

## Ch 11 Debate Docs

### Where Historians Disagree - The Age of Jackson ← DOCUMENT J

To many Americans in the 1820s and 1830s, Andrew Jackson was a champion of democracy, a symbol of the spirit of antielitism and egalitarianism that was sweeping American life. Historians, however, have disagreed sharply not only in their assessments of Jackson himself but in their portrayal of American society in his era.

The "progressive" historians of the early twentieth century tended to see Jacksonian politics as a forebear of their own battles against economic privilege and political corruption. Frederick Jackson Turner encouraged scholars to see Jacksonianism as a protest by the people of the frontier against the conservative aristocracy of the East, which they believed restricted their own freedom and opportunity. Jackson represented those who wanted to make government responsive to the will of the people rather than to the power of special interests. The culmination of this progressive interpretation of Jacksonianism was the publication in 1945 of Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Age of Jackson*. Schlesinger was less interested in the regional basis of Jacksonianism than the disciples of Turner had been. Jacksonian Democracy, he argued, was the effort "to control the power of the capitalist groups, mainly Eastern, for the benefit of non-capitalist groups, farmers and laboring men, East, West, and South." He portrayed Jacksonianism as an early version of modern reform efforts to "restrain the power of the business community."

Richard Hofstadter, in an influential 1948 essay, sharply disagreed. Jackson, he argued, was the spokesman of rising entrepreneurs--aspiring businessmen who saw the road to opportunity blocked by the monopolistic power of Eastern aristocrats. The Jacksonians opposed special privileges only to the extent that those privileges blocked their own road to success. They were less sympathetic to the aspirations of those below them. Bray Hammond, writing in 1957, argued similarly that the Jacksonian cause was "one of enterpriser against capitalist." Other historians saw Jacksonianism less as a democratic reform movement than as a nostalgic effort to restore a lost past. Marvin Meyers's *The Jacksonian Persuasion* (1957) argued that Jackson and his followers looked with misgivings on the new industrial society emerging around them and yearned instead for a restoration of the agrarian, republican virtues of an earlier time.

In the 1960s, historians began taking less interest in Jackson and his supporters and more in the social and cultural bases of American politics in the time of Jackson. Lee Benson's *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* (1961) used quantitative techniques to demonstrate the role of religion and ethnicity in shaping party divisions. Edward Pessen's *Jacksonian America* (1969) portrayed America in the Jacksonian era as an increasingly stratified society. This inclination to look more closely at society than at formal "Jacksonianism" has continued into the 1980s and 1990s. Sean Wilentz, in *Chants Democratic* (1984), examined the rise of a powerful class identification among workers in New York, who were attracted less to Jackson than to an artisanal notion of democracy.

Gradually, this attention to the nature of society has led to reassessments of Jackson himself and the nature of his regime. In *Fathers and Children* (1975), Michael Rogin portrays Jackson as a leader determined to secure the supremacy of white men in the United States. Alexander Saxton, in *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (1990) makes the related argument that "Jacksonian Democracy" was explicitly a white man's democracy that rested on the subjugation of slaves, women, and Native Americans. But the portrayal of Jackson as a champion of the common man has not vanished from scholarship entirely. The most renowned postwar biographer of Jackson, Robert V. Remini, argues that, despite the flaws in his democratic vision, he was a genuine "man of the people."

(Washington, DC) March 11<sup>th</sup> (1829)

Thousands and thousands of people, without distinction or rank, collected in an immense mass round the Capital, silent, orderly, and tranquil, with their eyes fixed on the front of that edifice (large or impressive building), waiting the appearance of the President...The door open,... the old man with his grey locks (hair), that crown of glory advances, bows to the people, who greet him with a shout that rends (splits) the air...It was grand, it was sublime! An almost breathless silence...and the multitude (crowd) was still, listening to catch the sound of his voice, tho' (though) it was so low, as to be heard only by those nearest to him. After...(he read) his speech, the oath was administered to him by the Chief Justice."

Margaret Bayard, Smith, inauguration observer

Document **B**— Jackson's message explaining his veto of the National Bank, July 10, 1832

"It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes...Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government....But when the laws undertake to.... Make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society....have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government."

Document **C**— Jackson's message to Congress concerning the removal of Native Americans from east of the Appalachian Mountains, December 7, 1835

"All preceding experiments for the improvement of the Indians have failed. It seems now to be an established fact that they can not live in contact with a civilized community and prosper....No one can doubt the moral duty of the Government .... To protect and if possible to preserve and perpetuate the scattered remnants of this race...."

Document **D** The following quotations were made by President Andrew Jackson in reference to the threatened South Carolina secession over the Tariff of 1828.

"...I would hang the first man I could get my hands on."

Jackson's remarks to the states threatening secession

"So obvious are the reasons which forbid this secession (withdrawal from the union), that it is necessary only to mention them. The Union was formed for the benefit of all. It was produced by the sacrifice of interest and opinions. Can those sacrifices be ignored?...Everyone must see that the other States, in self-defense, must oppose secession at all costs."

Document **E**

Source: Chief Justice Roger B. Taney's opinion in Supreme Court case

*Charles River Bridge v. Warren Bridge* (1837)

The interests of the great body of the people of the state, would, in this instance, be affected by the surrender of this great line of travel to a single corporation, with the right to exact toll, and exclude competition, for seventy years. While the rights of private property are sacredly guarded, we must not forget, that the community also have rights, and that the happiness and well-being of every citizen depends on their faithful preservation.

... The charter of 1785 to the proprietors of the Charles River bridge . . . confers on them the ordinary faculties of a corporation, for the purpose of building a bridge; and establishes certain rates of toll, which the company are authorized to take. . . . There is no exclusive privilege given to them over the waters of Charles River, above or below their bridge; no right to erect another bridge themselves, nor to prevent other persons from erecting one; no engagement from the state, that another should not be erected; and no undertaking not to sanction competition, nor to make improvements that may diminish the amount of its income.

Document F

BORN TO COMMAND.

OF VETO MEMORY.



KING ANDREW THE FIRST.

HAD I BEEN CONSULTED.

Document G

Methods of Electing Presidential Electors: 1816 to 1836

P—by people L—by legislature

	1816	1820	1824	1828	1832	1836
Massachusetts	L	P	P	P	P	P
New York	L	L	L	P	P	P
Delaware	L	L	L	L	P	P
S. Carolina	L	L	L	L	L	L
Georgia	L	L	L	P	P	P
Vermont	L	L	L	P	P	P
Louisiana	L	L	L	P	P	P
Indiana	L	L	L	P	P	P
Illinois	*	P	P	P	P	P
Alabama	*	L	P	P	P	P
Maine	*	P	P	P	P	P
Missouri	*	L	P	P	P	P

Note: States not listed above chose Presidential Electors by the people as of 1816. States displaying the (\*) were not yet admitted as states.

Document H

Source: Daniel Webster's reply to Jackson's veto message (July 11, 1832)

[This message] extends the grasp of executive pretension over every power of the government. . . . It appeals to every prejudice which may betray men into a mistaken view of their own interests, and to every passion which may lead them to disobey the impulses of their understanding. It urges all the specious topics of State rights and national encroachment against that which a great majority of the States have affirmed to be rightful and in which all of them have acquiesced. It sows, in an unsparring manner, the seeds of jealousy and ill-will against that government of which its author is the official head. It raises a cry that liberty is in danger, at the very moment when it puts forth claims to powers heretofore unknown and unheard of. It effects alarm for the public freedom, when nothing endangers that freedom so much as its own unparalleled pretences. This even, is not all. It manifestly seeks to inflame the poor against the rich; it wantonly attacks whole classes of the people, for the purpose of turning against them the prejudices and the resentments of the other classes. It is a state paper which finds no topic too exciting for its use, no passion too inflammable for its address and its solicitation.

Source: Harriet Martineau, a British author, reporting on her 1834 visit to the United States in *Society in America* (New York, 1837)

Document I

I had been less than three weeks in the country and was in a state of something like awe at the prevalence of not only external competence but intellectual ability. The striking effect upon a stranger of witnessing, for the first time, the absence of poverty, of gross ignorance, of all servility, of all insolence of manner cannot be exaggerated in description. I had seen every man in the towns an independent citizen; every man in the country a landowner. I had seen that the villages had their newspapers, the factory girls their libraries. I had witnessed the controversies between candidates for office on some difficult subjects, of which the people were to be the judges.

With all these things in my mind, and with evidence of prosperity about me in the comfortable homesteads which every turn in the road and every reach of the lake brought into view, I was thrown into painful amazement by being told that the grand question of the time was "whether the people should be encouraged to govern themselves, or whether the wise should save them from themselves."