

## **THE ADMINISTRATIONS OF JACKSON, VAN BUREN, AND TYLER 1829-1845**

For twelve years Jackson and his chosen heir held the Presidency after the victory in 1828. The new democracy coming to power with Jackson's election represented the rise of the plain people – small farmers and workers – to an influence of the new West across the Appalachians. While Jeffersonian philosophy espoused government for the people by capable, educated leaders, Jacksonian philosophy believed the people could best govern themselves.

### **THE BEGINNINGS OF JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY**

Distinct changes in laws, practices and popular attitudes gave rise to Jacksonian Democracy and were in turn accelerated by the new equalitarian spirit. These innovations taken together brought a distinct break with the earlier generation, a “revolution” comparable to that of the election of Jefferson in 1800.

### **POLITICAL CHANGES**

Many changes in the way the American government did its business occurred during Jackson administration. 1) Political democracy had been considerably extended by 1828 (his supporters worked hard from 1824-1828 to get these changes in place so Jackson could be elected) by the abolition in the states of all property requirements and of the remaining religious qualifications for voting and office holding. 2) Presidential electors, at first chosen by the state legislatures, came to be chosen by the people of the state. 3) New state constitutions made an increased number of offices elective instead of appointive, and terms of office were shortened. 4) The choice of Presidential nominees by caucus of Congress or by state legislatures gave way to nominating conventions where the people were more adequately represented. 5) Political parties as we know them today took form. Political machines organized voters and, to win elections, conducted rigorous and rough campaigns among the plain people. Most of these changes had occurred or had begun to occur before Jackson arrived on the scene, but were used by Jackson and his supporters for their benefit. 6) The “spoils system” of rewarding loyal party workers with government jobs came to be more actively practiced. The frontier influence on Jacksonian Democracy depreciated the value of education and experience; any ordinary person of good intentions was considered capable of discharging the duties of public office. New blood in office was advocated by the adage “a new broom sweeps clean.” Rotation in office was preferred to permanent office-holders who might come to regard themselves as a privileged aristocracy. 7) Jackson took a new view of the presidency. As the chosen servant of the people, Jackson believed the president should assume wide prerogatives and exercise vigorously the powers of his office. He defied Congress and the Supreme Court when he felt they did not adequately represent the interests of the people. Jackson exercised his veto power freely; he vetoed more bills than all his predecessors combined.

### **THE NEW ADMINISTRATION**

Jackson's Presidential inauguration in 1829 symbolized the “revolution” had taken place. The people crowded into Washington to celebrate the overthrow of the aristocrats. At the Presidential Palace reception the mob trampled in muddy boots on fine carpets and broke delicate furniture.

In his first cabinet Jackson appointed his eager supporter, Martin Van Buren, as Secretary of State. Other cabinet members were not outstanding and merely served as administrators. For executive and political advice Jackson consulted a “kitchen cabinet” of close friends led by his ghost writer Amos Kendall and by William B. Lewis, his adviser on petty politics. About ten percent of the office holders were removed in the application of the rule “To the victor belong the spoils,” stated by a Jackson supporter. Adams men were replaced with Jackson supporters.

Jackson never announced in his five year quest for the Presidency any intended program. He merely intended to meet problems as they came up (his military strategy.)

### **THE JACKSON-CALHOUN SPLIT**

John C. Calhoun of South Carolina and leader of the group opposed to the tariffs had been Jackson's running mate in 1824 and was elected with Jackson in 1828. This alliance was hoped to bring about another unified government like the one under the leadership of James Monroe. Calhoun was expected to be a strong influence and to succeed the aging Jackson either in 1832 or 1836.

### **THE EATON AFFAIR**

A quarrel over the social acceptability of Secretary of War Eaton's wife worked against Calhoun's hitherto working relationship with Jackson. Eaton had married Peggy O'Neill shortly before the inauguration; she was the daughter of the hotel keeper where Eaton had once boarded. Gossip against her reputation and her humble origin made her unacceptable to the other cabinet wives who ostracized her. Calhoun and his wife refused to accept her, but Jackson, whose wife also had been the victim of malicious gossip, tried to force the cabinet wives to accept her. Martin Van Buren, like Jackson, a widower, joined the President in showing courtesies to Mrs. Eaton.

### **THE JEFFERSON DAY BANQUET**

Calhoun and South Carolina Democrats attempted to use the occasion of the Jefferson Day Banquet, early in 1830, to maneuver Jackson into going on record in favor of Calhoun's states' rights views, something Jackson never endorsed. Jackson, with advanced warning, offered the first toast: "Our Federal Union – it must be preserved!" Calhoun managed a weak toast to states' rights in reply but became resentful of the public rebuff he had received.

### **CALHOUN'S CENSURE ATTEMPT OF JACKSON**

Van Buren's friends, hoping to make Van Buren favorable to the President, worked to widen the breach. Crawford wrote a letter in which he revealed that Calhoun in 1818 had recommended to the Senate Jackson be censured for his military role in the hanging of two British subjects during Jackson's invasion of Florida. Jackson now branded Calhoun his enemy and their political alliance, and any hope for a new united national government, ended in 1830. Consequently, Van Buren became Jackson's choice for the succession. Soon afterwards, Jackson reorganized his cabinet, named Eaton as Governor of the Florida Territory and thereby ended the social feud over Mrs. Eaton at Washington. Van Buren became Ambassador to England.

### **WESTERN PROBLEMS**

Jackson fell heir to the Native American problems that had been happening in the West since the birth of the Republic. He attempted to solve these problems once and for all, he also clarified his stand on other problems facing the West.

### **CONFLICTS WITH NATIVE AMERICANS**

Jackson, a westerner, took the viewpoint of the frontier settlers towards the "Indian problems" and worked to facilitate the removal of the Indians, which would cause the problem to disappear.

The best example of Jackson's policy is with the Cherokees of Georgia. The Cherokees hoped to avoid removal from Georgia. They farmed their land, conducted schools, and had otherwise adopted the white man's ways. Georgia claimed the land of the Cherokees was owned by Georgia and ordered them out of Georgia so the land could be settled by Americans. (New land in Georgia was becoming scarce and this was an attempt to solve the problem.) In the case of *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832) the Supreme Court ruled that Georgia had no jurisdiction over the Cherokees and that they fell under the protection of the federal government. Georgia refused to obey the decision, and Jackson refused to enforce the Court's decision by sending troops to Georgia to help Georgia remove the Indians.

A series of small wars between the United States Army and the various Indian tribes affected by the removal policy. However, by 1835 all Indians were removed from Georgia and were being moved out of other states as well. (Trail of Tears). The Indians were being moved to Oklahoma.

## **INTERNAL IMPROVEMENTS**

Jackson's view on federal aid for internal improvements was not known until he vetoed the bill for construction of a road from Maysville to Lexington, Kentucky (May 1830). He reasoned, in his famous veto, that the road lay entirely within Kentucky, therefore did not fall under the interstate commerce clause of the Constitution. To vote Federal aid, state roads would need an amendment to the Constitution. This caused Jackson to lose supporters who before had hoped he would approve such appropriations. Because of this, the Whig Party began to take shape as the malcontents deserted Jackson.

## **THE LAND QUESTION**

Westerners were unsatisfied by the Land Act of 1820. They agitated for land on more favorable terms. Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri served as their leading spokesman. 1) "Squatters" who had illegally settled on the public domain asked for preemption laws that would give them the first right to buy the land after it was surveyed and put up for sale. 2) As a means of making lands available at a cheaper price, Benton and many other Democrats proposed the principle of graduation, that is, unsold land would be gradually reduced in price according to a fixed schedule or, finally, it would be given away.

Easterners opposed these easy terms of land sales since Western lands drained away population and tended to raise wages in industry. It also hurt the ability of land speculators to make money, which drained the East of much needed currency. Daniel Webster and Clay favored distribution of the revenues made from the land sales among the states. However, the West did not want their money to go to raising the revenue for Eastern governments. The South did not want the money to be distributed, instead it wanted the money to stay in the federal government, which would then allow the government to lower the tariff that hurt the south. (90% of the government was funded by the tariff.)

## **THE WEBSTER-HAYNE DEBATES**

In the course of the debates over land policy, Senator Samuel A Foote introduced legislation to stop land sales. The South proposed an alliance with the West against the East. The debate then centered around the tariff. The South and the West proposed the sale of the land and the placing of the money in the federal government, making it possible to drop the tariff rates. In order to give their side more credibility, Senator Hayne of South Carolina began to assert Calhoun's nullification theory and that the tariff by itself is unconstitutional. Daniel Webster replied that the ultimate sovereignty rested in the people and not in the state governments. A state could not by itself declare an act of Congress unconstitutional and nullify it. Many Westerners agreed with the South on the tariff but were slow to accept the nullification theory.

## **THE TARIFF OF 1832**

With election year approaching, Jackson in December 1831, recommended that Congress revise the tariff downward with money coming from the land sales to replace the lost revenue. The national debt was almost paid off and revenues coming into the United States were pouring into the Bank. However, Congress passed a revised tariff that did not change the rates of the tariff, but it did place the money from the tariff and the land sales into the Bank.

## **NULLIFICATION BY SOUTH CAROLINA**

The nullifiers in South Carolina immediately elected delegates to a convention that in turn proceeded to pass the Nullification Ordinance (November 1832) declaring the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 null and void. The convention prohibited tariff collections in the state and promised secession if the federal government should use coercion to enforce the collection of duties (American War for Independence and the Coercive Acts).

Jackson answered with his famous Nullification Proclamation (December 1832) denying the right of a state to nullify a law of the United States. As tensions increased, the Senate passed the "Force Bill" (February 1833) authorizing the President to use military force against South Carolina. At the same time Clay secured the passage of the Compromise Tariff which provided for steady, gradual reduction until 1842

when no duties would exceed 20 percent. South Carolina accepted the compromise and called another convention that repealed the Nullification Ordinance and nullified the Force Act. Jackson ignored this last act of defiance from South Carolina. (No punishment. War for Independence and the lack of the ability of the British to force Americans to follow Acts of Parliament.)

### **THE WAR OVER THE BANK 1832-1836**

The charter of the Second Bank of the United States, issued in 1816, expired in 1836. Henry Clay, who was expected to get the nomination for President from the Whigs, submitted the re-charter bill in 1832. He believed Jackson would not dare veto the bill in an election year, thus giving the Clay's people the victory of a re-charter; if Jackson did veto the bill, Clay believed he would be defeated in the election.

### **DISLIKE OF THE BANK**

1) Various elements in the nation disliked the tight money policy of the Bank. Debtors favored easy money and low interest rates; land speculators liked a plentiful money supply since it facilitated land sales financed with loans of paper money from the state banks

2) Bankers owning state-chartered private banks (some run responsibly and others deserving the tag "wildcat banks") disliked the Bank's competition and disciplinary policies. The Bank often tested the specie reserve behind the issuance of paper money by the smaller banks by collecting them and then presenting them for redemption. This forced banks to keep adequate reserves of specie (gold or silver) which they would have preferred to loan at interest.

3) Others opposed the privilege all banks enjoyed in creating and lending paper money, which tended to exaggerate the fluctuations of the business cycle. 4) The ruthlessness of banks in foreclosing mortgages made many people hate all banks. 5) Nicholas Biddle, the president of the Bank, used its vast power to corrupt Congressmen and pay for favorable newspaper publicity.

Jackson disliked all banks but especially resented Biddle's use of the Bank's lending power to influence politics. Congress passed the bill to re-charter but Jackson vetoed it, and in his veto message issued a ringing denunciation of it as a privileged monopoly used to enrich a "few at the expense of the many."

### **THE ELECTION OF 1832**

The Democrats renominated Jackson and chose Van Buren as his running mate. At this convention the Democrats adopted their traditional "two-thirds rule" to assure Van Buren's nomination. Conservatives and opponents of Jackson of Jackson came together to nominate Clay. Despite of his beliefs the people would not re-elect Jackson if he vetoed the Bank, Clay was wrong. Jackson, with the support again the common person, won a resounding victory.

With Jackson threatening the shutdown of the Bank, Biddle tightened the credit policy of the Bank to show the need for the Bank to regulate industry and its need to provide for a good business climate. The policy backfired against Biddle and Jackson vowed to destroy the Bank instead of waiting for it to expire in 1836. Jackson ordered all government money withdrawn from the Bank, which was a lot since the land sales money and the tariff money were being deposited in the Bank, and ordered the deposits be placed in selected state banks (pet banks) by his loyal Secretary of the Treasury, Roger B. Taney.

### **INFLATION AND PANIC**

Without the curbs of the National Bank to prevent the liberal issue of bank notes, many newly founded state banks, chartered under existing lax state banking laws, made liberal loans. A great increase in loans and money in circulation stimulated a business and speculative boom. State banks increased their loans when deposits of federal funds were made with them. Land speculators borrowed money freely to purchase government land. Western states indulged in a frenzy of subsidizing road and canal building by selling bonds to Eastern and British bankers. In 1836, Jackson ordered the rest of the money in the federal treasury be evenly distributed to the states according to their population. This however proved to be too much and inflation spiraled out of control.

Money issued by banks soon had little or no value, which were being used to buy land and causing a severe loss of revenue for the United States government. Jackson dealt with it by issuing the Specie Circular, requiring only coin in payment for public land. The deflationary effect of retiring so much coin, made already scarce coin even more scarce. This along with downturns in the British economy (also caused by the inflation of banks, see: selling of bonds to build roads and canals) plunged the United States into the December Money Panic of 1836 and a depression lasting several years.

### **PROBLEMS IN FOREIGN RELATIONS (THE TEXAS REVOLUTION)**

In 1820 Moses Austin secured Spanish permission to colonize families in Texas. After his death, his son, Stephen Austin, took possession of the land grants in 1821 and secured confirmation of colony's charter from the newly recognized independent government of Mexico. In 1825 Mexico encouraged further immigration with an act introducing the empresario system under which large grants were offered colonizers who would settle several hundred families. Terms of the land sales were far more generous than in the United States and settlers from the nearby South flocked to cultivate the rich soils. At this point, Mexico did not disallow slavery in the Texas colony and the southerners brought their slaves to the colonies.

Friction soon developed between Mexico and the settlers for several reasons. 1) Mexico failed to solve annoying problems (i.e. Indians) and provide services of local government (a police force paid by the taxes paid to the Mexican government). 2) Texans did not take their pledge to accept Roman Catholicism, the established church of Mexico. Texans were forced to pay an unpopular tax to the church. 3) Conflicts over the payment of Mexican customs duties on goods brought from the United States. 4) Mexico soon began to attempt to abolish slavery in the colony. 5) In an attempt to end the slavery question, Mexico ended further immigration of Americans into the colony.

The independence movement began when the Texans failed to secure satisfaction of their grievances. One of the three Mexican leaders, General Santa Anna, led an army into Texas to establish Mexican control over the territory. However, the Texans declared their independence from Mexico in March 1836. Battles soon happened throughout the territory. The Mexican army killed all Texan defenders at the Alamo. Instead of crushing the rebellion, the defeat at the Alamo strengthened the Texans willingness to fight for their independence. General Sam Houston, an old friend of Jackson, retreated towards the Louisiana border making the Mexicans think the army was defeated. However, Houston caught the Mexican cocky and off-guard at the Battle of San Jacinto in April 1836 and annihilated the larger and better equipped Mexican army. Santa Anna, captured in the battle, recognized the independence of Texas. However, this recognition was not accepted by all in the Mexican government.

The Republic of Texas, with Sam Houston chosen President, was established and requested annexation to the United States because of the ongoing threat of further Mexican invasion. The United States Congress recognized the independence of Texas but Jackson took no steps to annex the republic (the Constitution does not outline the steps annex land, and it was believed that this was a power of the President as commander-in-chief). Jackson wished to avoid war with Mexico and feared the disruption of the Democratic Party if he antagonized the antislavery Northerners.

### **VAN BUREN'S ADMINISTRATION**

Van Buren firmly believed that the federal government should have little to do with the private economy, that it was up to individuals, not the government, to bring the country out of the depression. Accordingly, after his easy election, because of him being the chosen by the popular Jackson to be the next President, he proposed nothing to remedy the nation's economy.

### **VAN BUREN AND THE PANIC OF 1837**

Within a month after Van Buren's inauguration in 1837 all signs indicated the country was in a serious depression. Hundreds of banks and other businesses failed. Land and commodity prices collapsed. Unemployment spread and wages fell. The Whigs, who blamed Jacksonian financial ideas and practices, began to make notable political gains. Van Buren helped the Whigs by adhering to his philosophy of negative government and did not advise any measures to combat the depression.

## **THE INDEPENDENT TREASURY QUESTION**

The depression experience turned major attention to the search for a solution to the problem of creating sounder banks and limiting the issuance of bank notes. It was recognized that the large number of bank notes had been issued prior to 1836 and this inflation was one of the main reasons for the onset of the depression.

Van Buren and the Democrats continued to believe the government should not be involved in the private economy and, therefore, the government should divorce itself from banking. They believed government revenues should not be kept in a bank, but instead in the government agencies where the money was received. The use of government offices as depositories was nicknamed the "Independent Treasury System." Both national bank and state bank supporters were opposed to this system. Van Buren's policy would mean specie (coin) would replace paper money as the way the government would conduct business. This "hard money" policy was opposed by the Whigs who favored the National Bank. As a compromise, the Whigs offered to place the money in state banks if no National Bank was created. However, Van Buren refused to compromise his belief of no government involvement in the economy.

In 1840, the Democrats were able to secure passage of the independent treasury system and the government ended its responsibility for establishing a national paper currency, instead advocating a currency based on specie.

## **THE ELECTION OF 1840**

The Democrats renominated Van Buren. The Whigs chose William Henry Harrison, the old Indian fighting hero of the War of 1812; Harrison had run for the Presidency in 1836, while he lost, he surprised many with his popularity among the common person. With the support of many prominent Whig leaders, Harrison received the nomination over Clay. Clay was without a doubt the most able and prominent leader of the Whigs, but a combination of opponents conspired to defeat for the nomination, and in Congress his well-known position on many sensitive issues had alienated certain groups. John Tyler of Virginia, an anti-Jackson Democrat and also Clay supporter was chosen as Vice President. Tyler was not a Whig, but was placed on the ballot to get votes in the South, which was anti-Jackson because of the nullification crisis, and those who blamed Jackson and Van Buren for the depression.

In the campaign some attention was given to the political issues, but more than anything the depression that many blamed on Jackson, and Van Buren's refusal to assist the unemployed, conspired to defeat the Democrats.

The Whigs won the Presidency and both houses of Congress, but their joy was brief. During his inauguration party, Harrison refused to hold his swearing in ceremony inside despite the downpour of cold rain. Trying to keep up his image as a tough man of the outdoors, which had helped identify with the common person and helped win the election, Harrison also refused to wear any protection from the elements. Soon after Harrison contracted pneumonia, and died a month after taking office.

For the first time, the Vice President had succeeded to the Presidency. Tyler made good on his assertion he was now President and not just acting-President like many thought his role should be. A states-rights Virginian, Tyler vetoed most of the Whig program, which would be beneficial to the northern manufacturers.

## **WHIG LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM**

Henry Clay assumed control of the Whigs in Congress but was never able to win the cooperation of the conscientious and stubborn Tyler who disagreed with the entire Whig program.

The Independent Treasury Act was repealed because both Tyler and the Whigs identified it with Jackson, but Tyler vetoed the act of Congress to establish a third national bank. The expiration of the Tariff of 1832 forced Congress to legislate a new tariff in 1842; this act restored the duties to the levels of 1832. The Whigs wanted a higher tariff, but Tyler threatened to veto any tariff that placed the level of the tariff higher than the 1832 tariff.

Because of his failure to support any of the programs of the Whigs, the Whigs refused to nominate Tyler for the election of 1844. Instead the Whigs chose Clay as their candidate. However, the bickering in the party, led to the Democrats to win the election of 1844 with James K. Polk.