CHAPTER NINE JACKSONIAN AMERICA

Objectives

A thorough study of Chapter 9 should enable the student to understand

1. Andrew Jackson’s philosophy of government and his impact on the office of the presidency.
2. The debate among historians about the meaning of “Jacksonian Democracy” and Andrew Jackson’s relationship to it.
3. The nullification theory of John C. Calhoun and President Jackson’s reaction to the attempt to put nullification into action.
4. The supplanting of John C. Calhoun by Martin Van Buren as successor to Jackson and the significance of the change.
5. The reasons why the eastern Indians were removed to the West and the impact this had on the tribes.
6. The reasons for the Jacksonian war on the Bank of the United States and the effects of Jackson’s veto on the powers of the president and on the American financial system.
7. The causes of the Panic of 1837 and the effect of the panic on the presidency of Van Buren.
8. The differences in party philosophy between the Democrats and the Whigs, the reasons for the Whig victory in 1840, and the effect of the election on political campaigning.
9. The negotiations that led to the Webster-Ashburton Treaty and the importance of the treaty in Anglo-American relations.
10. The reasons John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and Daniel Webster were never able to reach their goal—the White House.

Main Themes

1. How mass participation became the hallmark of the American political system.
2. The growing tension between nationalism and states’ rights.
3. The rise of the Whig party as an alternative to Andrew Jackson and the Democrats.

Glossary

1. Political machine A well-organized local political group that can turn out voters on specific issues. In return for delivering these votes, the machine is allowed to dispense patronage in its particular area.
2. Party boss The politician in charge of the machine, usually the ranking elected official in a political unit (state, county, city, and so on); the person responsible for getting out the vote and for dispensing patronage.
3. “Democracy: A term that more accurately describes the spirit of the age than a movement led by Andrew Jackson. During this period (1820—1850), more offices became elective, voter restrictions were reduced or eliminated (for white male adults), and popular participation in politics increased. The Democratic Party, led by Jackson, appealed to this growing body of voters by stressing its belief in rotation in office, economy in government, governmental response to popular demands, and decentralization of power.
4. States’ rights The belief that the United States was formed as a compact of sovereign states and that the national government was violating that sovereignty. The theory rests on the conviction that the states did not surrender their sovereignty to the central government by adopting the Constitution and that when their rights are violated, they can act in their own defense. (See the discussion of nullification in the text and interposition below.)
5. interposition The idea that a state, having retained its sovereignty in a federal system, can interpose its authority between the central government and an individual, to protect its citizens from illegal or unconstitutional action. (See the discussion of nullification in the text and states’ rights above.)

6. Marxism The theory that history has been characterized by a struggle between the working classes and their masters, the middle-class capitalists. The outcome of struggle is to be an uprising of the oppressed and the overthrow of capitalism. In part, this belief was shared by John C. Calhoun, who feared that the growth of industrial capitalism in America would lead to just such a class struggle.

7. soft money Paper money. Easily produced, this currency increased the amount of money in circulation, made credit easier, and made prices higher. Generally favored by speculators, by agricultural interests, and by debtors.

8. hard money Specie, coin with a fixed value, which could not be cheaply manufactured to flood the market. Its use made money scarce and credit expensive and difficult, and it discouraged speculation. It also kept wages low and reduced commercial activity. Its advocates were known as “sound money” men.

9. land-poor The condition in which many speculators found themselves during the Panic of 1837 (and in 1819, as well). Having bought land on credit, they were unable to pay their debts when the land did not sell. Hence, they had a lot of land, but no money, and the result was bankruptcy.

Pertinent Questions

THE RISE OF MASS POLITICS (234-238)

1. What were the general characteristics of “Jacksonian Democracy,” its philosophy, and its practice?

2. How did the spoils system fit into Jackson’s “democratic” plans? What other means did he use to bring more people into the political process?

3. What role did social rank and occupation play in the growing democratization of American politics?

4. What was the reaction in New York and Rhode Island to these democratic trends?

5. What groups were excluded from this widening of political opportunity? Why?

6. What was the effect of this growth of democracy? How did it change, or not change, the American political system? What is its significance?

“OUR FEDERAL UNION” (238-242)

7. What was the dilemma faced by John C. Calhoun, and what factors gave rise to it?

8. How did Calhoun attempt to resolve this dilemma? What arguments did he use and on which sources did he draw?

9. What did Calhoun really hope his theory of nullification would accomplish?

10. How did Martin Van Buren’s and John C. Calhoun’s backgrounds and rise to prominence differ?

11. What was the Kitchen Cabinet? Who were its members? Why did it come into existence?

12. What were the origins of the Calhoun-Jackson split? How did the Eaton affair contribute to the division? What effect did it have on the Jackson administration?

13. How did the Webster-Hayne debate fit into the controversy between Jackson and Calhoun? What brought about the debate, what was the major point of disagreement between the two, and what were the arguments advanced?

14. How did Calhoun and South Carolina propose to test the theory of nullification? What factors contributed to their decision?

15. What was Jackson’s reaction to South Carolina’s attempt at nullification? How did his action in this case correspond to his action in the case of the Cherokee removal? What accounts for this?
16. What was the outcome of the nullification crisis? What, if anything, did the antagonists learn from the confrontation?

THE REMOVAL OF THE INDIANS (242-246)

17. What were the whites’ attitudes toward the tribes and how did they contribute to the decision in favor of removal?

18. What was the program (inherited by Jackson) designed to deal with the Indians who lived east of the Mississippi? What happened when this program was applied to the Cherokee in Georgia?

19. Explain the Supreme Court’s decisions regarding the Indian tribes and Jackson’s response.

20. How did Jackson’s action in the matter of the Cherokee removal correspond to his views on the role of the president and on the issue of states’ rights?

21. How were Jackson’s views concerning the Indians “little different” from those of most white Americans?

22. What was “the meaning of removal”?

JACKSON AND THE BANK WAR (246-249)

23. What was Jackson’s opinion of the Bank of the United States? On what did he base his views? What other factors contributed to his stand?

24. What was Nicholas Biddle’s initial attitude toward the Bank’s involvement in politics? What caused him to change his mind, what steps did he take, and who were his supporters?

25. How did Jackson respond to the efforts to recharter the Bank? What reasons did he give for his action, and what effect did the election of 1832 have on his Bank policy?

26. How did the supporters of the Bank respond to Jackson’s action? What did Biddle do? What were the results?

27. How did the Supreme Court under Roger B. Taney differ from the court under Marshall? What groups profited from Taney’s decisions?

THE CHANGING FACE OF AMERICAN POLITICS (249-257)

28. How did the “party philosophy” of the Whigs differ from that of the Democrats?

29. Who were the Whig leaders? How did they reflect the variety of political opinions found in the Whig Party?

30. What was the Whig strategy in the election of 1836? Who was the Democratic candidate? Why was he selected? What was the result?

31. What was the general condition of the American economy in 1836? What factors contributed to this? What was the most pressing problem that Congress and the administration faced between 1835 and 1837 and how did they propose to solve it?

32. What was the effect of the government’s decision to lend surplus money to state banks? What action did Jackson take to ease that effect and what was the result?

33. What caused the Panic of 1837? What effect did it have on the nation? on the Democratic Party?

34. What programs did Martin Van Buren propose to ease the depression? Why did he act in this way?

35. What other programs did Van Buren propose? How did these proposals reflect the balance of power in the Democratic Party?

36. Why did the Whigs select William Henry Harrison as their candidate in 1840? How did his campaign set a new pattern for presidential contests?

37. What did the selection of John Tyler as Harrison’s vice-presidential candidate reveal about the composition of the Whig Party?
38. What was the legislative program that Clay and the leading Whigs hoped to institute under Tyler? On what parts did Tyler agree? disagree?

39. What was the origin of the split between Tyler and Clay? What effect did it have on the administration? on the Whig Party? What was the result?

40. What were the accomplishments of Whig diplomacy?

WHERE HISTORIANS DISAGREE (236-237)

41. How have historians differed over the nature of Jacksonian Democracy?

42. Explain how these different opinions reflect divisions over what historians feel was the role Andrew Jackson played in the era named for him.

PATTERNS OF POPULAR CULTURE (254-255)

43. How did the advent of the penny press reflect the social, technological, and cultural changes taking place in America during the 1820s and 1830s?

44. How did the penny press capture the spirit of the Age of Jackson?

Identification

Identify each of the following, and explain why it is important within the context of the chapter.

1. “The reign of King ‘Mob”
2. James Kent
3. Dorr Rebellion
4. Albany Regency
5. William L. Marcy
6. Tariff of Abominations
7. Peggy Eaton
8. Robert Y. Hayne
9. Webster’s Second Reply to Hayne
10. Democrats’ Jefferson banquet
11. force bill
12. Black Hawk War
13. Five Civilized Tribes
14. Indian Removal Act
15. Worcester v. Georgia
16. Trail of Tears
17. “soft money”/”hard money”
18. “pet banks”
19. Locofoocos
20. Anti-Mason Party
21. the Great Triumvirate
22. specie circular
23. independent treasury
24. “log cabin” campaign
25. Caroline affair
26. “Aroostook war”
27. Creole
28. Webster-Ashburton Treaty

Document I

Below is an excerpt from Daniel Webster’s reply to Robert Y. Hayne’s defense of the theory of nullification. What does Webster see as the danger inherent in Calhoun’s doctrine? How is this speech in keeping with Webster’s political views—especially his view of the nature of the Union and the role of the national government?

I have not allowed myself, Sir, to look beyond the Union, to see what might lie hidden in the dark recess behind. I have not coolly weighed the changes of preserving liberty when the bonds that unite us together shall be broken asunder. I have not accustomed myself to hang over the precipice of disunion, to see whether, with my short sight, I can fathom the depth of the abyss below; nor could I regard him as a safe counsellor in the affairs of this government, whose thoughts should be mainly bent on considering, not how the Union may be best preserved, but how tolerable might be the condition of the people when it should be broken up and destroyed. While the Union lasts, we have high, exciting, gratifying prospects spread out before us, for us and our children. Beyond that I seek not to penetrate the veil. God grant that in my day, at least, that curtain may not rise! God grant that on my vision never may be opened what lies behind! When my eyes shall be turned to behold for the last time the sun in heaven, may I not see him shining on the broken and dishonored fragments of a once glorious Union; on States dissevered, discordant, and belligerent; on a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, it may be, in fraternal blood! Let their last feeble and lingering glance rather behold the gorgeous
ensign of the republic, now known and honored throughout the earth, still full high advanced, its arms and 
trophies steaming in their original lustre, not a stripe erased or polluted, nor a single star obscured, bearing for 
its motto, no such miserable interrogatory as “What is all this worth?” nor those other words of delusion and 
folly, “Liberty first and Union afterwards”; but everywhere, spread all over in characters of living light, blazing 
on all its ample folds, as they float over the sea and over the land, and in every wind under the whole heavens, 
that other sentiment, dear or every true American heart,—Liberty and Union, now and for ever, one and 
inseparable!

Daniel Webster, The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster National Edition (Boston, 1903), 6:75.

Document 2

Joseph G. Baldwin’s Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi caught the spirit and unmasked the pretensions 
of the age of Jackson. With unerring aim, his satire hit its mark, and future generations were left with a 
delightful portrait of the period. But Baldwin, like most good satirists, was serious about his subject, and his 
insights into the era may tell us more than a hundred political speeches on the same subject. 

What is the author describing here? What gave rise to the economic conditions he pictures, and what is his 
opinion of what was taking place? What does Baldwin feel to be the main problem highlighted by these 
activities? On whom does he place the blame?

Who was the “Jupiter Tonans of the White House” to whom the author calls attention? What action did this 
individual take to stop the abuses and what resulted? From the way it was described, what was the author’s 
opinion of the action taken by this Jupiter Tonans, and, considering what you have read in your text, would the 
author have been a Whig or a Democrat? In either case, what element (or branch or faction) of that party does 
he seem to support? What was the result of the action taken by Jupiter Tonans?

Historian Bray Hammond, in his study of American banking, described the Jacksonian program as “one of 
enterpriser against capitalist, of banker against regulation.” How does the account by Baldwin correspond with 
Hammond’s theory? How might it be possible that the Jacksonian program both created and ended the situation 
described here?

In the fulness of time the new era had set in—the era of the second great experiment of independence: 
the experiment, namely, of credit without capital, and enterprise without honesty.

This country was just settling up. Marvellous accounts had gone forth of the fertility of its virgin lands; and the 
productions of the soil were commanding a price remunerating to slave labor as it had never been remunerated 
before. Emigrants came flocking in from all quarters of the Union, especially from the slaveholding States. The 
new country seemed to be a reservoir, and every road leading to it a vagrant stream of enterprise and adventure. 
Money, or what passed for money, was the only cheap 
thing to be had. Every cross road and every avocation presented an opening—through which a fortune was seen 
by the adventurer in near perspective. Credit was a thing of course. To refuse it—if the thing was ever done—
were an insult for which a bowie knife were not a too summary or exemplary a means of redress. The State 
banks were issuing their bills by the sheet, like a patent steam printing-press its 
issues; and no other showing was asked of the applicant for the loan than an authentication of his great distress 
for money. Finance, even in its most exclusive quarter, had thus already got, in this wonderful revolution, to 
work upon the principles of the charity hospital.

Under this stimulating process prices rose like smoke. Lots in obscure villages were held at city 
prices; lands, bought at the minimum cost of government, were sold at from thirty to forty dollars per acre, and 
considered dirt cheap at that.

The old rules of business and the calculations of prudence were alike disregarded, and profligacy, in all the 
departments of the cnmen falso held riotous carnival. Larceny grew not only respectable, 
but genteel, and ruffled it in all the pomp of purple and fine linen.
“Commerce was king”—and Rags, Tag and Bobtail his cabinet council. Rags were treasurer. Banks, chartered on a specie basis, did a very flourishing business on the promissory notes of the individual stockholders ingeniously substituted in lieu of cash. They issued ten for one, the one being fictitious. They generously loaned all the directors could not use themselves.

The Jupiter Tonans of the White House saw the monster of a free credit prowling about like a beast of apocalyptic vision, and marked him for his prey. Gathering all his bolts in his sinewy grasp, and standing back on his heels, and waving his wiry arm, he let them all fly, hard and swift upon all the hydra’s heads.

To get down from the clouds to level ground, the Specie Circular was issued without warning, and the splendid lie of a false credit burst into fragments... he did some very pretty fairy work, in converting the bank bills back again from rags and oak-leaves. Men worth a million were insolvent for two millions; promising young cities marched back again into the wilderness. The ambitious town plat was re-annexed to the plantation, like a country girl taken home from the city. The frolic was ended, and what headaches, and feverish limbs the next morning! The retreat from Moscow was performed over again, and “Devil take the hindmost” was the tune to which the soldiers of fortune marched. The only question was as to the means of escape, and the nearest and best route to Texas...


Ma Exercise

Fill in or identify the following on the blank map provided. Use the map in the text as your source.

1. Tribal lands and the states and territories in which they were located.
2. Other states in the region.
3. Removal routes (including the towns and forts along the way).
4. Reservations and the forts within them.

Interpretive Questions

Based on what you have filled in, answer the following. On some of the questions you will need to consult the narrative in your text for information or explanation.
1. Why did the states involved want the Indians removed? Look at the location of the tribal lands, and explain why their continued occupation by the Indians represented not only the loss to the state of valuable territory but might also have threatened the westward movement itself.

2. How did the land to which the Indians were removed differ from that on which they had lived? Were whites aware of the significance of the difference? What does this suggest about white attitudes toward the Indians?

3. Note the removal routes. What geographic features were considered in determining where the Indians would travel? Do you feel this made the trek easier or more difficult?

4. What geographic features made it possible for the Seminoles (and some Cherokees) to resist removal?

5. Note the location of the forts in or near the Indian Territory. Were they placed as they were? What does this indicate about American Indian policy?

Summary
At first glance, Andrew Jackson seems a study in contradictions: an advocate of states’ rights who forced South Carolina to back down in the nullification controversy; a champion of the West who removed the Indians from land east of the Mississippi River and who issued the specie circular, which brought the region’s “flush times” to a disastrous halt; a nationalist who allowed Georgia to ignore the Supreme Court; and a defender of majority rule who vetoed the Bank after the majority’s representatives, the Congress, had passed it. Perhaps he was, as his enemies argued, simply out for himself. But in the end, few would argue that Andrew Jackson was a popular president, if not so much for what he did as for what he was. Jackson symbolized what Americans perceived (or wished) themselves to be—defiant, bold, independent. He was someone with whom they could identify. So what if the image was a bit contrived, it was still a meaningful image. Thus Jackson was reelected by an overwhelming majority and was able to transfer that loyalty to his successor, a man who hardly lived up to the image. But all this left a curious question unanswered. Was this new democracy voting for leaders whose programs they favored or, rather, for images that could be altered and manipulated almost at will? The answer was essential for the future of American politics and the election of 1840 gave the nation a clue.

Review Questions
These questions are to be answered with essays. This will allow you to explore relationships between individuals, events, and attitudes of the period under review.

1. Historian Lee Benson has contended that the democratic movement in America during this period was much broader than the Democratic Party and that this should be called the age of egalitarianism rather than the age of Jackson. Having read the text chapter (paying attention to “Where Historians Disagree”) and completed this unit in the guide, what evidence have you found to support Benson? What have you found to contradict his assertion? Write an essay evaluating both sides.

2. Andrew Jackson thought of himself as the “president of the people.” Was he? What can you find in the career of Jackson that would support his assertion, and what can you find to deny it?

3. How were Andrew Jackson’s attitudes toward the Indian tribes “little different from those of most other white Americans”? How did eastern Indians attempt to live in harmony with whites, and how did attitudes like Jackson’s make that impossible?

4. Why the split between Calhoun and Jackson? The Eaton affair is generally seen as a symptom, not a cause, which would indicate the real division between the two men was much deeper. Assess the causes of the split and speculate on the significance of the split for the South and for the Democrats.

5. How did William Henry Harrison win in 1840? What were the issues that worked against him, and how did his party exploit them? Furthermore, how was this candidate presented to the people? What image were his managers trying to create, and what does this image tell you about the American electorate?
6. How did Calhoun (and South Carolina) justify and explain the theory of nullification? On what points did Webster (and Jackson) oppose this theory? Be sure to read your documents in the text.

7. Analyze the presidency of John Tyler. On which programs can he be considered successful, and on which did he fail? What does his elevation to the presidency and the problems he experienced tell you about the nature of the Whig Party?