

# 1 Politics of the People

## TERMS & NAMES

John Quincy Adams

Andrew Jackson

Jacksonian democracy

spoils system

### MAIN IDEA

Andrew Jackson's election to the presidency in 1828 brought a new era of popular democracy.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Jackson's use of presidential powers laid the foundation of the modern presidency.

## ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

Margaret Bayard Smith was 22 years old when she married and moved to Washington, D.C., in 1800. For the next 40 years, she and her husband, a government official, were central figures in the political and social life of Washington. They entertained presidents from Jefferson to Jackson.

Smith wrote magazine articles and numerous letters describing life in Washington. In 1824, she described how John Quincy Adams reacted to his election as president.

### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

When the news of his election was communicated to Mr. Adams by the Committee . . . the sweat rolled down his face—he shook from head to foot and was so agitated that he could scarcely stand or speak.

Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*

Adams had reason to be shaken by his election. It had been hotly contested, and he knew that he would face much opposition as he tried to govern. In this section, you will learn how Adams defeated Andrew Jackson in 1824, only to lose to him four years later.



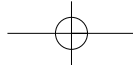
Margaret Bayard Smith wrote about life in the nation's capital in the first half of the 19th century.

## The Election of 1824

In 1824, regional differences led to a fierce fight over the presidency. The Democratic-Republican Party split apart, with four men hoping to replace James Monroe as president. **John Quincy Adams**, Monroe's secretary of state, was New England's choice. The South backed William Crawford of Georgia. Westerners supported Henry Clay, the "Great Compromiser," and **Andrew Jackson**, a former military hero from Tennessee.

Jackson won the most popular votes. But he did not receive a majority of electoral votes. According to the Constitution, if no person wins a majority of electoral votes, the House of Representatives must choose the president. The selection was made from the top three vote getters.

Clay had come in fourth and was out of the running. In the House vote, he threw his support to Adams, who then won. Because Adams



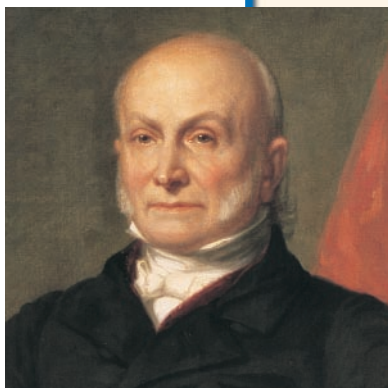
## AMERICA'S HISTORY MAKERS

### JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

1767–1848

John Quincy Adams was born into wealth and social position. He was the son of President John Adams. Like his father, he had a sharp mind, spoke

eloquently, worked tirelessly in public service, and had high principles. But he was sometimes vain, and unwilling to compromise. This made him unpopular with many people and often ineffective. After his presidency, he served with distinction in Congress.



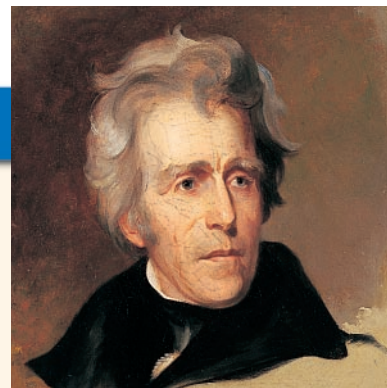
### ANDREW JACKSON

1767–1845

Andrew Jackson was the son of a poor farm couple from South Carolina. Orphaned by age 14, he was a wild and reckless youth.

Jackson moved on to become a successful lawyer and plantation owner in Tennessee. But his quick temper still got him into brawls and duels. Bullets in his body from two duels frequently caused him pain.

Jackson's humble background and reputation for toughness endeared him to voters. They considered him one of their own.



**Why do you think Jackson was popular but Adams was not?**

later named Clay as his secretary of state, Jackson's supporters claimed that Adams gained the presidency by making a deal with Clay. Charges of a "corrupt bargain" followed Adams throughout his term.

Adams had many plans for his presidency. He wanted to build roads and canals, aid education and science, and regulate the use of natural resources. But Congress, led by Jackson supporters, defeated his proposals.

## Jacksonian Democracy

Jackson felt that the 1824 election had been stolen from him—that the will of the people had been ignored. Jackson and his supporters were outraged. He immediately set to work to gain the presidency in 1828.

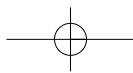
For the next four years, the split in the Democratic-Republican Party between the supporters of Jackson and of Adams grew wider. Jackson claimed to represent the "common man." He said Adams represented a group of privileged, wealthy Easterners. This division eventually created two parties. The Democrats came from among the Jackson supporters, while the National Republicans grew out of the Adams camp.

The election of 1828 again matched Jackson against Adams. It was a bitter campaign—both sides made vicious personal attacks. Even Jackson's wife, Rachel, became a target. During the campaign, Jackson crusaded against control of the government by the wealthy. He promised to look out for the interests of common people. He also promoted the concept of majority rule. The idea of spreading political power to all the people and ensuring majority rule became known as **Jacksonian democracy**.

Actually, the process of spreading political power had begun before Jackson ran for office. When Jefferson was president in the early 1800s,

### ReadingHistory

**A. Analyzing Causes** What was the main reason John Quincy Adams was not effective as president?



additional people had gained the right to vote as states reduced restrictions on who could vote. Before, for example, only those who owned property or paid taxes could vote in many states. This easing of voting restrictions increased the number of voters. But voting was still limited to adult white males.

The expansion of voting rights helped Jackson achieve an overwhelming win in the 1828 presidential election. Jackson's triumph was hailed as a victory for common people. Large numbers of Western farmers as well as workers in the nation's cities supported him. Their vote put an end to the idea that the government should be controlled by an educated elite. Now, the common people would be governed by one of their own. (See chart "Changes in Ideas About Democracy," page 357.)

### Reading History

**B. Recognizing Effects** What factor made Jackson's appeal to the "common man" especially important in the election of 1828?

## The People's President

Jackson's humble background, and his reputation as a war hero, helped make him president. Many saw his rise above hardship as a real American success story. He was the first president not from an aristocratic Massachusetts or Virginia family, and the first from the West.

Jackson indeed had had a hard life. His father died shortly before his birth, and Jackson grew up on a frontier farm in South Carolina. At 13, he joined the militia with his older brother to fight in the Revolutionary War. In 1781, they were taken prisoner by the British. While captive, he allegedly refused when commanded to shine an officer's boots. The officer struck Jackson with a sword, leaving scars on his hand and head. Later, Jackson's mother obtained her sons' release from a military prison, where they had become ill with smallpox. Jackson's brother died, but his mother nursed Jackson back to health. A short time later, she also died. Jackson's experiences during the Revolution left him with a lifelong hatred of the British.

After the war, Jackson moved to the Tennessee frontier. In 1784, he began to study law. He built a successful legal practice and also bought and sold land. Jackson then purchased a plantation near Nashville and ran successfully for Congress. After the War of 1812 broke out, he was appointed a general in the army. At the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, Jackson soundly defeated the British even though his troops were greatly outnumbered. He became a national war hero. He earned the nickname "Old Hickory," after a soldier claimed that he was "tough as hickory."

## Jackson Takes Office

Jackson's success in the presidential election of 1828 came at a high price. Shortly after he won, his wife, Rachel, died of a heart attack. Jackson believed that the campaign attacks on her reputation had killed her. She was a private woman who preferred a quiet life. In fact, she had

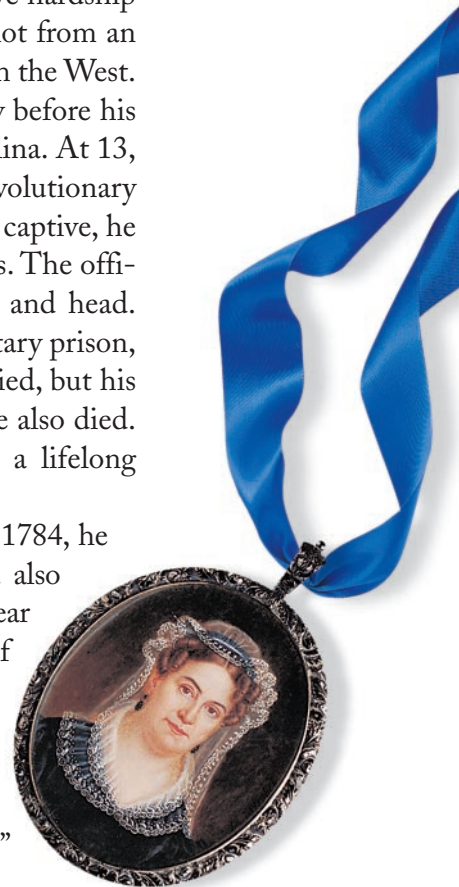
## STRANGE but True

### ADAMS AND JEFFERSON

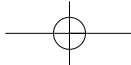
John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died on the same day—the Fourth of July, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

Both Adams and Jefferson were founders of the nation, signers of the Declaration, and presidents. They were also political enemies who had become friends late in life.

Adams was 90; Jefferson, 83. Adams's last words were "Jefferson still survives." He was unaware that Jefferson had died hours earlier.



Jackson usually wore this miniature oil portrait of his beloved wife, Rachel, around his neck.



said that she would “rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than . . . live in that palace at Washington.” Margaret Bayard Smith described Rachel’s importance to Jackson, saying she “not only made him a happier, but a better man.”

Jackson looked thin, pale, and sad at his inauguration on March 4, 1829. But the capital was full of joy and excitement. Thousands of people were there. Senator Daniel Webster wrote about the inauguration.

#### A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I have never seen such a crowd before. Persons have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson, and they really seem to think that the country has been rescued from some dreadful danger.

Daniel Webster, *Correspondence*

At the inauguration ceremony, the crowd shouted, waved, applauded, and saluted its hero. He bowed low to the people in turn. A throng followed Jackson to the White House reception. One person described the crowd as containing “all sorts of people, from the highest and most polished, down to the most vulgar and gross in the nation.”

The crowd grew rowdy. People broke china and glasses as they grabbed for the food and drinks. The pushing and shoving finally drove the new president to flee the White House. As Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story observed, “The reign of King Mob seemed triumphant.”

#### ReadingHistory

**C. Drawing Conclusions** Why did Jackson’s supporters react with such enthusiasm at his inauguration?

## CITIZENSHIP TODAY

### Exercising the Vote

During the Age of Jackson, rules on who could vote were eased. This increased the number of voters. But voting was still limited to adult white males. Over the years, other groups gained the right to vote, including African Americans, women, and Native Americans. Today’s elections are open to all citizens aged 18 and over.

Future voters can practice casting their votes in mock, or pretend, elections. The National Student/Parent Mock Election teaches students to be informed voters. Mock presidential elections attract coverage by the media. Television stations may even broadcast live from schools, interviewing student voters.

One high school student, Charlie Tran from San Jose, California, said, “Students seem to catch the important political events surrounding them. Some students are taking their views . . . to a new level by campaigning for the candidate they support.”

Students register to vote in a mock election.



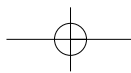
### How Do You Set Up a Mock Election?

1. Choose issues and candidates and then set up a mock election in your classroom. (You could focus on the national, state, or local level.)
2. Create the materials of an election, such as the polling place, ballots, and posters.
3. Campaign for the candidates or the issues you support.
4. Conduct the voting.
5. Prepare mock media reports on the election’s outcome. You may want to interview voters.

 See *Citizenship Handbook*, page 267.

For more about citizenship and voting . . .

 **RESEARCH LINKS**  
CLASSZONE.COM



Changes in Ideas About Democracy	
JEFFERSONIAN DEMOCRACY	JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY
government for the people by capable, well-educated leaders	government by the people
democracy in political life	democracy in social, economic, and political life
championed the cause of the farmer in a mainly agricultural society	championed the cause of the farmer and the laborer in an agricultural and industrial society
limited government	limited government, but with a strong president



**SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts**

1. What do you think was the most important change in democracy?
2. Did Jefferson or Jackson exercise more power?

## A New Political Era Begins

Jackson’s inauguration began a new political era. In his campaign, he had promised to reform government. He started by replacing many government officials with his supporters. This practice of giving government jobs to political backers became known as the **spoils system**. The name comes from a statement that “to the victor belong the spoils [possessions] of the enemy.” Jackson’s opponents charged that the practice was corrupt. But he defended it, noting that it broke up one group’s hold on government.

As president, Jackson would face three major issues—the status of Native Americans, the rights of the states, and the role of the Bank of the United States. In the next section, you will learn how Jackson’s policies affected Native Americans.

Section **1** Assessment

**1. Terms & Names**

**Explain the significance of:**

- John Quincy Adams
- Andrew Jackson
- Jacksonian democracy
- spoils system

**2. Taking Notes**

Use a chart to identify important biographical information about Andrew Jackson.

Life of Andrew Jackson	
Youthful life	
Road to Congress	
War hero	
Appeal to voters	

**3. Main Ideas**

- a. How did Andrew Jackson react to the election of 1824? Why?
- b. What factors helped Jackson win the presidency in 1828?
- c. What was the effect of expanding voting rights?

**4. Critical Thinking**

**Analyzing Points of View**  
What are reasons for and against the spoils system?

**THINK ABOUT**

- the effects of giving government workers lifetime jobs
- the effects of rewarding political supporters

**ACTIVITY OPTIONS**

**GEOGRAPHY**

**MATH**

Find out which states Jackson and Adams won in the 1828 election. Show the results on a **map** or **chart** that includes vote totals and percentages.