



## CHAPTER EIGHT

## THE PEOPLE'S PRESIDENT

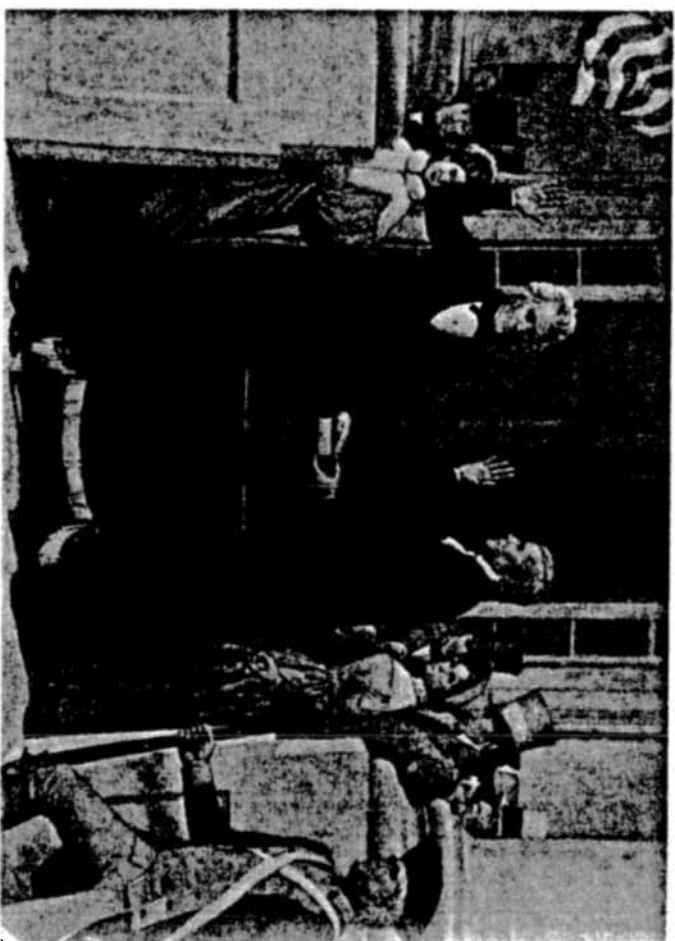
*"It was a proud day for the people. General Jackson is their own President."*

—the newspaper Argus of Western America

Andrew Jackson was inaugurated as the seventh president of the United States on March 4, 1829. It was a clear, sunny day. Thousands of people had streamed into Washington for the occasion.

Most of the presidents before Jackson had been educated and wealthy. Now the common people of America had come to see their own president take office. Jackson's plain-speaking ways appealed to small-town folk and to those from the frontier. Crowds from around the country gathered near the Capitol to watch the ceremony.

Jackson was dressed in black, still mourning deeply for Rachel. At sixty-one years old, he was tall and lean, with a long, craggy face. His thick hair had become completely white. He mounted the steps of the Capitol to take the



*In his inaugural address, President Jackson (left) promised "the zealous dedication of [his] humble abilities to [the people's] service and their good."*

oath of office. His speech was short and to the point. He emphasized his view that the purpose of government was to protect the rights and liberty of the people. He promised to cut down on spending and to pay off the national debt.

Not everyone was happy that Jackson had won. His opponents were critical of the noisy, excited crowd of admirers and onlookers. "The reign of KING MOB seemed triumphant," one of them remarked.

President Jackson ignored the skeptics and took charge. His first task was to appoint a presidential cabinet made up of the heads of government departments. One of Jackson's

most trusted advisers was the brilliant Martin Van Buren, whom he chose as secretary of state. A president usually meets with his full cabinet, but Jackson preferred to consult with a small group of loyal friends who became known as the "kitchen cabinet." The president listened to these unofficial advisers, but even their influence was small. Andrew Jackson made his own decisions.

One of his early decisions was to call for appointed

government officials to resign from office with the begin-

ning of a new administration. He felt that public service should only last for a short time and that keeping officials in their jobs over several terms led to dishonesty and corruption. Jackson believed that these positions should be filled by each new president. This practice, which came to be known as the "spoils system," was widely criticized.

During his campaign, Andrew had pledged to pay off the national debt by reducing corruption and adjusting the government's budget. He followed through on his promise emphasizing this measure in his first message to Congress. Despite some opposition from officials who had to change their habits, the national debt was reduced considerably after only one year.



Martin Van Buren

### THE INDIAN REMOVAL ACT

Early in his presidency, Jackson had to face the difficult "Indian question." The question was how to gain control over Native American territory to make room for white farmers and businesspeople. Jackson still believed that the destiny of the country was tied to expansion, and there was no place for Native Americans in his vision of America.

President Jackson's solution was simple but harsh. He proposed that all Native Americans who lived east of the Mississippi River be "removed," or resettled west of the Mississippi. In 1830 Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. This law authorized the government to make treaties with the Indians, granting them land in the West in exchange for their ancestral lands. Native Americans, including the Choctaw,

◇ *When calling for the Indian Removal Act, Jackson stated that the "emigration should be voluntary." Nevertheless, thousands of Native Americans made the hard journey westward against their will.*



Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole tribes, were forced out of their homes in Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, Illinois, and Florida. The entire Cherokee nation was sent on a long and difficult march westward. Some estimates say that as many as four thousand Cherokees died along the way. Their forced migration became known as the Trail of Tears.

### STATES' RIGHTS

Another problem facing Jackson involved the rights of the states versus the power of the national government. The debate had been going on for years. Jackson supported the idea that people should have power over local issues. But some states wanted to go further. They wanted to nullify, or refuse to recognize and obey, national laws with which they disagreed. One of these laws was a tariff bill that Congress had passed in 1828. This law put a tax on goods coming into the United States from abroad. Southerners objected because they traded cotton for these imported products. They worried that the extra tax would hurt them financially. Vice President John C. Calhoun, who was from South Carolina, also protested the tariff bill. He claimed that the country was a loose union of states, and that a state should have the right to nullify a federal law, or even to secede (or withdraw) from the Union. Senator Daniel Webster of Massachusetts pointed out that the national government represented the will of all the people. "Liberty and Union," he proclaimed, "now and forever, one and inseparable."

Andrew Jackson was a Southerner who generally supported the rights of states, and the advocates of nullification assumed that he sided with them. The opposite was true. Jackson believed that the future of the nation depended on



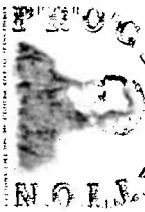
In 1831 disagreements and scandal caused many members of Jackson's administration to resign. This popular cartoon shows Jackson being abandoned by his advisers and cabinet members.

a strong Union. The existence of the country would be in danger if every state could secede on a whim.

The president made his own view clear at a dinner party in Washington, D.C., in 1830. Calhoun and other Southerners had openly declared their support for states' rights. Then the president stood up and raised his glass. "Our Union," he toasted, "it must be preserved." His statement was met with dead silence. The Southerners now knew exactly where Jackson stood.

The crisis built as South Carolina continued to consider withdrawing from the Union. Jackson took strong measures against the supporters of nullification. In December 1832, he sent a proclamation directly to the people of South Carolina, promoting the strength of the Union and warning that nullification would destroy the nation. In 1833 he signed a new tariff bill that lowered the tax, but he also made it clear that he would not hesitate to use force to prevent the state from seceding. South Carolina and the nullifiers finally backed down. Jackson had held the Union together against the worst internal threat it had ever faced.

"Fellow-citizens!" wrote Jackson in his proclamation to the people of South Carolina in 1832. "The momentous case is before you . . . whether your sacred Union will be preserved."



Still, he feared that his victory was only temporary. He believed that the nullifiers in the southern states would one day "blow up a storm." "These men," he warned, "would do any act to destroy this union and form a southern confederacy."

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Jackson was as forceful in the way he conducted foreign affairs as he was in domestic business. He told Congress that his policy was "to ask nothing that is not clearly right, and to submit to nothing that is wrong." He sent a firm message to foreign countries that the United States of America was a free and independent nation and should be treated with respect. His strong stand helped to end some British restrictions on U.S. trade and to recover money that foreign countries owed to the United States. He was the first president to negotiate commercial treaties with Asian countries such as Japan and the nations that would become

Vietnam and Thailand. He also established diplomatic relations with Russia, Denmark, Portugal, Turkey, Morocco, Mexico, and Chile.

At the end of his first term, Jackson was as popular as ever. One newspaper wrote, "The devotion to him is altogether personal, without reference to his course of policy." Even citizens who disagreed with some of his beliefs voted for him. Andrew Jackson was overwhelmingly reelected in 1832.

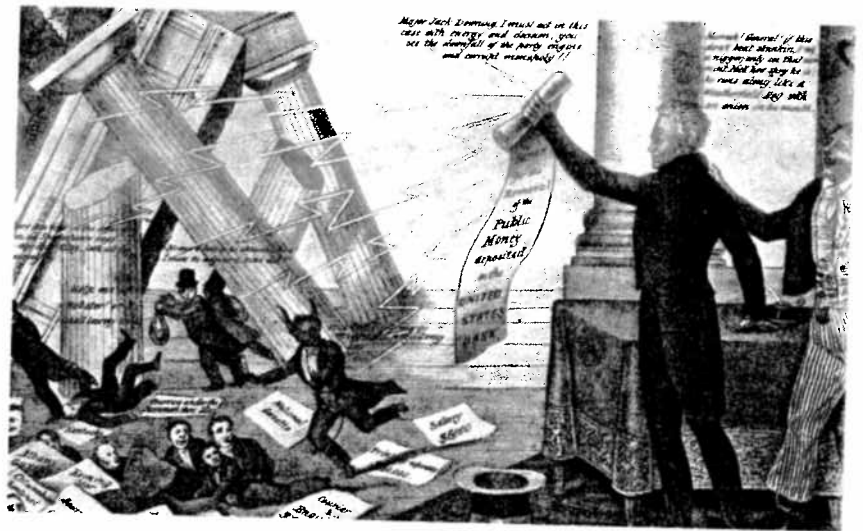
### THE BANK

During Jackson's second term, he accomplished his goal of paying off the entire national debt. He also fought one of the fiercest battles of his presidency.

The Bank of the United States had been established by Alexander Hamilton when the nation was founded. The new, small country had needed a stable financial institution to survive. By the time Jackson became president, economic conditions had changed, and Jackson believed that the powerful Bank of the United States had grown too large and corrupt. He accused it of strangling the common people and small-business owners. He wanted to change the system so that small banks across the country would be able to compete.

Congress disagreed. The bank's charter, giving it permission to continue operating, was due to expire in 1836. In 1832 the Senate voted to approve a new charter for the Bank of the United States.

Jackson was furious. He called the bank a monster and claimed that it was trying to kill him. "*But I will kill it!*" he vowed. When the Senate's bill arrived at his desk in July 1832, he vetoed the measure, saying, "when the laws



This political cartoon shows the columns of the Bank of the United States crashing to the ground as Jackson finally triumphs.

undertake . . . to make the rich richer . . . the humble members of society . . . have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government." Congress tried to override this veto but failed. Jackson followed up his veto with a bill that stopped the deposit of government money into the bank. He also began to propose alternative ways to distribute this money and to spread business to smaller banks. These actions weakened the Bank of the United States, but in 1834 another bill to renew the bank's charter went to Congress. When this bill failed to pass, the bank finally collapsed.

### TEXAS

Near the end of Jackson's term, he turned his attention to a new frontier to the west. The territory of Texas belonged to Mexico when Jackson was president. Jackson wanted to add