported manufactured goods in order to protect American manufacturers. In 1830, Vice President Calhoun backed South Carolina's protest against a high protective tariff. With few manufacturers, that state received little benefit from the protective tariff and had to pay higher prices for manufactured goods. To appease South Carolina, Congress in 1832 proposed a moderate reduction of the tariff. The congressmen from South Carolina were not satisfied. On November 24, 1832, South Carolina declared the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 to be null and void, and warned that it would prohibit enforcement of the tariff within its boundaries after February 1, 1833. Thus began a battle with Calhoun and South Carolina that would continue.

## The Eaton Affair

But Jackson's relationship with Calhoun had begun to deteriorate earlier. And indeed, his relationship with his entire cabinet would suffer. In 1831, Peggy O'Neale Eaton, the wife of Secretary of War John H. Eaton, was snubbed by the wives of the other cabinet members. Vice

President Calhoun's wife led the attack on Mrs. Eaton. Jackson, still in mourning for his wife, and still insistent that the attacks on her had led to her death, defended Mrs. Eaton and considered the attacks on her character to be the work of his enemies. The result was that Secretary of War Eaton and Secretary of State Van Buren resigned, and soon after, the rest of the cabinet followed suit.

### Nullification

On December 28, 1832, Calhoun resigned the vice presidency in order to better serve his state of South Carolina in the Senate. Calhoun said that if the federal

government did not allow a state to declare a law null and void, that state had the right to secede from the Union. Although Jackson was a believer in states' rights, he thought this exceeded the rights granted to the states under the Constitution. He threatened to send thousands of federal troops to South Carolina, if need be, to enforce the tariff laws and to keep the Union together. On March 2, 1833, South Carolina agreed to a Compromise Tariff proposed by Senator Henry Clay of Kentucky.

In contrast to his treatment of South Carolina, Jackson made no effort to prevent the state of Georgia from defying federal authority. In 1829, Georgia passed laws depriving the Cherokee people of their rights to own land (on which gold had recently been discovered) and to govern themselves. These laws violated previous treaties between the federal government and the American Indians. When the Cherokee protested to the federal government, Jackson's secretary of war, John H. Eaton, told them, "If you will go to the setting sun there you will be happy; there you can remain in peace and quietness; so long as waters run and the oaks grow that country shall be guaranteed to you and no white man shall be permitted to settle near you."<sup>2</sup>

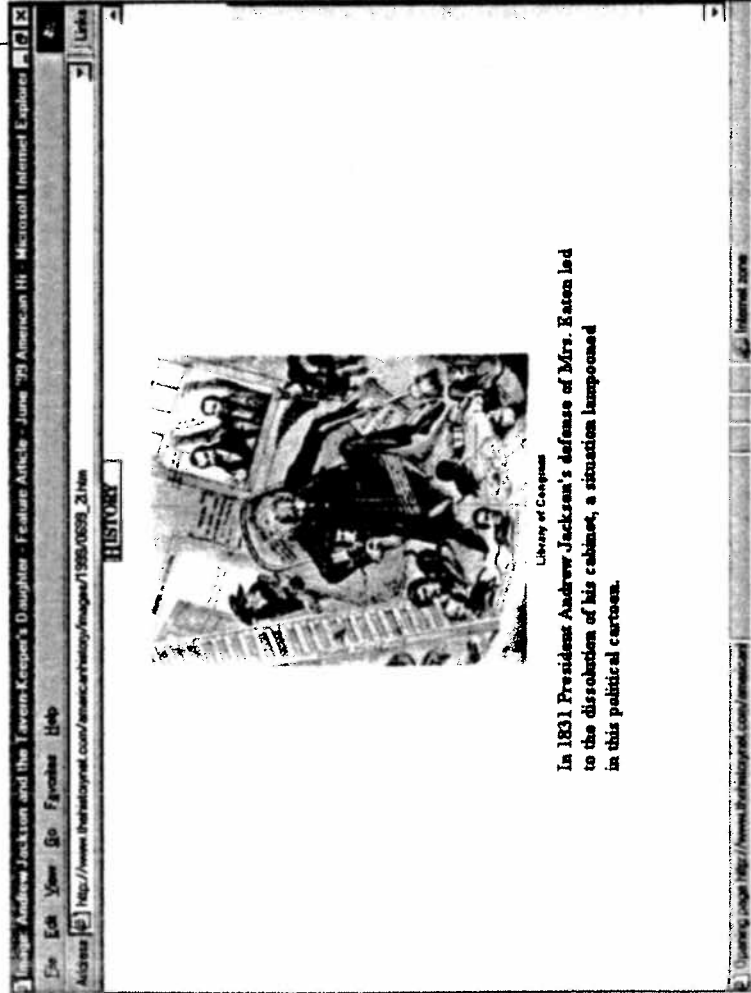
### Indian Removal

Jackson supported congressional passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, by which American Indians in all of the twenty-four states were to be moved to lands west of the Mississippi River. Most of this Indian Territory would later become the state of Oklahoma. In his second Annual Message to Congress, in December 1830, Jackson said, "The waves of population and civilization are rolling to the westward, and we now propose to acquire the countries occupied by the red men of the South and West by a fair exchange . . ."<sup>3</sup> American

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In this political cartoon of 1831, Jackson's defense of Mrs. Eaton is lampooned.

Indians were pressured into signing treaties legalizing their removal, typically granting them perpetual rights to lands of their own. These treaties were routinely broken once white settlement had begun to encroach on Indian lands. Then the Indians would face removal once again.

In 1831, Chief Justice John Marshall upheld the right of Georgia's Cherokee Nation to ignore that state's laws regarding the Indians. When Georgia refused to abide by the Supreme Court ruling, Jackson did nothing about it, thus paving the way for the shameful tragedy known as the Trail of Tears. Over the winter of 1838-39, Georgia's fifteen

thousand Cherokee were removed from their lands and forced to march to the Indian Territory in what is now Oklahoma. About one quarter of them died along the way.

### Jackson Vetoes Bank Recharter

On July 10, 1832, Jackson vetoed a congressional bill to renew the charter of the Second Bank of the United States. To Jackson, the bank, under the direction of Nicholas

Biddle, favored the interests of America's wealthiest and most powerful citizens at the expense of the common working people. This presidential veto led to a conflict over financial policy that would continue through Jackson's second term.

In the election of 1832, the presidential candidates were chosen by national political conventions for the first time. Jackson was unanimously nominated by the Democratic National Party Convention meeting in Baltimore, Maryland. The National Republican Party, meeting in the same city, chose Henry Clay as its candidate. The rechartering of the Second Bank became the main campaign issue in the election. Jackson won a decisive victory, demonstrating that he was still popular with the majority of the people.



Still revered as a military hero, Jackson's popularity swept him into the presidency for a second term, in the election of 1832. This painting of him was done shortly thereafter.



The forced march west of the Cherokee during the winter of 1838-39 became known as the Trail of Tears. Nearly one quarter of them died before reaching the land that is today Oklahoma.