Chapter 11: The Growth of Democracy, 1824–1840

Chapter Review

I. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES A Political Community Abandons Deference for Democracy

By the 1820s, the status of Philadelphia artisans and workers had changed. The market revolution changed the economy, and as it did artisans lost much of their independence and became wage workers in factories owned by other people. At the same time, the spread of universal manhood suffrage marked the end of traditional politics and the beginning of more democratic politics. William Heighton’s short-lived Philadelphia Working Men’s Party and its support for Andrew Jackson exemplified the changing role of voters in democratic political communities.

II. THE NEW DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN NORTH AMERICA

America’s acceptance of universal male suffrage was unusual for the time. In other countries, crises over popular rights were far more common.

a. Struggles over Popular Rights: Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain. Colonel Agustin de Iturbide declared a constitutional monarchy in Mexico and guaranteed equal rights for everyone. This government and a series of weak governments to follow it were unsuccessful in creating a stable and lasting government amidst conflicts over elite versus popular rule. Haiti gained its independence in 1804. However, Haitian independence destroyed the lucrative sugar trade there as former slaves refused to work in the cane fields. By the 1830s, the Caribbean islands were awash with revolt and the British parliament abolished slavery in all British colonies in 1834. A third crisis over popular rights emerged in Canada in 1837 when Canadians rebelled against the limited representative government that the British government imposed. In stark contrast to these upheavals over popular rights, the United States was characterized by the rapid spread of male suffrage and a stable democratic political culture.

b. The Expansion and Limits of Suffrage

Westward expansion changed the nature of American politics. Most of the new states extended male suffrage to all white men aged 21 and older. Older states began to extend the rights of suffrage after the War of 1812 when it became apparent that men who could not vote could be drafted to fight in the nation’s wars. Universal male suffrage, while radical for its time, overlooked the rights of free African American men and all women. Blacks were excluded because of pervasive racism and fear of party alignment while women were excluded for paternalistic reasons. This did not prevent women from
participating in benevolent societies and quietly influencing politics in more “appropriate ways.” Still, many Americans wondered if democratic “mob rule” could succeed.

**MHL document: A Legal Scholar Opposes Spreading the Vote (1821) at www.myhistorylab.com**

c. The Election of 1824

The election of 1824 marked the end of the ideal of nonpartisan rule by a small elite. The Republican Party ran five candidates for president in the 1824 election: William H. Crawford, John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, and John C. Calhoun (who wisely withdrew to run for vice president). Although Jackson won a majority of the popular vote, he failed to win a majority in the electoral college. At Henry Clay’s behest, the House of Representatives decided the election in Adams’s favor, and Clay’s subsequent appointment as Secretary of State, the traditional steppingstone to the presidency, was denounced by Jackson as a “corrupt bargain.” Adams’s administration’s efforts to advance Clay’s American System were largely rebuffed by Congress. The stage was set for a Adams-Jackson rematch and the revival of a two-party system in 1828.

**MHL document: John Quincy Adams, Inaugural Address (1825) at www.myhistorylab.com**

d. The New Popular Democratic Culture

As French observer Michel Chevalier observed, the Age of Jackson ended the dominance of the small political elite. New national parties with broad appeal were beginning to emerge and succeed. In New York, Martin Van Buren formed an organized political group known as the Albany Regency. Regencies, as they were known, began to form in other states as well. The print revolution also changed American politics by spreading political messages outside of major urban centers where they had previously remained. The new American politics placed a great emphasis on participation and party loyalty. In essence, these parties began to function as a sort of national men’s club, the political manifestation of a wider impulse toward community.

**MHL document: Michel Chevalier, Society, Manner and Politics in the U.S. (1834) at www.myhistorylab.com**

e. The Election of 1828

The election of 1828 demonstrated the power and effectiveness of the new political culture and the new party system. With the help of Martin Van Buren, Andrew Jackson was elected president. Jackson’s party, the Democratic Republicans, spoke the language of democracy and of the common man. The most important aspect of Jackson’s election is that it was achieved through a political coalition. By securing support from the North, South, and West, Jackson’s party succeeded in becoming truly national.
III. THE JACKSON PRESIDENCY

Andrew Jackson’s election ushered in a new era of American politics known as the “Age of the Common Man.” Jackson’s popularity was due in part to his ability to adapt quickly to the ways that westward expansion and extended male suffrage had changed the American political arena.

a. A Popular President

Born poor on the Carolina frontier, Jackson moved West and became a successful and wealthy lawyer. His military fame after the Battle of New Orleans made him a national hero and helped him win in 1828, despite his lack of political experience. On March 4, 1829, in front of a sizable crowd, Andrew Jackson was inaugurated as president of the United States. The crowd of well-wishers was not the typical Washington gathering but rather people from out west and other common people who had come to see Jackson inaugurated. This popular participation and interest marked something new in American politics.

b. A Strong Executive

Andrew Jackson dominated his administration and largely disregarded the presidential cabinet, instead opting for a group of friends from the West known as the “Kitchen Cabinet.” Rivals such as Webster, Clay, and even Vice President Calhoun were excluded from the inner circle, especially after the Peggy Eaton affair, which also ended the unofficial influence of political wives. Jackson used the tools and powers of his office to strengthen the executive branch at the expense of both the legislature and the judiciary. Jackson used the presidential veto more often than all previous presidents combined. In doing so, he forced Congress to consider his opinions on issues.

c. The Nation’s Leader versus Sectional Spokesmen

As a national figure, Jackson was more interested in promoting strong national leadership rather than seeking sectional compromise. Congress was dominated by three powerful sectional figures. Southerner John C. Calhoun was uncompromising on the issue of slavery and its defense as an economic necessity. Daniel Webster, a Northerner, became the spokesman for new and powerful northern commercial interests. Finally, Henry Clay of Kentucky represented western interests and was eager to form compromises. This earned him the nickname “the Great Pacificator.” Despite Jackson’s efforts to promote a national agenda, sectional interests remained an important force to be dealt with in the Congress.

d. The Nullification Crisis
The tariff became the issue that raised the issue of states’ rights and the Union while symbolizing the economic and political differences between the North and the South. The North’s new industries required protective tariffs to thrive. Southerners, who were dependent on cash crops and the importation of many finished goods from Britain, despised the protective tariffs so much that the 1828 tariff was nicknamed the “Tariff of Abominations.” South Carolina resorted to the doctrine of nullification, which argued that states were not required to enforce federal laws that harmed their citizens, in order to avoid the tariff. The Nullification Crisis, as it became known, was seen as a threat to national unity by some and as a safeguard of minority rights to others. In 1832, after the passage of another protective tariff, South Carolina nullified the tariff and threatened to secede from the Union. Jackson responded, branding nullification treason and threatening to use force to collect federal revenues. Steered through Congress by Clay, the Tariff Act of 1833 repealed the 1832 tariff and persuaded South Carolina to remain in the Union.

MHL document: Proclamation Concerning Nullification (1832) at www.myhistorylab.com
MHL document: An American Senator Opposes Nullification (1830) at www.myhistorylab.com

IV. CHANGING THE COURSE OF GOVERNMENT

Jackson came to the presidency with a clear agenda: removal of the Indians from their western territories, stopping the abuses of the Federal government with regard to internal improvements, and finally opposing the reincorporation of the National Bank.

a. Indian Removal

At the time of Jackson’s election, the Five Southern Tribes still lived in the Southwest United States. By the 1830s, the tribes had ceded most of their tribal land to the United States, but they still retained sizable land holdings in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida. Rejecting assimilation, these states, driven by poor whites’ land hunger, ignored federal treaties and pressured the Indians to move west. The Cherokees fought back using the Supreme Court of the United States and actually won in Cherokee Nation v. Georgia (1831) and Worcester v. Georgia (1832). President Jackson ignored the decisions and enforced a controversial Indian Removal Act. Although some Indians were driven out on the “Trail of Tears,” Seminoles in Florida and the Sauk and Fox in the Northwest fought for their lands through the 1830s. Although many approved of Jackson’s policy, others were strongly against it. Indian removal became a divisive national issue and highlighted the potential for unfairness in majority rule.

MHL document: Memorial of the Cherokee Nation (1830) at www.myhistorylab.com
MHL document: A Choctaw Chief Bids Farewell (1832) at www.myhistorylab.com
MHL map: Native American Land Cessions to 1829 at www.myhistorylab.com

b. Internal Improvements
In a slap at Clay’s American System, Jackson vetoed the Maysville Road Bill, disappointing supporters of internal improvements who hoped that the Kentucky spur of the National Road would be funded by the federal government. He argued that federal funding for such expensive projects was unconstitutional and that it infringed on the reserved powers of the individual states. Despite Jackson’s objections, the country needed a transportation infrastructure to tie the national economy together. Without assistance from the federal government, the job was taken up by private developers with the assistance of individual states.

c. Federal and State Support for Private Enterprise

A series of Supreme Court decisions handed down by John Marshall overruled state regulation of interstate commerce. These decisions encouraged commercial enterprise by limiting the powers of the states to regulate that commerce. States did move to support commerce by giving legal protection to limited liability corporations. Both Marshall’s decisions and state innovations helped bring about the market revolution (Chapter 12).

d. The Bank War

In 1816, Congress granted a 20 charter to the Second Bank of the United States. The Bank’s most important job was to keep the state banks in line by forcing them to maintain adequate reserves and restricting speculative activities. In short, the Bank acted as a currency stabilizer by helping to control the supply of money. In 1832, Nicholas Biddle, the director of the Bank, filed for an early renewal of the Bank’s charter. While Congress approved the application, Andrew Jackson vetoed it and declared the bank unconstitutional. Despite adverse economic effects—the Panic of 1833—Jackson’s actions were popular and helped ensure his defeat of Clay in the election of 1832. Moving federal deposits to “pet banks,” Jackson completed the destruction of the Bank, further expanding presidential power at the expense of Congress.

MHL document: Andrew Jackson, Veto of the Bank Bill (1832) at www.myhistorylab.com

e. Whigs, Van Buren, and the Panic of 1837

In 1833, Nicholas Biddle called in all of the Bank’s commercial loans. This caused a panic and recession. Merchants, businessmen, and planters blamed Jackson for his war on the Bank. These groups formed a formal political party known as the Whigs. Despite the formation of the new party, Jackson’s Vice President Martin Van Buren won the presidential election of 1836.

The recession of 1833–34 was followed by a speculative boom with easy credit, rising cotton prices and land speculation. To curtail growing issues of paper money, in July 1836 Jackson issued the Specie Circular requiring payment for federal lands only in hard currency, triggering the Panic of 1837 and a recession that would last for six years. The banking system virtually collapsed and unemployment reached more than 10 percent.
Blamed for the depression, Van Buren’s unhappy presidency gave the Whigs new opportunities to oust the Democrats in 1840.

V. THE SECOND AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

The political struggles of the Jackson era combined with the sweeping social changes brought about by expansion and economic growth created the basic American political system: two major parties competing in the “Second American Party System.”

a. Whigs and Democrats

The two-party system reflected newly emerging class and cultural differences. The parties, Whigs and Democrats, both had national appeal. Democrats favored expansion, Indian removal, and freedom of choice for the frontier but opposed rapid social and economic change. The Whigs believed in the importance of a strong federal role in the national economy and a strong central government. They also favored a protective tariff, the Bank of the United States, and internal improvements. Whigs favored government intervention in both social and economic affairs. As Van Buren had learned, party leaders needed to forge divergent regional interests into a winning national coalition.

b. The Campaign of 1840

In 1840 the Whigs nominated William Henry Harrison as their presidential candidate. They balanced their ticket, and their appeal, by nominating Southerner John Tyler as the vice president. The Whig campaign tactics included blaming Van Buren for the continuing depression. These tactics worked and Harrison won an impressive electoral victory with an unprecedented 80 percent voter turnout rate.

c. The Whig Victory Turns to Loss: The Tyler Presidency

William Henry Harrison died of pneumonia one month after his inauguration. Vice president John Tyler of Virginia became president. As president, Tyler vetoed a series of bills that were the essence of the Whig platform: tariffs, internal improvements, a new Bank of the United States. These actions in effect negated the Whig party’s victory in the 1840 election.

VI. AMERICAN ARTS AND LETTERS

At this period in history a collective American identity was beginning to emerge in popular culture and among intellectual groups. The Age of the Common Man would prove to be the period when American writers and painters found themes with national appeal that allowed them to create the first distinctively American works.

a. Popular Cultures and the Spread of the Written Word
The print revolution had more far reaching effects than just politics. Newspapers and pamphlets nurtured a variety of popular cultures. Although religious literature was still the most commonly read throughout the country, a small middle-class audience did emerge with an interest in literary magazines, while the common man responded to lurid and scandalous tales. The telegraph, invented in 1844 by Samuel F. Morse, had a revolutionary impact as well. Important news could now be sent from one side of the country to the other in a matter of minutes or hours rather than days and weeks, widening horizons and strengthening community

**MHL document:** *Davy Crockett, Advice to Politicians (1833)* at www.myhistorylab.com

b. Creating a National American Culture

In the early nineteenth century there was still a lack of national culture. For writers and artists, the challenge was to find uniquely American themes. New England claimed to be the leader in the formation of an American culture, separate and distinct from the culture of Europe. Novels by Washington Irving and James Fennimore Cooper and the essays of Ralph Waldo Emerson emphasized the distinctive American experience and its lessons of cultural self-sufficiency.

c. Artists and Builders

Artists, like authors, sought uniquely American themes. Thomas Cole founded the Hudson River school of American painting, which was nationalistic in its style and subject. The western and romantic painters, like Karl Bodmer, George Catlin, Albert Bierstadt, and Thomas Moran, made an important contribution to the American sense of the land and to the nation’s sense of identity through their works. American haste and movement were nowhere better exemplified than in the balloon-frame structures that could be built quickly, cheaply, and without the assistance of a skilled carpenter, creating and new kind of housing for the common man and his family.

**VII. CONCLUSION**

The Age of Jackson and the Second Party System transformed American politics, and while sectional and party battles raged, artists and writers began to forge a distinctly American identity in the arts.

**Learning Objectives:**

Students should be able to answer the following questions after studying Chapter 11:

1. How did suffrage expand between 1800 and 1840?
2. In what ways did Andrew Jackson’s presidency affirm the new democratic politics?
3. How did the major political struggles of the Jackson years strengthen the executive branch of government?
4. How did the basic two-party pattern of American political democracy take shape?
5. How was a distinctive American cultural identity shaped by writers and artists?

**Discussion Suggestions and Possible Answers**

1. What rationales were offered in the 1820s and 1830s in support of limited white male suffrage?

**Answer:** Women were incapable of self-directed political thought and would, as an extension of the prevailing perceptions of marriage, vote along the same lines as their husbands. Those who did not own land or had little stake in the community were likely to be swayed to vote in their own self-interest and not in the interests of the larger community. Blacks were, as a race, seen as being incapable of sophisticated political thought and understanding.

2. Why is Andrew Jackson’s presidency considered one of the most influential in American history?

**Answer:** Jackson transformed interest-group politics into party politics and in so doing strengthened the role of the president by demonstrating the power of the office in contrast to the power of the other two branches of government. In all things he favored the interests of the people, not the institutions, including the federal government itself.

3. What was the role of the government in economic development and why was its support for internal improvements so controversial?

**Answer:** Prohibited from funding internal improvements, the government nevertheless paved the way for private investors through land deals, legislation, court decisions, and economic policies that favored speculators and investors. Their role was so controversial because while the long-term benefits were accrued by all, the short-term consequences hurt the small farmers, the laboring class, and resulted in conflicts on the frontier and with other nations.

4. What were the key differences between Whigs and Democrats?

**Answer:** At first the Whigs’ entire platform was based on their opposition to Andrew Jackson and his policies. As they coalesced into a more substantial party they developed a more “positive” set of ideas that included support for the American system, high protective tariffs, federally subsidized internal improvements, and a restoration of the national bank. They opposed Jackson’s nepotism, the increasing executive authority, and territorial expansion.

5. What distinctive American themes did the writers, artists, and builders of the 1820s and 1830s express in their works?

**Answer:** The themes were centered around the natural beauty of the land, the Americans’ innate ability to “tame the wilderness” for positive progress, the expansion of the role of democracy so that everyone could play a role in society, and the establishment of Providence...
as a central interpretation of American life. These ideas all laid the foundations for what was later called “manifest destiny.”

Lecture Outline

American Communities: A Political Community Abandons Deference for Democracy

The New Democratic Politics in North America
  Struggles for Popular Rights
    Mexico
    Haiti
    Canada
  Expansion of Suffrage and the Election of 1824
  Democratic Popular Culture and Elections
  The Election of 1828

Jackson’s Presidency
  Popular Politics and a Strong Executive
  Nationalism versus Sectionalism
  The Nullification Crisis

Changing the Course of Government
  Indian Removals
  Internal Improvements
  Federal Support and Private Enterprise
  The Bank War
  Whigs, Van Buren and the election of 1836

The Second American Party System
  Whigs, Democrats and 1840
  Harrison and Tyler

American Arts and Letters
  Popular Culture and Print
  Creating a National Culture
  Artists and Writers

Conclusion: Summing Up the Age of Jackson
Resources (Web, Films/Video)

Web
American Economic History:  http://freepages.history.rootsweb.com/~cescott/economics.html details the economic conditions and developments that governed the nation’s growth and challenges in the marketplace from the 1820s–1840s.

American West:  www.americanwest.com/pages/davycroc.htm presents primary and secondary sources on the life and legacy of Davy Crockett.

Divining America, Religious Roots of Manifest Destiny:  http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/divam.htm provides a historical overview of religion in the Jacksonian period and how it helped justify the nation’s economic and physical growth.

Exploring Democracy in America:  www.tocqueville.org/ explores the influence of Tocqueville’s most famous work through online readings, a two-hour video, biographical information, tracking his visit, and contemporary references to his ideas.

The Hermitage:  www.thehermitage.com provides insight into the life and presidency of Andrew Jackson, including his relationship with Indians, his role as a military hero, his political dealings that led to the birth of the modern Democratic Party, and more.

Indian Removal Act:  www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Indian.html provides detailed examination and primary sources from the Congressional debates, Jackson’s views, maps, court cases, and images.

Films/Video

Andrew Jackson: Good, Evil, and the Presidency (110 minutes). PBS, 2008. Examines Jackson’s life at key moments and stages, from his childhood all the way through his remarkable, yet controversial, presidency and political career.

Empire Upon the Trails: The West, Episode Two (120 minutes). WETA, 2001. Examines the conditions and factors that led to an uncontrollable thirst for land and the encounters that resulted as the migrating Americans increasingly encountered Native Americans.

Trail of Tears: Cherokee Legacy (115 minutes). Rich-Heape Films, 2006. A documentary that interweaves photographs, documents, and the story of the modern Cherokee, using modern-day actors, including Wes Studi, who delivers his lines in the Cherokee language.
My History Lab Resources

Reinforce what you learned in this chapter by studying the many documents, images, maps, review tools, and videos available at www.myhistorylab.com.

Read and Review

Read the Documents
A Legal Scholar Opposes Spreading the Vote (1821)
An American Senator Opposes Nullification (1830)
A Choctaw Chief Bids Farewell (1832)
Black Hawk, from “The Life of Black Hawk” (1833)
John Quincy Adams, Inaugural Address (1825)
Davy Crockett, Advice to Politicians (1833)
Treaty with the Sioux and Other Tribes (1825)
Andrew Jackson, Veto of the Bank Bill (1832)
Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America (1835)
The Force Bill (1833)

See the maps
Native American Land Cessions to 1829

Research and Explore:

Read the Documents
Exploring America: American Art

Read the Biographies
DeWitt Clinton
Davy Crockett

See the Videos
Railroads and Expansion

Critical Thinking Exercises

Just as slavery had implications for all regions of the nation, so too did western expansion. While the brunt of the impact and its issues was felt most keenly in the West, the policies were shaped in the East, the migrants came from both the South and the North, the nation’s social and political institutions were forced to follow, and the expansion of territorial control had a profound and sweeping impact on American society. What then did “the West” mean to all Americans?