

# The era of the common man



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The Era of the Common Man The Jacksonian period from 1824 to 1848 began a new era of change and growth, which is celebrated as the era of the common man. For the first time in American history, a man born in the west, considered part of the common people, was elected president. Andrew Jackson's election showed that politics didn't have to be about where someone came from, but rather focus on the greater good of the commoners of the United States. Jackson represented a usual citizen; therefore, his presidency is known as the era of the common man. This title is reflected in the political parties, economic developments, and the domestic issues of the Jacksonian period, all of which were greatly affected during this time period. During this time, the political parties changed in favor of the common people.

New political parties began to emerge and they had to begin to appeal to the people. Because of this, the candidate for presidency was often portrayed as a rough-hewn frontiersman and a stalwart champion of the common man (275). The controversial election of 1824 between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson involved the corrupt bargain between John Q. Adams and Henry Clay and thus was a catalyst for the change in political parties. The corrupt bargain was a name given to the way Henry Clay helped get Adams elected and then Adams made Clay the Secretary of State. Ironically, though Jackson violently slandered Adams for his use of the corrupt bargain, the spoils system became popular during Jackson's presidency. Although portrayed as a negative in most situations, the spoils system was an important element of the emerging two-party order, cementing as it did loyalty to [a particular party] (280). It

was actually important because those that supported Jackson were given political positions.

Considering he was a commoner himself, this means that a lot of his followers were given political positions. Though corrupt, he opened the door for more people. Many saw Jackson's presidency as tyrannical; therefore, the anti-Jacksonians joined Henry Clay in a new political party "the Whigs. Unlike Jackson, the Whigs favored a renewed national bank, a protective tariff, and internal reforms. Supporters of Jackson became known as the Democrats, who clung to state and individual rights and federal restraint in social and economic affairs. The birth of the Whig party and the development of the Democrat party opened a broader world for the common man, and gave him the opportunity to stand up and speak about issues and problems.

In the beginning of the new government, democracy was looked upon as wrong and unrespectable; however, as the tide of power began to shift from aristocracy to the common man, democracy became more important. As the land requirements for voting were taken away, more of the common men were able to vote and were able to take an active role in helping their government. While the American political party system was evolving, the economy was faced with hardships. The issues that affected most Americans were those of the Bank of the United States and the country's economic depression. When the charter of the bank was ready to expire, Henry Clay proposed re-chartering the bank in his American System to provide economical stability. Jackson vetoed the bill because he believed that the bank was unconstitutional and favored the wealthy. Before the charter of the Bank expired in 1836, Jackson removed all federal funds from

the Bank of the United States, even though the Constitution did not give the president the power to do this.

This crippled the remaining power of the dying bank. Although the money-interested East did not agree with his decision, ???[it] made perfect sense to the common people??? (288). The common people realized that the bank only helped a select few of the wealthier class. However, Jackson failed to see that the Bank of the United States was ??? a source of credit and stability??? that was an ??? important and useful part of the nation??™s growing economy??? (286.) Nicholas Biddle reacted to this by calling in his bank loans and causing a mini financial panic because the pet and wildcat banks where the federal money was moved to were very unreliable. Jackson moved the federal funds to these pet banks so that they will begin to flourish. Common men, not wealthy landowners who had controlled the banks prior to Jackson, ran these pet banks, and Jackson wanted to give the common men the opportunity to prosper.

However, the sectionalism intensified and these hardships helped the economy develop. While the government of the United States had faced domestic issues before, the problems during the Jacksonian period were mainly based on the fading nationalism and threats of secession. The conflicts and controversial protective tariffs brought the fading nationalism to the surface. In South Carolina, the Tariff of 1828, there referred to as the Tariff of Abominations, caused an angry outburst of protest.

After the War of 1812, Britain was dumping its goods on America for cheap prices and the North industry was growing weak. Jackson had proposed the

tariff to protect the United States industry, mainly the North. However, the southern common man was very dependent on the system of imports and exports. Without the export of all the goods they grew, the South grew weak as the North prospered with the tariff. The South Carolina Exposition, written by John Calhoun, current vice president of the time, declared that the states should nullify the tariff, which led to a threat of secession from South Carolina. The secession was easily put down, but South Carolina's threat showed the lack of nationalism.

Tariff hurt the southern commoner, while northern commoners in industries began to benefit. These became a further dividing line for future tensions. Despite Jackson's attempt to protect the nation, the tariff divided the United States into the North and South and the domestic issues divided the nation. The common man was mostly forgotten in society prior to Andrew Jackson's election.

The Jacksonian period symbolized a shift in America from the wealthy aristocrats to the common man. Andrew Jackson did not fit the mold of the previous presidents: educated, wealthy, and born from a strong family, such as the Adams and Jeffersons. Jackson was an orphan who was only able to rise to power by pure hard work.

He represented hope for the common people of a better life. Known as the era of the common man, the Jacksonian period from 1824 to 1848 caused big changes in the political parties, economic development, and domestic issues and set the stage for more revolution, such as the Civil War.