

Andrew Jackson's legacy

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As he believed that “ one man with courage can make a majority”, Andrew Jackson has been described as the president who was both loved and hated because of his powerful personality and his penchant for strong leadership.

Although he is widely criticized for his unpopular decision to displace American Indians from their homelands via the Indian Removal Act, Andrew Jackson's two terms of being the United States president has revolutionized economic, political, social, and cultural changes in the government.

Considered as a champion of democracy, Andrew Jackson was the mover for the “ era of the common man” because “ he melded the amorphous coalition of personal followers who had elected him into the country's most durable and successful political party, an electoral machine whose organization and discipline would serve as a model for all others”.

It is believed that his true legacies are the rise of both the Democratic Party and the national two-party system (Miller Center Public Affairs Website, 2008).

Popularly called as “ Old Hickory”, Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) was the seventh president of the United States. Born as the son of farmers from the western frontier of the Carolinas (an area disputed between North Carolina and South Carolina, although Jackson believed he was in the South), Jackson led the United States from 1829 to 1837.

His early life was fraught with inconsequential tragedies because he was imprisoned, struck with a sword and he lost his mother and two brothers after the British invasion of the western Carolinas in 1780-81 (Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 2008).

It said that Jackson's interest in public affairs and in politics did not stop as he " had gone to Nashville as a political appointee, and in 1796 he became a member of the convention that drafted a constitution for the new state of Tennessee" (Encyclopædia Britannica Online, 2008).

With the outbreak of war against Great Britain in 1812, the governor of Tennessee commissioned Jackson with his militia against the Creek Indians, who used the war as an opportunity to attack the southern frontier.

Although lacking in military training or experience, Jackson soon developed into an excellent general. His outstanding leadership qualities and determination made him defeat the enemies that spelled his incredible military victories.

After that war, Andrew Jackson's popularity rose. Despite Jackson's lack of adequate credentials as a public official, many Americans had begun to think of him as a presidential contender. He was so beloved that the electorate could deny him nothing, not even the presidency. Andrew Jackson took the name Democratic Republicans and called for an assault on privilege.

He faced John Quincy Adams who attracted the support of most of the remaining Federalists. But Jackson appealed to a broad coalition that opposed the " economic aristocracy." Jackson's victory was decisive, but sectional. He won 56 percent of the popular vote and an electoral majority of 178 votes to 83.

Adams swept virtually all of New England and showed significant strength in the mid-Atlantic region. Nevertheless, the Jacksonians considered their victory as complete and as important as Jefferson's in 1800. Once again, a

champion of democracy would occupy the White House and restore liberty to the people and to the economy. America had entered, some Jacksonians claimed, a new era of democracy, the "era of the common man."

However, Jackson's greatness was marred with the Indian Removal Act. It was in 1829 that the Georgians began an aggressive drive to remove the Cherokees from their homeland when gold was discovered on Cherokee land. The Cherokees initiated a court battle against removal. In 1832, the Supreme Court ruled that the Cherokees had a right to remain on their land. However, this ruling by the high court did not halt the determined efforts of the Georgians and President Andrew Jackson to remove the Cherokees.

Harassed and pressured, part of the tribe finally signed a removal treaty in 1835. Even though only a minority of the tribe's leaders signed the treaty, the Cherokees were forced to move to Indian Territory.

During the long march from Georgia to Oklahoma in 1838 and 1839, almost one fourth of the Cherokees died from starvation, diseases, and the perils of the journey. Their long westward journey is recalled as the "Trail of Tears" (Harvey & Harjo, 1998).

Jackson cannot be entirely blamed for the "Trail of Tears" because he was mainly motivated by two considerations with that Act: national security and the preservation of the tribes.

Despite that wrong decision, Jackson can still be considered as a great man because he demanded respect by other nations for the sovereignty of U. S. democracy. Jackson also introduced many government reforms in American history. With this, he is considered as the soul of Jacksonian democracy,

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extolled as one of the most important advances in the development of U. S. government.

Works

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