

# Chapter 10: A Democratic Revolution, 1800-1844

## I. The Rise of Popular Politics, 1820-1828

### A. The Decline of the Notables and the Rise of Parties

1. Expansion of the **franchise** was the most dramatic expression of the democratic revolution; beginning in the late 1810s, many states revised their constitutions to give the franchise to nearly every white male farmer and wage earner.
2. In America's traditional agricultural society, wealthy notables dominated the political system and managed local elections by building up supporting factions.
3. Smallholding farmers and ambitious laborers in the Midwest and Southwest launched the first challenges to the traditional political order; the constitutions of new states prescribed a broad male franchise and voters usually elected middling men to local and state offices.
4. To deter migration to the western states, the elites in most eastern legislatures grudgingly accepted a broader franchise for their states.
5. By the mid-1820s, only a few states – North Carolina, Virginia, and Rhode Island – required the ownership of freehold property for voting.
6. Between 1818 and 1821, some eastern states reapportioned legislatures on the basis of population and instituted more democratic forms of local government.
7. Americans began to turn to government in order to advance business, religious, and cultural causes.
8. As the power of the notables declined, the political party emerged as the organizing force in the American system of government.
9. Parties were political machines that gathered the diverse agenda of social and economic groups into a coherent legislative program.
10. Between 1817 and 1821, Martin Van Buren created the first statewide **political machine**, and he later organized the first nationwide political party, the Jacksonian Democrats.
11. Keys to Van Buren's political success were his systematic use of party newspapers to promote a platform and drum up the vote and his use of **patronage**; he and his party made six thousand political appointments in New York. Van Buren then used the **spoils system** to award public jobs to political supporters after an electoral victory.
12. Van Buren also insisted on party discipline and required state legislators to follow the dictates of a **caucus**, or meeting of party leaders.

### B. The Election of 1824

1. With the democratization of politics, the aristocratic Federalist Party virtually disappeared, and the Republicans broke up into competing factions.
2. The election of 1824 had five candidates who all called themselves Republicans: John Quincy Adams, John C. Calhoun, William H. Crawford, Henry Clay, and Andrew Jackson.
3. Congress selected William Crawford as the official candidate, yet the other candidates refused to accept the selection and sought support among ordinary voters.
4. Although Jackson received nationwide support, no candidate received an absolute majority in the electoral college, so members of the House of Representatives had to choose the president.
5. Clay assembled a coalition of congressmen that voted for Adams, and Adams repaid Clay by appointing him secretary of state. As a congressman, Clay had promoted the **American System**, an integrated program of national economic development.
6. Clay's appointment was a politically fatal mistake for both men; Calhoun accused Adams of using the power and patronage of the executive to thwart the popular will and Jacksonians in Congress condemned Clay for arranging this "corrupt bargain."

### C. The Last Notable President: John Quincy Adams

1. Adams embraced the American System proposed by Clay: protective tariffs, federally subsidized transportation improvements, and a national bank.
2. Adams's policies favored the business elite of the Northeast and the entrepreneurs and commercial farmers in the Midwest but won little support among southern planters and smallholding farmers.
3. Congress approved only a few of Adams's proposals for internal improvements, such as a short extension of the

National Road.

4. The most far-reaching battle of the Adams administration came over tariffs; Adams's Tariff of 1824 protected manufacturers in New England and Pennsylvania against imports of more expensive woolen and cotton textiles as well as iron goods.
5. Disregarding southern opposition, northern Jacksonians joined with the supporters of Adams and Clay to enact the Tariff of 1828, which raised duties on raw materials, textiles, and iron goods.
6. The new tariff enraged the South; as the world's cheapest producer of raw cotton, the tariff cost southern planters about \$100 million a year as planters had to buy either higher-cost American textiles and iron goods or highly taxed British goods.
7. Southerners felt the tariff was legalized pillage and labeled it a "Tariff of Abominations."

#### D. "The Democracy" and the Election of 1828

1. Southerners refused to support Adams's bid for a second term: most were offended that he supported the land rights of Indians and blamed him for the new tariff.
2. Adams's primary weakness was his increasingly out-of-date political style; for example, he felt that the country should ask for his services.
3. Martin Van Buren and the professional politicians handling Andrew Jackson's campaign had no reservations about "running" for the presidency.
4. Jacksonians initially called themselves "Democratic Republicans" but eventually became simply "Democrats," and their name conveyed their message that through them the middling majority – the democracy – would rule.
5. Jackson's appeal as a candidate was his message of equal rights and popular rule, his hostility to business corporations and to Clay's American System, his animus toward Native Americans, and his personal preference for a "judicious" tariff.
6. Jackson received 178 of 261 electoral votes and became the first president from a western state; however, the massive outpouring of popular support for Jackson frightened men of wealth and influence.

## II. The Jacksonian Presidency, 1829–1837

### A. Jackson's Agenda: Rotation and Decentralization

1. To decide policy, Jackson primarily relied on his so-called "Kitchen Cabinet" – an informal group of advisors.
2. Using the spoils system, Jackson created a loyal and disciplined national party and dispensed government jobs to aid his friends and win support for his legislative program.
3. Jackson's main priority was to destroy Clay's American System.
4. He rejected national support for transportation projects, which he also opposed on constitutional grounds, and in 1830 vetoed four internal improvement bills.

### B. The Tariff and Nullification

1. Although opposition to the Tariff of 1828 helped Jackson to win the election, a major political crisis saddled him with protecting it.
2. To sidetrack the possibility that government would try to end slavery, South Carolina politicians tried to limit the power of the central government and chose the tariff as their target.
3. The crisis began in 1832 when high-tariff congressmen ignored southern warnings that they were "endangering the Union" and reenacted the Tariff of Abominations.
4. In response, the South Carolina state convention adopted an Ordinance of Nullification, which declared the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 null and void and threatened secession.
5. South Carolina's act of **nullification** rested on the constitutional arguments developed by Vice President John C. Calhoun, in which he maintained that the Constitution had been ratified by state conventions and, therefore, a state convention could declare a congressional law null and void.
6. Jackson denounced this radical redefinition of the constitutional system, declaring that nullification violated the Constitution and threatened the union of the United States.
7. At Jackson's request, Congress passed a Force Bill authorizing the use of the army and navy to force South Carolina's obedience.
8. At the same time, a tariff act was passed that gradually reduced rates; by 1842, tariffs reverted to the modest rates of 1816, thereby eliminating another part of Clay's American System.
9. South Carolina rescinded its nullification of the tariff, and Jackson had established the principle that no state could nullify a law of the United States.

### C. The Bank War

1. By collecting notes and regularly demanding specie, the Second Bank of the United States kept state banks from issuing too many notes – preventing monetary inflation and higher prices.
2. Most Americans did not understand the regulatory role of the Second Bank and feared its ability to force bank closures, which left them holding worthless paper.
3. In 1832, Jackson's opponents in Congress persuaded the Second Bank's president, Nicholas Biddle, to seek an early extension of the bank's charter with the hope of luring Jackson into a veto that would split the Democrats just before the 1832 elections.
4. Jackson vetoed the bank bill and became a public hero; he declared that the Second Bank promoted the advancement of the few at the expense of the many.
5. Jackson won the election of 1832, jettisoned Calhoun as vice president, and chose Martin Van Buren instead.
6. Jackson had Secretary of the Treasury Roger B. Taney withdraw the government's gold from the Second Bank and deposit it in state "pet" banks.
7. The "bank war" escalated into an all-out political battle. Jackson's opponents in the Senate passed a resolution censuring the president for acting independently of Congress, although Jackson ultimately won out. When the Second Bank's national charter expired in 1836, Jackson prevented its renewal.
8. Jackson had destroyed both national banking and the American System of protective tariffs and internal improvements. The result was a profound reduction in the purview and powers of the national government.

### D. Indian Removal

1. In the late 1820s, whites in both the West and East called for the resettlement of the Indians west of the Mississippi River.
2. Indian peoples still controlled vast tracts of ancestral land and were determined to retain them.
3. Setting Indian preferences aside, the Georgia legislature demanded a fulfillment of the promise to extinguish Indian landholdings in the state in return for its 1802 ceding of western land claims.
4. Jackson gave full support to Georgia. He declared states were sovereign within their borders, and he withdrew the federal troops that had protected Indian enclaves.
5. Jackson then pushed through Congress the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which provided territory in modern-day Oklahoma and Kansas to Native Americans who would give up their ancestral holdings on the promise that they could live on the new lands in perpetuity.
6. When Chief Black Hawk and his followers refused to move from their rich farmland in western Illinois, Jackson sent troops to expel them, which resulted in the army pursuing him into the Wisconsin Territory and engaging in the brutal eight-hour Bad Axe Massacre of 1832.
7. Over the next five years American diplomatic pressure and military power forced seventy Indian nations to sign treaties and move west of the Mississippi.
8. In *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831), the Supreme Court denied Indian independence; however, in *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832), the Supreme Court voided Georgia's extension of state law over the Indians.
9. Rather than guaranteeing the Cherokees' territory, the U.S. government took it from them.
10. When a vast majority of Cherokees had not departed to the new territory by the deadline of May 1838, President Martin Van Buren ordered General Winfield Scott to forcibly march them 1,200 miles to the new Indian Territory – a journey remembered as the Trail of Tears.
11. Though Seminoles were the exception, the national government had forced the removal of most eastern Indian peoples to the West.

### E. The Jacksonian Impact

1. Jackson permanently expanded the authority of the nation's chief executive, using the rhetoric of popular sovereignty to declare that the president is the direct representative of the American people.
2. Appointed chief justice by Jackson, Roger B. Taney persuaded the Court to give constitutional legitimacy to Jackson's policies of anti-monopoly and states' rights.
3. In *Charles River Bridge Co. v. Warren Bridge Co.* (1837), Taney's ruling undermined the legal positions of chartered corporations and encouraged competitive enterprise (thus challenging John Marshall's interpretation of the contract clause in *Dartmouth College v. Woodward*, which had emphasized the binding nature of public charters).
4. In 1837, Taney's decisions enhanced the regulatory role of state governments (*Mayor of New York v. Miln*) and restored some of the states' economic powers (*Briscoe v. Bank of Kentucky*).

5. Most states mounted a constitutional revolution – extending the vote to all white men, reapportioning legislatures on the basis of population, and mandating the election of officials.
6. Most Jacksonian-era constitutions prohibited states from granting exclusive charters to corporations or extending loans and credit guarantees to private businesses and protected taxpayers by setting strict limits on state debts and encouraging judges to enforce them.
7. Jacksonian “populists” embraced a small-government outlook, based on **classical liberalism**, or **laissez-faire**; in public, at least, they attacked government-granted special privileges and celebrated the power of ordinary people.

### III. Class, Culture, and the Second Party System

#### A. The Whig Worldview

1. The rise of the democracy and Jackson’s tumultuous presidency sparked the creation in the mid-1830s of a second national party – the **Whigs**.
2. Although a heterogeneous group initially, the Whigs gradually elaborated a distinct vision – a political world dominated by men of ability and wealth, chosen by talent, not birth. Whigs appealed to evangelical Protestants and upwardly mobile groups.
3. Northern Whigs called for a return to Clay and Adams’s American System; Southern Whigs advocated economic development but did not support high tariffs and social mobility.
4. Many Whig voters previously were Anti-Masons, members of a powerful but short-lived political movement of the late 1820s.
5. In the election of 1836, the Whigs faced Martin Van Buren; Van Buren emphasized his opposition to the American System and his support for individual rights.
6. The Whigs ran four regional candidates in the election in hope of throwing the presidential contest to the House, which they controlled, but the plan failed, and Van Buren won.

#### B. Labor Politics and the Depression of 1837–1843

1. Working Men’s Parties embraced the ideology of artisan Republicanism; their vision led them to join the Jacksonians in demanding equal rights and attacking chartered corporations and monopolistic banks.
2. Even as they campaigned for a more egalitarian society, workers formed unions to bargain for higher wages for themselves.
3. At this juncture, the Panic of 1837 threw the American economy into disarray; the panic began when the Bank of England sharply curtailed the flow of money and credit to the United States.
4. To pay their foreign loans and commercial debts, Americans had to withdraw specie from domestic banks. Lacking adequate specie and without a national bank to turn to, domestic banks suspended all payments in specie.
5. By 1839, the American economy fell into deep depression: canal construction fell by 90 percent, prices dropped nearly 50 percent, and unemployment rose to 20 percent in some areas.
6. The depression devastated the labor movement by depleting the membership of unions and destroying their bargaining power. Some state courts also issued injunctions, orders that prohibited workers from picketing or striking. By 1843, most unions had disappeared.
7. During the depression, *Commonwealth v. Hunt* upheld the rights of workers to form unions and enforce a closed shop, and Van Buren established a ten-hour day for federal employees.

#### C. "Tippecanoe and Tyler Too!"

1. The Whigs blamed Jackson’s policies for the Panic of 1837, and, as Van Buren had just entered office, the public turned its anger on him because he did nothing to stop the downturn.
2. Van Buren’s Independent Treasury Act of 1840 actually delayed recovery because it took specie out of state banks and put it in government vaults.
3. In 1840, the Whigs nominated William Henry Harrison, victor of the Battle of Tippecanoe, for president and John Tyler for vice president.
4. Harrison had little political experience, but the Whigs wanted someone who would rubber-stamp their programs for protective tariffs and a national bank.
5. The contest – the great “log cabin” campaign – was the first time two well-organized parties competed for the loyalties of a mass electorate, using organized public events to draw in voters. The Whigs used the log cabin as an icon of their candidate’s (largely fictional) egalitarian tastes and common background.
6. The Whigs boosted their political hopes and their populist image by welcoming women to their festivities.

7. Harrison was voted into the White House, and the Whigs had a majority in Congress, but a month later Harrison died of pneumonia, so Tyler became president.
8. Tyler – who was more like a Democrat when it came to economic issues – was hostile toward the Second Bank and the American System.
9. The split between Tyler and the Whigs allowed the Democrats to regroup and recruit more supporters; the Democrats remained the majority party in most parts of the nation by drawing on **ethnocultural politics**, the practice of voting along ethnic and religious lines.
10. The Democratic Revolution exacted a price in that the new system perpetuated many problematic political customs – denying women, Indians, and most African Americans an effective voice in public life – and introduced such dubious practices as the spoils system and a coarser standard of public debate.
11. Still, unlike most of the contemporary world, the United States now had universal white male suffrage and a highly organized system of representative government that was responsive to ordinary citizens.