Was the Age of Jackson democratic?

The Age of Jackson has never been easy to define. Broader than his presidency (1829–1837), and narrower than his life (1767–1845), it roughly describes the third, fourth, and fifth decades of the nineteenth century. While some historians have attempted to define this era as the Age of Reform, or Democracy, or the Market Revolution, no name has ever conveyed more of the era’s energy, upward aspiration, and general restlessness than that of Jackson himself. If his election in 1828 launched the Age of Jackson, and terminated the so-called Era of Good Feelings, then his death in 1845 and the Mexican War that immediately followed it (1846–1848) might be considered the era’s close. By 1850, the crisis over slavery began to dominate almost every aspect of political discourse, leading to the unraveling of the great Democratic coalition forged by Jackson.

The twenty-two years between 1828 and 1850 are brief, but there is nothing small about the significance of Jackson’s era. It was a time of tremendous growth, as measured by any index of population, wealth, or economic productivity. The American experiment in democracy recalibrated itself in important ways, including enlarged suffrage and a strengthened presidency. The geographic center of the United States shifted dramatically to the west, as Americans poured across the Appalachians, as Jackson himself had done, and built new lives in the Ohio and Mississippi valleys. In nearly every category, Americans began to act out Ralph Waldo Emerson’s popular phrase, “self-reliance.” One group that had been confined to the margins of power, landless white male voters, saw their status rise during the Age of Jackson. Others—white women in particular—clarified their desire for greater power, although they did not achieve it until the following century. And others still—African Americans and American Indians—were generally and often forcefully excluded from any form of citizenship. In other words, it was an era of quite sharp ambition, and marked contrasts, resulting in real progress for millions of middling male Americans, and a rising level of frustration for those who saw no progress at all.
How Democratic Was Andrew Jackson?

Andrew Jackson may have been the most popular president in the history of the United States. Although he had his enemies during his two terms (1829-1837), many Americans at the time thought he could do no wrong. He was so popular that he was still getting votes for the presidency fifteen years after he died!

Historians connect Jackson to a new spirit of democracy that swept over the United States during the early 1800s. This era of the “common man” marked a new stage for American democracy where average people began to have a say in the workings of their government.

There is no question Jackson saw himself as the President of the People. But just how democratic was he? Before examining this question, it is important to review the early life of this most remarkable American.

Boyhood

Born on the border between North and South Carolina in 1767, Jackson grew up poor. His father died a few days before his birth, and Andrew was not an easy child for his mother to raise. He enlisted in the Revolutionary War at age 13, was captured and seriously wounded by a British officer. Typical of Jackson throughout his life, he had refused to take a demeaning order and was slashed with a sword. Because of a prisoner exchange, Jackson managed to survive his wounds. Sadly, his mother died shortly after he returned home, and young Andrew was left to confront the world on his own.

Jackson was a tough kid with a wild streak that ran deep. He never backed away from a fight – not even as a 75-year-old man – and left a trail of card games, busted-up taverns, liquor bottles, and bloody noses in his wake. A favorite trick of Andrew and his buddies was to drag away family outhouses and hide them in remote places.

At age 17 Jackson’s self-discipline improved, and he began his study of the law. At 21 he became a public prosecutor on the North Carolina frontier. Jackson soon moved west to Tennessee, married his wife for life, Rachel Donelson, and got involved in land speculation, farming, and slave ownership. At age 29 Jackson was elected Tennessee’s first representative in the U.S. House of Representatives and a year later was elected to the U.S. Senate.

Military Career

It was not, however, Andrew Jackson’s early political career that would make him an American hero; it was war. Andrew Jackson was born to be a soldier. His first successes came when he led a campaign of Tennessee volunteers against the Creek Indians in Alabama in 1813 and 1814. A year later he commanded American forces in the defense of New Orleans against the British. Jackson unknowingly took a huge step towards the presidency when he held off a
British attack on January 8, 1815. The results of the battle were staggering – 71 American casualties versus 2,037 British soldiers killed, wounded, or missing. It did not matter to the American people that a peace treaty had already been agreed upon in Europe (news traveled slowly in 1815). Jackson instantly became a national hero.

Jackson won American hearts not just because he won battles. Jackson never asked his men to endure more than he endured. During a bad patch of the Creek War, he ate acorns and cattle offal with his soldiers. He mailed home bone splinters to Rachel that occasionally pushed up through the skin in his arm. He carried a bullet next to his heart from a nearly fatal duel over the honor of his wife. For the last 25 years of Jackson’s life, including his eight years in the White House, he lived in nearly constant pain, but he never stopped. Known affectionately as Old Hickory, Andrew Jackson was tough and unbreakable.

Jackson spent much of the time between 1815 and 1820 removing the Spanish from Florida and negotiating treaties with the Five "Civilized" Indian Tribes – the Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, Choctaws, and Seminoles. His treatment of the Indians is one subject of this DBQ.

Presidential Politics

In 1824, Jackson made his first run for President of the United States. The vote was split four ways – 158,000 popular votes for Jackson, 114,000 for John Quincy Adams, 47,217 for Henry Clay, and 46,979 for William Crawford. In presidential elections, however, the popular vote does not determine the winner. A winning candidate needs a majority of the electoral votes, and Jackson, while ahead in the popular vote, fell short. The electoral tally was Jackson 99, Adams 84, Crawford 41, and Clay 37.

What happened next was to have a huge effect on Jackson and his thinking for the next 20 years. According to the 12th Amendment, when no candidate for the presidency receives a majority of the electoral votes, the House of Representatives elects the president from the top three vote-getters. This left Clay out of the running but not without great influence. In a deal that Jackson supporters forever branded “the corrupt bargain,” Clay traded his support and 37 electoral votes to Adams for Clay’s appointment as the Secretary of State. Jackson raged that the People’s voice had been silenced. He had been the choice of the largest number of voters, and he was being sent back home to Tennessee. Was this democracy?!

Andrew Jackson spent much of the next four years preparing for the election of 1828. His mantra was that the voice of the People must be heard. The electoral system and Henry Clay had cost him the presidency. He, Andrew Jackson, would create a new era of real democracy in
Jackson was elected President in 1828 and again in 1832. How well he listened to the People and did their will is left for you to decide.

**Ideas About Democracy**

The focus question of this DBQ is “How democratic was Andrew Jackson?” A few words about Jackson’s understanding of democracy are in order. Jackson and others of his time distinguished between something called **republicanism** and **democracy**. Republicanism might be thought of as cautious democracy. This idea placed an elite group of men – mostly lawyers, merchants, and wealthy farmers – between the common man and power. The **electoral system** is a good example of republicanism. The people vote for electors and electors vote for the president. The Founding Fathers created this system so that the electors could change an unwise choice by the common voter. Election to the US Senate before 1913 was another example of republicanism. The people in a given state voted for state legislators; then the state legislators elected the two members of that state to the US Senate. For Andrew Jackson, this was not democracy. To Jackson, democracy meant that all branches and agencies of the government – the President, the Congress, the National Bank, even the Supreme Court – must listen to and follow the wishes of the People. Of course, Jackson, like most men of his times, had certain ideas about who were included in the People, and enemies of Jackson claimed he behaved more like an autocrat, or a king, than a democratically elected president.

Following are 15 documents that touch on some of the key issues Jackson faced during his life and his presidency. This DBQ asks you to make a judgment about Jackson’s commitment to democracy: *How democratic was Andrew Jackson?*
Treasury Roger Taney, he transferred the funds to various state banks, which Jackson's critics called "pet banks."

**Specie Circular.** As a result of both Jackson's financial policies and feverish speculation in western lands, prices for land and various goods became badly inflated. Jackson hoped to check the inflationary trend by issuing a presidential order known as the Specie Circular. It required that all future purchases of federal lands be made in gold and silver rather than in paper banknotes. Soon afterward, as banknotes lost their value and land sales plummeted, a financial crisis—the Panic of 1837—plunged the nation's economy into a depression.

**The Election of 1836**

Following the two-term tradition set by his predecessors, Jackson decided not to seek a third term. To make sure his policies were carried out even in his retirement, Jackson persuaded the Democratic party to nominate his loyal vice president, Martin Van Buren, who was a master of practical politics.

Fearing defeat, the Whig party adopted the unusual strategy of nominating three candidates from three different regions. In doing so, the Whigs hoped to throw the election into the House of Representatives, where each state had one vote in the selection of the president. The Whig strategy failed, however, as Van Buren took 58 percent of the electoral vote.

**President Van Buren and the Panic of 1837**

Just as Van Buren took office, the country suffered a financial panic as one bank after another closed its doors. Jackson's opposition to the rechartering of the Bank of the United States was only one of many causes of the panic and resulting economic depression. But the Whigs were quick to blame the Democrats for their laissez-faire economics, which allowed for little federal involvement in the economy.

**The "Log Cabin and Hard Cider" Campaign of 1840**

In the election of 1840, the Whigs were in a strong position to defeat Van Buren and the Jacksonian Democrats. Voters were unhappy with the bad state of the economy. In addition, the Whigs were better organized than the Democrats, and also had a popular war hero, William Henry "Tippecanoe" Harrison, as their presidential candidate. The Whigs took campaign hoopla to new heights. To symbolize Harrison's humble origins, they put log cabins on wheels and paraded them down the streets of cities and towns. They also passed out hard cider for voters to drink and buttons and hats to wear. Name-calling as a propaganda device also marked the 1840 campaign. The Whigs attacked "Martin Van Ruin" as an aristocrat with a taste for foreign wines.

A remarkable 78 percent of eligible voters (white males) turned out on election day to cast their ballots. The popular vote was almost evenly divided between Harrison and Van Buren. But in the electoral college, "Tippecanoe" and John Tyler of Virginia, a former states' rights Democrat, swept most of the states in all three geographic sections—North, South, and West. Their victory established the Whigs as a true national party.

Unfortunately, the 67-year-old president's health was not strong. Less than one month after taking office, Harrison died of pneumonia, leaving the less popular John Tyler to carry on in his place. With Harrison's election and sudden death, the Jacksonian era was in its last stages, but Jackson's political legacy was to continue for decades afterward.

**HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY**

Historians still debate whether or not the election of Jackson in 1828 marked a revolutionary new turn in American politics or was merely an extension of an ongoing trend. The traditional view is that Jackson's election began the era of the common man, when the masses of newly enfranchised voters drove out the entrenched ruling class and elected one of their own. The Revolution of 1828 has also been characterized as a victory of the democratic West against the aristocratic East.

Nineteenth-century Whig historians, on the other hand, viewed Jackson as a despot whose appeal to the uneducated masses and "corrupt" spoils system threatened the republic.

In the 1940s, the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. argued that Jacksonian democracy relied as much on the support of eastern urban workers as on western farmers. Jackson's coalition of farmers and workers foreshadowed a similar coalition that brought another Democratic president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, to power in the depression decade of the 1930s.

Contemporary historians have used quantitative analysis of voting returns to compare elections before, during, and after Jackson's presidency. This analysis showed that increased voter participation was evident in local elections years before 1828 and did not reach a peak until the election of 1840, an election that the Whig party won. Strong links were discovered between voting behavior and the voters' religious and ethnic backgrounds. For example, Catholic immigrants objected to the imposition of the Puritan moral code (e.g., temperance) by the native Protestants. Much of the increased participation in the election process had little to do with the election of 1828 or Jackson's politics.

Other contemporary historians see Jackson's popularity in the 1830s as a reaction of subsistence farmers and urban workers against powerful and threatening forces of economic change. A capitalist,
or market, economy was rapidly taking shape in the early years of the 19th century. This market revolution divided the electorate. Some people (chiefly Whigs) welcomed the changes as the hope for enter-
prising and disciplined men. Others (chiefly Jacksonian Democrats) viewed the wealth of successful capitalists and entrepreneurs as a threat to Jefferson’s vision of a nation of independent farmers. Those who were most uncomfortable with economic change rallied around Jackson. Why was Jackson’s veto of the bank such a key event? Some contemporary historians, such as Charles Selzer (The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1992), see Jackson’s popularity as expressing people’s unspoken fears about the rise of capitalism.

**KEY NAMES, EVENTS, AND TERMS**

- common man
- universal male suffrage
- party nominating convention “King Caucus”
- popular election of president
- Anti-Masonic party
- Workingmen’s party
- spoils system
- John Quincy Adams “corrupt bargain”
- Henry Clay
- Tariff of 1828; “tariff of abominations”
- Andrew Jackson

- popular campaigning
- Revolution of 1828
- role of the president
- rotation in office
- Peggy Eaton affair
- Indian Removal Act (1830)
- Cherokee Nation v. Georgia
- Worcester v. Georgia
- trail of tears
- states’ rights
- nullification crisis
- Webster-Hayne debate
- John C. Calhoun

- Proclamation to the People of South Carolina
- Bank of the United States
- Nicholas Biddle
- two-party system: Democrats; Whigs
- Roger Taney
- “pet banks”
- Specie Circular
- Panic of 1837
- Martin van Buren
- “log cabin and hard cider” campaign

**MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. Jacksonian Democrats favored all of the following EXCEPT
   (A) rotation in office
   (B) universal suffrage for white males
   (C) the caucus system of nominating candidates
   (D) rewarding political supporters with government jobs
   (E) presidential electors being chosen by popular vote

2. After the election of 1824, the president’s choice of Henry Clay as secretary of state resulted in
   (A) the end of political bitterness between the major parties
   (B) the revival of the Federalist party
   (C) widespread criticism of the spoils system
   (D) charges of a corrupt bargain with John Q. Adams

3. An important effect of the tariff of abominations of 1828 was
   (A) increased prices for cotton overseas
   (B) South Carolina’s adoption of the theory of nullification
   (C) the election of a Democratic president, Andrew Jackson
   (D) an alliance of northeastern workers and western farmers
   (E) the growth of manufacturing in the South

4. The Revolution of 1828 revealed that political power was
   (A) shifting to the western states
   (B) shifting to the southern states
   (C) entrenched on the eastern seaboard
   (D) gravitating toward conservative elements
   (E) evenly divided between Whigs and Democrats

5. Which of the following documents would be most useful in evaluating President Jackson’s commitment to democratic values?
   (A) the Specie Circular
   (B) veto message on the rechartering of the Second Bank of the United States
   (C) congressional hearings on the “corrupt bargain”
   (D) Supreme Court cases on the Indian-rexemoval issue
   (E) Calhoun’s writings on nullification

6. In the 1830s, the factor that most directly promoted the development of a two-party system was
   (A) the growth of the immigrant population
   (B) increased interest in foreign affairs
   (C) changes in methods of nominating and electing the president
   (D) increasing sectional conflict between northern and southern states over the tariff issue
   (E) the dropping of constitutional limitations on the party system

7. “The duties of all public officers are, or at least admit of being made, so plain and simple that more is lost by the long continuance of men in office than is generally to be gained by their experience.”
   This statement best reflects the views of
   (A) John C. Calhoun
   (B) Daniel Webster
   (C) John Q. Adams
   (D) Andrew Jackson
   (E) Henry Clay

8. The main issue in the presidential campaign of 1832 was
   (A) the recharter of the Bank of the United States
   (B) the removal of Native Americans from eastern states
   (C) the use of federal funds for internal improvements
   (D) the cost of western lands sold by the government
   (E) the nullification of the “tariff of abominations”
Methods of Electing Presidential Electors: 1816 to 1836

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1816</th>
<th>1820</th>
<th>1824</th>
<th>1828</th>
<th>1832</th>
<th>1836</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Massachusets</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Carolina</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Document B


...(T)he concept of a political revolution in 1828 is not completely farfetched. The increased turnout of voters proved that the common people, especially in the universal-white-manhood suffrage states, now had the vote and the will to use it for their ends....

So in a broader sense the election was a “revolution” comparable to that of 1800. It was a peaceful revolution, achieved by ballots instead of bullets.... “Shall the people rule?” cried the Jacksonians. The answering roar seemed to say, “The people shall rule!” In the struggle between the poorer masses and the entrenched classes, the homespun folk scored a resounding triumph, befuddling some members of the elite establishment. “I never saw anything like it,” a puzzled Daniel Webster mused about Jackson’s inaugural. “Persons have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson, and they really think that the country is rescued from some dreadful danger.”

America hitherto had been ruled by an elite of brains and wealth, whether aristocratic Federalist shippers or aristocratic Jeffersonian planters. Jackson’s victory accelerated the transfer of national power from the country house to the farmhouse, from the East to the West, from the snobs to the mobs. If Jefferson had been the hero of the gentleman farmer, Jackson was the hero of the dirt farmer. The plowholders were now ready to take over the government: their government.
Document C

Hermitage, August 27th, 1822

Dr. Bronough,

I had the pleasure on last evening to receive your letter of the 22nd. It affords me great pleasure to be informed of your flattering prospects of success on your election...[as Florida Territory’s first delegate to the House of Representatives]....

If the soldiers should be admitted to vote you are safe, the army will stick by you.... Under existing circumstances, it would be impolitic & unjust to make a property qualification. Residence alone, in justice to all, should be required. This is the only rule that can be established until your land titles are adjudicated, and your vacant land...brought onto the market.... Then in your constitution you can adopt such qualifications as you may think proper for the happiness, security, & prosperity of the state. Until then all freemen of six months residence should be entitled to a vote....

Andrew Jackson

Document D

...(T)he General’s views on office holding became even more democratic as he grew older. He proceeded from the (idea) that all offices – whether appointed or elected – must ultimately fall under the absolute control of the people. Appointed offices should be rotated, preferably every four years. Elected offices must be filled directly by the people. In keeping with this principle, Jackson tried to abolish the College of Electors in the selection of the chief executive by proposing a constitutional amendment. In addition, he said, the President should serve a single term of no more than four or six years.... Moreover, he believed that United States senators should be directly elected by the people. Also, their term should be limited to four years and they should be subject to removal.
BORN TO COMMAND.

OF VETO MEMORY.

CONSTITUTION
OF THE
UNITED STATES.

HAD I BEEN CONSULTED.

KING ANDREW THE FIRST.

Note: Cartoon appeared in the presidential election of 1832.
**Document F**


**Andrew Jackson’s Bank Veto Message to Congress**  
**July 10, 1832**

I sincerely regret that in the act before me I can perceive none of those modifications of the bank charter which are necessary, in my opinion, to make it compatible with justice, with sound policy, or with the Constitution of our country. The present Bank of the United States...enjoys an exclusive privilege of banking,... almost a monopoly of the foreign and domestic exchange.

It appears that more than a fourth part of the stock is held by foreigners and the (rest) is held by a few hundred of our own citizens, chiefly of the richest class.

Of the twenty-five directors of this bank five are chosen by the Government and twenty by the citizen stockholders.... It is easy to conceive that great evils to our country...might flow from such a concentration of power in the hands of a few men irresponsible to the people.

Is there no danger to our liberty and independence in a bank that in its nature has so little to bind it to our country?

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes.

**Document G**

Source: Daniel Webster, July 11, 1832.

**Daniel Webster’s Reply to Jackson’s Bank Veto Message**  
**July 11, 1832**

(President Jackson’s message) extends the grasp of (the chief executive) over every power of the government.... It sows...the seeds of jealousy and ill-will against the 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 manifestly seeks to inflame the poor against the rich, it wantonly attacks whole classes of the people, for the purposes of turning against them the prejudices and resentments of the other classes.
Document H

Andrew Jackson's Letter To Congress
December 8, 1829

The duties of all public officers are... so plain and simple that men of intelligence may readily qualify themselves for their performance; and I... believe that more is lost by the long continuance of men in office than is generally to be gained by their experience. I submit, therefore, to your consideration whether the efficiency of the government would not be promoted... and integrity better secured by a general extension of the law which limits appointments to four years. In a country where offices are created solely for the benefit of the people, no one man has any more... right to official station than another. Offices were not established to give support to particular men at the public expense. No individual wrong is, therefore, done by removal, since neither appointment to nor continuance in office is a matter of right.

Document I

One bit of advice (Secretary of State) Van Buren offered (Jackson) concerned the appointment of the collector of the Port of New York. This was a very sensitive and important position. Some $15 million annually passed through the collector's hands. If any post needed a man of the highest integrity it was this one. And when Van Buren learned that Jackson intended to appoint Samuel Swartwout to the office he almost collapsed. Not only did Swartwout have criminal tendencies but the Regency detested him. Van Buren alerted the President immediately and warned him that Swartwout's appointment would "not be in accordance with public sentiment, the interest of the Country or the credit of the administration." Unfortunately, Jackson refused to listen. He liked Swartwout because he had been an early supporter—unlike Van Buren—and so he went ahead with the appointment. In time, of course, Swartwout absconded with $1,222,705.09. It was a monumental theft... Jackson was mortified.

When the scandal broke, Jackson's opponents doubled over with laughter. All the talk about rooting out corruption in government, they said, and here the greatest theft in the history of the Republic occurred in the General's own administration.... Here, then, was the bitter fruit of rotation, hooted the President's critics. Here the dreadful consequence of denying the government the service of an elite bureaucracy in order to serve some idealistic democratic principle.
Andrew Jackson’s Message to Congress
December 7, 1829

The condition and destiny of the Indian tribes within the limits of some of our states have become objects of much interest and importance. By persuasion and force they have been made to retire from river to river and from mountain to mountain, until some of the tribes have become extinct and others have left but remnants. Surrounded by the whites with their arts of civilization, which, by destroying the resources of the savage, doom him to weakness and decay, the fate of the Mohegan...is fast overcoming the Choctaw, the Cherokee, and the Creek. Humanity and national honor demand that every effort should be made to avert so great a calamity.

...I suggest for your consideration...setting apart an ample district west of the Mississippi, and (outside) the limits of any state or territory now formed, to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes as long as they shall occupy it, each tribe having a distinct control over the portion designated for its use. This emigration should be voluntary, for it would be as cruel as unjust to compel the aborigines to abandon the graves of their fathers and seek a home in a distant land. But they should be distinctly informed that if they remain within the limits of the states they must be subject to their laws.

Document K

Source: “Memorial of the Cherokee Nation,” as reprinted in Niles Weekly Register, August 21, 1830.

We wish to remain on the land of our fathers. We have a perfect and original right to remain without interruption or molestation. But if we are compelled to leave our country, we see nothing but ruin before us. The country west of the Arkansas territory is unknown to us. The far greater part of that region is, beyond all controversy, badly supplied with food and water; and no Indian tribe can live as agriculturalists without these articles. All our neighbors would speak a language totally different from ours, and practice different customs. It contains neither the scenes of our childhood, nor the graves of our fathers.

Shall we be compelled by a civilized and Christian people, with whom we have lived in perfect peace for the last forty years, and for whom we have willingly bled in war, to bid adieu to our homes, our farms, our streams and our beautiful forests? No. We are still firm. Our consciences bear us witness that we are the invaders of no man’s rights – we have robbed no man of his territory – we have usurped no man’s authority, nor have we deprived any one of his unalienable privileges. How then shall we indirectly confess the right of another people to our land by leaving it forever? On the soil which contains the ashes of our beloved men we wish to live – on this soil we wish to die.
Document L

Source: Map created from various sources.

INDIAN REMOVAL, 1831-1840s

Document M

Source: John Spencer Bassett (ed.), Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, 1931.
Reprinted by permission of the Carnegie Institution of Washington.

Excerpts of letters written by Andrew Jackson to his wife Rachel regarding their Creek Indian son, Lyncoya, adopted after the battle of Tallasatchie, November 13, 1813

December 19, 1813
He is the only branch of his family left, and the others when offered to them to take care of would have nothing to do with him but wanted him to be killed.... Charity and Christianity says he ought to be taken care of and I send him to my little Andrew and I hope he will adopt him as one of our family.

December 28, 1823
Tell Lyncoya to read his book and be a good boy and obey you in all things.

Note: Lyncoya died at age 14 of tuberculosis in 1827 and was buried in the family cemetery.
Through a mistaken policy you have heretofore been deprived of a participation in the glorious struggle for national rights, in which our country is engaged. This shall no longer exist....

To every noblehearted free man of color, volunteering to serve in the present contest with Great Britain and no longer, there will be paid the same bounty in money and lands now received by the white soldiers of the United States, viz. $124 in money, and 160 acres of land. The non-commissioned officers and privates will also be entitled to the same monthly pay and daily rations and clothes furnished to any American soldier.

On enrolling yourselves in companies, the major general commanding will select officers for your government, from your fellow white citizens. Your non-commissioned officers will be appointed from among yourselves.

Due regard will be paid to the feelings of freemen and soldiers. You will not, by being associated with white men in the same corps, be exposed to improper comparisons or unjust sarcasm. As a distinct, independent battalion or regiment, pursuing the path of glory, you will, undivided, receive the applause and gratitude of your countrymen.
The Age of Jackson, 1824–1840

racy was a powerful, sometimes radical, egalitarian movement that transformed American politics and provided the foundation of later reforms.

The first principle of Jacksonian democracy was majority rule, which at the time included only white male voters. If it had a second principle, it was that a popularly elected president was the only true representative of the people of the United States. The following readings illustrate both the strengths and weaknesses of majority rule and a strong popular presidency. Is majority rule the ultimate value of the democratic process?

DOCUMENTA. DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA

Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States extensively in 1831–1832 to study American prison reform for the French government, but his subject ultimately became the new democratic political and social order that was developing in the United States. Once back in France, this reflective and curious young aristocrat published what turned out to be a masterful analysis of democracy and the United States, Democracy in America. Tocqueville found the United States during the Jacksonian era an excellent laboratory in which to study both the strengths and weaknesses of democracy.

It is incontestable that the people frequently conduct the public business very badly; but it is impossible that the lower orders should take a part in public business without extending the circle of their ideas and quitting the ordinary routine of their thought. The humblest individual who co-operates in the government of society acquires a certain degree of self-respect.

When the opponents of democracy assert that a single man performs what he undertakes better than the government of all, it appears to me that they are right. . . . Democratic liberty is far from accomplishing all it projects with the skill of an adroit despotism. It frequently abandons them before they have borne their fruits, or risks them when the consequences may be dangerous; but in the end it produces more than any absolute government; if it does fewer things well, it does a greater number of things. . . . Democracy does not give people the most skillful government, but it produces what the ablest governments are frequently unable to create: namely, an all-pervading and restless activity.

We must first understand what is wanted of society and its government. Is it your object to refine the habits, embellish the manners, and cultivate the arts, to promote the love of poetry, beauty, and glory? Would you constitute a people fitted to act powerfully upon all other nations, and prepared for those high enterprises which, whatever be their results, will leave a name forever famous in history?
If you believe such to be the principal object of society, avoid democracy, for it would not lead you with certainty to the goal.

But if you hold it expedient to divert the moral and intellectual activity of man from production of comfort and promotion of general well-being; if a clear understanding be more profitable to man than genius, if your object is not to stimulate the virtues of heroism, but the habits of peace, if you had rather witness vices than crimes . . . if, instead of living in the midst of a brilliant society, you are contented to have prosperity around you; if, in short, you are of the opinion that the principal object of a government is not to confer the greatest possible powers and glory upon the body of the nation, but to ensure the greatest enjoyment and to avoid the misery to each of the individuals who compose it—if such be your desire, then equalize the conditions of men and establish democratic institutions.

_Alexis de Tocqueville,
_Democracy in America, 1835_

**DOCUMENT B. THE NULLIFICATION ISSUE**

Was democratic government, as understood by Andrew Jackson, compatible with southerners’ ideas about the nature of the federal Union? In 1828 and 1832, South Carolina answered that question in the negative when it declared the tariffs voted by Congress to be null and void. Jackson’s vice president, John C. Calhoun of South Carolina, presented the theory that the United States was nothing more or less than a loose compact of states and that a state could decide to nullify, or ignore, any federal law that wrongly injured the state’s interests and rights. In 1832, a South Carolina convention adopted Calhoun’s ideas and defended the doctrine of nullification in the following terms:

_We hold, then, that on their separation from the Crown of Great Britain, the several colonies became free and independent States, each enjoying the separate and independent right of self-government; and that no authority can be exercised over them or within their limits, but by their consent, respectively given as States. It is equally true, that the Constitution of the United States is a compact formed between the several States, acting as sovereign communities; that the government created by it is a joint agency of the States, appointed to execute the powers enumerated and granted by that instrument; that all its acts not intentionally authorized are of themselves essentially null and void, and that the States have the right, in the same sovereign capacity in which they adopted the Federal Constitution, to pronounce, in the last resort, authoritative judgment on the usurpations of the Federal Government, and to adopt such measures as they may deem necessary and expedient to arrest the operation of the unconstitutional acts of the Government, within their respective limits. Such we deem to be inherent rights of the States; rights, in the very nature of things, absolutely inseparable from sovereignty._

—“Address to the People of the United States” (November 1832), in _Statutes at Large of South Carolina_ 1896

**DOCUMENT C. REMOVAL OF NATIVE AMERICANS FROM TREATY LANDS**

In 1831, Edward Everett, a young representative from Massachusetts (later to become president of Harvard College), delivered a speech in the House attacking Jackson’s policy on the removal of Native Americans. The following is an excerpt from Everett’s speech.

_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. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth cannot be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law._

_But when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society—the farmers, mechanics, and laborers—who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustices of their government._

_There are no necessary evils in government. Its evils exist only in its abuses. If it would confine itself to equal protection, and, as heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike on the high and the low, the rich and the poor, it would be an unqualified blessing. In the act before me there seems to be a wide and unnecessary departure from these just principles._

_Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1896_
I cannot disguise my impression that it [the annulment of the Indian treaties] is the greatest question which ever came before Congress, short of the question of peace and war. It concerns not an individual, but entire communities of men, whose fate is wholly in our hands. . . .

Sir, the Secretary [of War] says a new era has arisen in Indian affairs. This is true. Up to the year 1828, the course of proceeding in our Indian affairs is well known, at least in reference to all the tribes whose rights are now in controversy. The United States had negotiated treaties with all the Southwestern tribes. Our relations with them, and the boundary between them and us, were regulated by treaty; . . . No State had pretended to extend her laws over either of these tribes till the year 1828. . . .

Georgia led the way. In 1828, she passed a summary law, to take effect prospectively [at some later time], extending her jurisdiction. . . . over the Indian tribes within her limits. In 1829, this law, with more specific provisions, was re-enacted, to take effect on the 1st day of June, 1830. This example of Georgia was imitated by Alabama and Mississippi. By these State laws, the organization previously existing in the Indian tribes was declared unlawful, and was annulled. . . . The political existence of these communities was accordingly dissolved, and their members declared citizens or subjects of the States. . . .

The Indians, as was natural, looked to the Government of the United States for protection. It was the quarter whence they had a right to expect it—where, as I think, they ought to have found it. They asked to be protected in the rights and possessions guaranteed to them by numerous treaties, and demanded the execution, in their favor, of the laws of the United States governing the intercourse of our citizens with the Indian tribes. They came first to the President, deeming, and rightly, that it was his duty to afford them this protection. They knew . . . he had but one constitutional duty to perform toward the treaties and laws—the duty of executing them. The President refused to afford the protection demanded. He informed them that he had no power, in his view of the rights of the States, to prevent their extending their laws over the Indians. . . .

_Congressional Debates,_
21st Congress, 2nd Session
(February 14, 1831)

---

The Age of Jackson, 1824–1840

ANALYZING THE DOCUMENTS

1. What did Tocqueville consider the advantages and the disadvantages of American democracy?
2. According to the compact theory of John Calhoun, why was it legitimate for a state to nullify a federal law?
3. Why did President Jackson oppose the recharter of the Bank of the United States?
4. Why did Everett think that three states and President Jackson violated the rights of the Native American tribes?
5. Andrew Jackson and his supporters have been criticized for upholding the principles of majority rule and the supremacy of the federal government inconsistently and unfairly. Assess the validity of this criticism in the cases of the recharter of the Bank, the nullification controversy, and the removal of Native Americans.