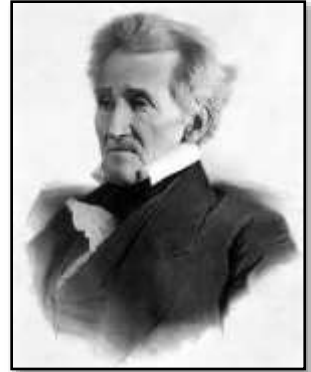


“Have To” History: Andrew Jackson

Stuff You Don't Really Want To Know (But For Some Reason Have To)

Three Big Things:

1. Hero of the “common man.” Almost everything he did as President – good, bad, or iffy – can be best understood as variations on this theme.
2. “The Corrupt Bargain” – when he lost the Presidency in 1824, he insisted that the winner, John Quincy Adams, and Henry Clay, who became Adams’ Secretary of State, had conspired against him in some sort of backroom deal. They might have.
3. Indian Removal – the “Trail of Tears” and related removal experiences were his baby. He pushed the legislation and enforced the bogus treaties pushed on the Tribes.



Pre-President Andrew Jackson

Jackson was born seriously poor, his father dying a few weeks before he emerged. His brothers served in the American Revolution, as did he – although primarily as a messenger for the Rebels. When captured, Jackson was ordered to clean the boots of a British Officer, but instead gave the officer his honest opinion of him and his boots – possibly including his parentage, his politics, and his funny red jacket. The Officer slashed him across the hand and face with his sword, leaving permanent scars and an even more permanent hatred of the British. Probably didn’t do much for his opinion of the rich and powerful, either.

His brothers died of smallpox as prisoners of war, and his mother – who’d nursed them in their final days – passed of the same soon after. Jackson was an orphan by 14 and moved in with an uncle who had property and made sure he received an education. Jackson learned to speak “Whole Foods,” but his native tongue was forever “Dollar General.”

Jackson became a hero in 1814 during the War of 1812 (it had been going for a few years by that point) and earned the nickname “Old Hickory” for his toughness and resolve – a name which presumably sounded much cooler back then than it does two centuries later. In 1817 he sparked an international incident when he led troops into Spanish Florida in pursuit of runaway slaves trying to reach the Seminole Indians. While there, he captured and executed two British diplomats for being too friendly with Blacks and Indians. He returned home as either a psychopath or a hero, depending on one’s point-of-view. Despite all of this, the U.S. ended up “purchasing” Florida shortly thereafter for a Subway gift card and a second-round draft pick (actually, you might wanna double-check those details), so it all seems to have worked out well.

Jackson ran for President in 1824 and won a plurality of electoral votes – meaning that while he didn’t have the “more than half” necessary to win, he won *more than anyone else*. Constitutionally, this meant the decision went to the House of Representatives, who chose John Quincy Adams. Adams made Clay his Secretary of State, a position widely perceived as a stepping stone towards the Presidency, at which point Jackson accused them of making a “corrupt bargain.”

The Election of 1828 was one of the nastiest and most personally degrading in American History. It’s the first example cited whenever people wish to make the case that elections have *always* been vile, as if that somehow proves we should give up altogether on decency and civil debate and just accept that politics are inseparable from ugly divorces or snuff porn so we might as well just go with it. That’s a questionable position no matter how many examples you trot out, but if you’re determined to make that case, start with this election.

The biggest issue used against Jackson was his love for Rachel Donelson. She was a “used woman,” having been

married before. By the standards of the times, he'd have been better off wearing someone else's discarded undies from the dumpster. To make matters worse, two years into their marriage, they discovered that her divorce hadn't been legally finalized – making them bigamists. Jackson won in 1828, but Rachel died just before his inauguration. The cause? A broken heart.

OK, it was probably more medical than that, but there's a kinda dark poetry to it this way, so don't fight it.

Jackson's Presidency

First Democratic President: Times have changed, the party has evolved, but in terms of an unbroken chain, this is the same Party of Franklin D. Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Josiah Bartlet.

The Inauguration: Jackson invited the “common man” to inaugural festivities at the White House – the “People's House.” Being “common men,” they stole valuables, stood on the furniture, trampled through the gardens, and otherwise trashed the place. Servants had to run across the yard with bowls of spiked punch just to draw them away. A few contemporaries noted the irony – was it really such a good thing to expand democracy to *these* people?

The “Spoils System” (Patronage): Jackson expanded the practice of giving government jobs to his supporters. Sure, it looked corrupt, but he insisted it made government more democratic – *anyone* should be able to fulfill the role of public servant. No more career bureaucrats – drain that swamp.

The Bank War: Banks, in Jackson's mind, were primarily owned by the elite and designed to serve to the elite. He hated the idea of a “National Bank” and for a time deposited the nation's reserves in various local “pet banks.” The fact that Henry Clay was a Congressional proponent of a strong federal banking system probably didn't help.

The Veto: While it's statistically debatable, Jackson is perceived as having vetoed way more bills than his predecessors. More shocking than quantity was his *reasoning* – he didn't claim they were unconstitutional; he just didn't like them as laws.

Indian Removal: While a travesty, removal was in Jackson's mind first and foremost about freeing up land for white homesteaders – the “common people.” Amerindians were painted as backwards and savage, and thus not deserving of so much promising soil – ironic, given that those same white people had labeled five of them the “Five Civilized Tribes” for how closely they emulated white culture.

You Wanna Sound REALLY Smart? {Extra Stuff}

The “Petticoat Affair” – Jackson's Secretary of War, John Eaton, married Peggy O'Neill, whose reputation was such that other cabinet wives would not associate with her. Daughter of a tavern-keeper, previously married, and much too informed and comfortable engaging in conversations with powerful men. Melodrama tore Jackson's cabinet apart, except for Martin Van Buren – who was single, and could hang out with whomever he wished.

Specie Circular – Much like the Homestead Act (1862) a generation later, western lands were intended for individual homesteaders to “civilize” the frontier – not for wealthy to buy up all the land and resell for profits. Jackson insisted land purchases had to be made in specie – actual gold or silver coin – not paper money. The idea was to prevent “borrowed money” from being used, thus driving up prices and such.

Political Cartoons – There are two political cartoons involving Jackson which tend to come up *way* more often than most. “King Andrew” shows him in regal robes holding veto power and standing on a shredded Constitution. “Many-Headed Monster” shows him fighting the National Bank, a hydra whose many heads represented key figures of the day – President of the Bank Nicholas Biddle, Representative Henry Clay, etc. If you really want to shine, make sure you can reference the key elements and meaning of each of these.



From the Library of Congress (Summary):

A caricature of Andrew Jackson as a despotic monarch, probably issued during the Fall of 1833 in response to the President's September order to remove federal deposits from the Bank of the United States. The print is dated a year earlier by Weitenkampf and related to Jackson's controversial veto of Congress's bill to recharter the Bank in July 1832. However, the charge, implicit in the print, of Jackson's exceeding the President's constitutional power, however, was most widely advanced in connection not with the veto but with the 1833 removal order, on which the President was strongly criticized for acting without congressional approval. Jackson, in regal costume, stands before a throne in a frontal pose reminiscent of a playing-card king. He holds a "veto" in his left hand and a scepter in his right. The Federal Constitution and the arms of Pennsylvania (the United States Bank was located in Philadelphia) lie in tatters under his feet. A book "Judiciary of the U[nited] States" lies nearby. Around the border of the print are the words "Of Veto Memory", "Born to Command" and "Had I Been Consulted."

From the Library of Congress (Summary):

A satire on Andrew Jackson's campaign to destroy the Bank of the United States and its support among state banks. Jackson, Martin Van Buren, and Jack

Downing struggle against a snake with heads representing the states. Jackson (on the left) raises a cane marked "Veto" and says, "Biddle thou Monster Avaunt!! avabout I say! or by the Great Eternal I'll cleave thee to the earth, aye thee and thy four and twenty satellites. Matty if thou art true...come on. if thou art false, may the venomous monster turn his dire fang upon thee..." Van Buren: "Well done General, Major Jack Downing, Adams, Clay, well done all. I dislike dissensions beyond every thing, for it often compels a man to play a double part, were it only for his own safety. Policy, policy is my motto, but intrigues I cannot countenance." Downing (dropping his axe): "Now now you nasty varmint, be you imperishable? I swan General that are beats all I reckon, that's the horrible wiper wot wommits wenemous heads I guess..." The largest of the heads is president of the Bank Nicholas Biddle's, which wears a top hat labeled "Penn" (i.e. Pennsylvania) and "\$35,000,000." This refers to the rechartering of the Bank by the Pennsylvania legislature in defiance of the administration's efforts to destroy it.

