

Unit 14: Andrew Jackson and the Growth of American Democracy

1. Introduction



The Granger Collection, NYC

Men line up to vote in the presidential election of 1828.

The presidential campaign of 1828 was one of the dirtiest in U.S. history. The two candidates were John Quincy Adams, running for reelection, and Andrew Jackson, the popular hero of the War of 1812's Battle of New Orleans.



The Granger Collection, NYC

Jackson, at the upper left, greets his supporters after winning the presidency in the election of 1828.

During the campaign, both sides hurled accusations at each other, a practice called mudslinging. Adams, for example, was called a “Sabbath-breaker” for traveling on Sunday. He was accused of using public money to purchase “gambling furniture” for the White House. In reality, he had used his own money to buy a billiard table.

The president’s supporters lashed back. They called Jackson a crude and **ignorant [ignorant: lacking knowledge]** man who was unfit to be president. They also brought up old scandals about his wife. Jackson was called “Old Hickory” by his troops because he was as tough as “the hardest wood in all creation.” But when he read such lies, he broke down and cried.

When the votes were counted, Jackson was the clear winner. But his supporters came from among the general population, not the rich and upper class. In this chapter, you will discover how his presidency was viewed by different groups of people. You will also learn how Jackson’s government affected the growth of democracy in the nation.

2. From the Frontier to the White House



imac / Alamy

Andrew Jackson was born on the South Carolina frontier. In the early 1800s, he moved to Tennessee and bought a plantation called the Hermitage. His first home there was a log cabin similar to this one.

Andrew Jackson was born in 1767, on the South Carolina frontier. His father died before he was born, leaving the family in poverty. Young Jackson loved sports more than schoolwork. He also had a hot temper. A friend recalled that he would pick a fight at the drop of a hat, and “he’d drop the hat himself.”

The American Revolution ended Jackson’s childhood. When he was just 13, Jackson joined the local militia and was captured by the British. One day, a British officer ordered Jackson to polish

his boots. “Sir,” he replied boldly, “I am a prisoner of war, and claim [demand] to be treated as such.” The outraged officer lashed out with his sword, slicing the boy’s head and hand. Jackson carried these scars for the rest of his life.

Frontier Lawyer

After the war, Jackson decided to become a lawyer. He went to work in a law office in North Carolina. He quickly became known as “the most roaring, rollicking, game-cocking, horse-racing, card-playing, mischievous fellow” in town.

In 1788, Jackson headed west to Nashville, Tennessee, to practice law. At that time, Nashville was a tiny frontier settlement of rough cabins and tents. But the town grew quickly, and Jackson’s practice grew with it. He soon earned enough money to buy land and slaves and set himself up as a gentleman farmer.

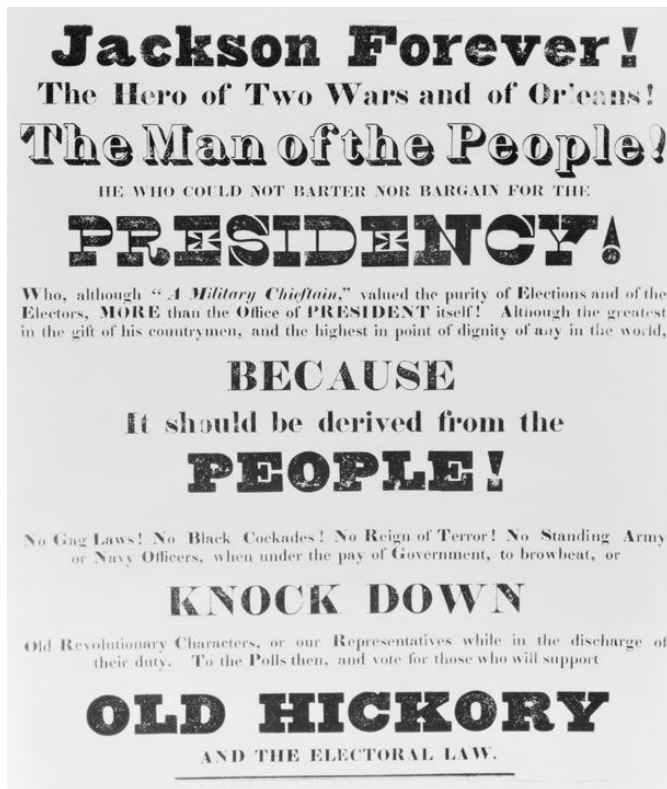
Despite his success, Jackson never outgrew his hot temper. A slave trader named Charles Dickinson found this out when he called Jackson “a worthless scoundrel.” Enraged, Jackson challenged Dickinson to a duel with pistols. At that time, duels were accepted as a way of settling **disputes** [**dispute: a strong disagreement**] between gentlemen. Jackson killed Dickinson with a single shot, even though Dickinson shot first and wounded him.

The People’s Choice

Jackson entered politics in Tennessee, serving in both the House and Senate. But he did not become widely known until the Battle of New Orleans during the War of 1812. His defense of the city made “Old Hickory” a national hero.

In 1824, Jackson ran for president against three other candidates: Henry Clay, William Crawford, and John Quincy Adams. Jackson won the most popular votes as well as the most electoral votes. But he did not have enough electoral votes for a majority. When no candidate has an electoral majority, the House of Representatives chooses a president from among the three leading candidates.

Clay, who had come in fourth, urged his supporters in the House to vote for Adams. That support gave Adams enough votes to become president. Adams then chose Clay to be his secretary of state.



Bettmann/CORBIS

This campaign poster shows the theme of Jackson's presidential campaign. His supporters said that if Jackson were elected, the government would finally be in the hands of ordinary people, not just the rich and upper class.

It made sense for Adams to bring Clay into his cabinet, because the two men shared many of the same goals. Jackson's supporters, however, accused Adams and Clay of making a "corrupt bargain" to rob their hero of his rightful election. They promised revenge in 1828.

Jackson's supporters used the time between elections to build a new political organization that came to be called the Democratic Party, the name it still uses today. This new party, they promised, would represent ordinary farmers, workers, and the poor, not the rich and upper class who controlled the Republican Party.

In the election of 1828, Jackson's supporters worked hard to reach the nation's voters. Besides hurling insults at Adams, they organized parades, picnics, and rallies. At these events, supporters sang "The Hunters of Kentucky"—the nation's first campaign song—and cheered for Old Hickory. They wore Jackson badges, carried hickory sticks, and chanted catchy campaign slogans like "Adams can write, but Jackson can fight."

The result was a great victory for Jackson. But it was also a victory for the idea that the common people should control their government. This idea eventually became known as **Jacksonian Democracy** [**Jacksonian Democracy: the idea that the common people should control the government**] .

3. The Inauguration of Andrew Jackson

On March 4, 1829, more than 10,000 people, who came from every state, crowded into Washington, D.C., to witness Andrew Jackson's inauguration. The visitors overwhelmed local hotels, sleeping five to a bed. "I never saw such a crowd here before," observed Senator Daniel Webster. "Persons have come five hundred miles to see General Jackson, and they really seem to think that the country is rescued from some dreadful disaster!"

Many of the people flocking into the capital were first-time voters. Until the 1820s, the right to vote had been limited to the rich and upper class. Until then, only white men with property were thought to have the education and experience to vote wisely.

The new states forming west of the Appalachians challenged this argument. Along the frontier, all men—rich or poor, educated or not—shared the same opportunities and dangers. They believed they should also share the same rights, including the right to vote.

With the western states leading the way, voting laws were changed to give the "common man" the right to vote. This expansion of democracy did not yet include African Americans, American Indians, or women. Still, over one million Americans voted in 1828, more than three times the number who voted in 1824.



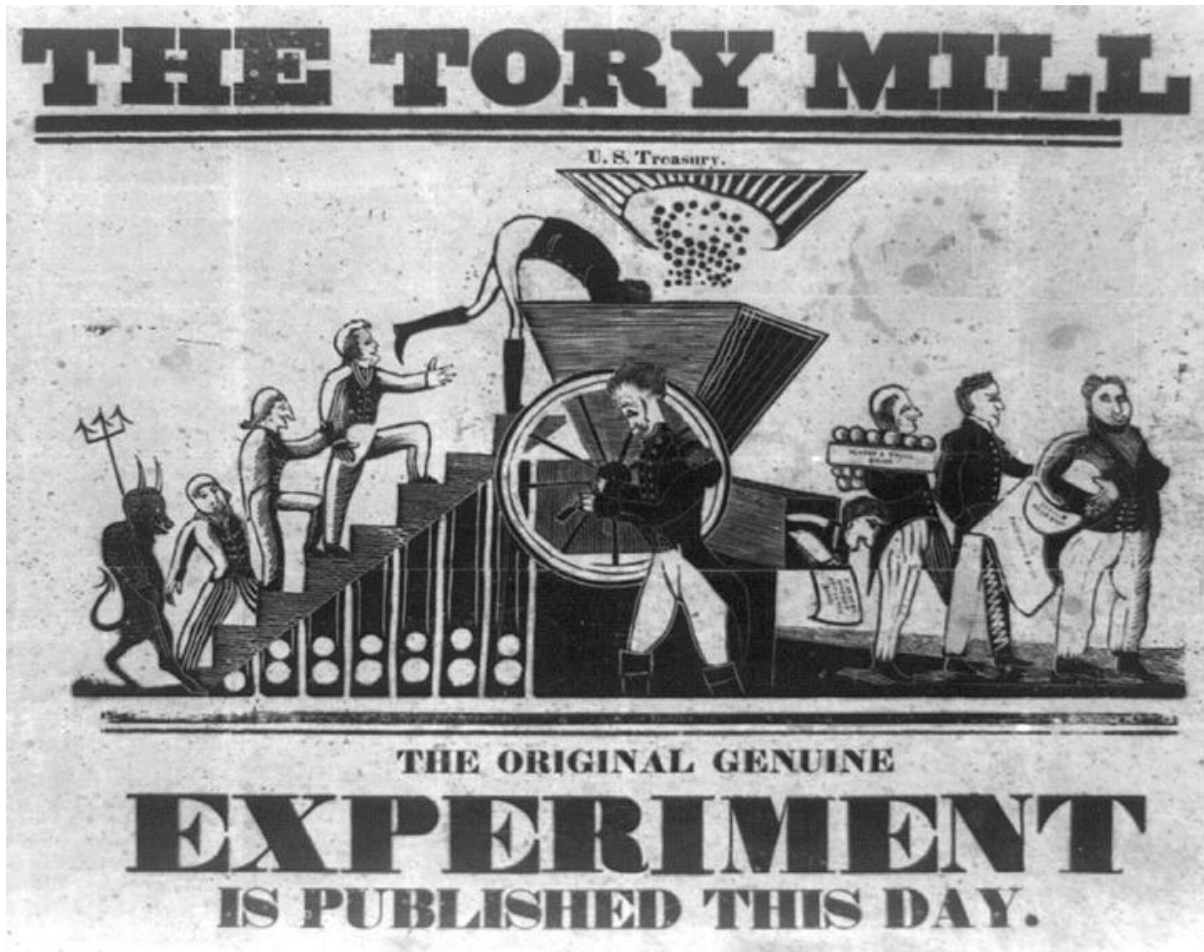
Library of Congress

People of every color, age, and class mobbed the White House to see Andrew Jackson take the oath of office. One observer claimed that the scene was like the invasion of barbarians into Rome.

Many of these new voters did believe they had rescued the country from disaster. In their view, the national government had been taken over by corrupt “monied interests”—that is, the rich. Jackson had promised to throw the rich out and return the government to “the people.” His election reflected a shift in power to the West and to the farmers, shopkeepers, and small-business owners who supported him.

After Jackson was sworn in as president, a huge crowd followed him to the White House. As the crowd surged in, the celebration turned into a near riot. “Ladies fainted, men were seen with bloody noses, and such a scene of confusion took place as is impossible to describe,” wrote an eyewitness, Margaret Bayard Smith. Jackson was nearly “pressed to death” before escaping out a back door. “But it was the People’s day, and the People’s President,” Smith concluded. “And the people would rule.”

Section 4: Jackson's Approach to Governing



Library of Congress

This political cartoon about the spoils system is titled, "The Tory Mill." "Tory" is another term for "democrat." Here, Andrew Jackson turns a crank, while a devil ushers men into a mill being fed by the U.S. Treasury. On the other side of the mill, men emerge as wealthy officeholders. What is the cartoonist's opinion of Jackson?

Andrew Jackson approached governing much as he had leading an army. He listened to others, but then did what he thought was right.

The Kitchen Cabinet

Jackson did not rely only on his cabinet for advice. He made most of his decisions with the help of trusted friends and political supporters. Because these advisers were said to meet with him in the White House kitchen, they were called the "kitchen cabinet."

The rich men who had been used to influencing the government viewed the "kitchen cabinet" with deep suspicion. In their eyes, the men around the president were not the proper sort to be

running the country. One congressman accused Amos Kendall, Jackson's closest adviser, of being "the President's . . . lying machine." Jackson ignored such charges and continued to turn to men he trusted for advice.

The Spoils System

Jackson's critics were even more upset by his decision to replace many Republican officeholders with loyal Democrats. Most of these **civil servants** [**civil servant: an employee of the government**] viewed their posts as lifetime jobs. Jackson disagreed. Rotating people in office was more democratic than lifetime service, he said, because it gave more people a chance to serve their government. Jackson believed that after a few years in office, civil servants should go back to making a living as other people do.

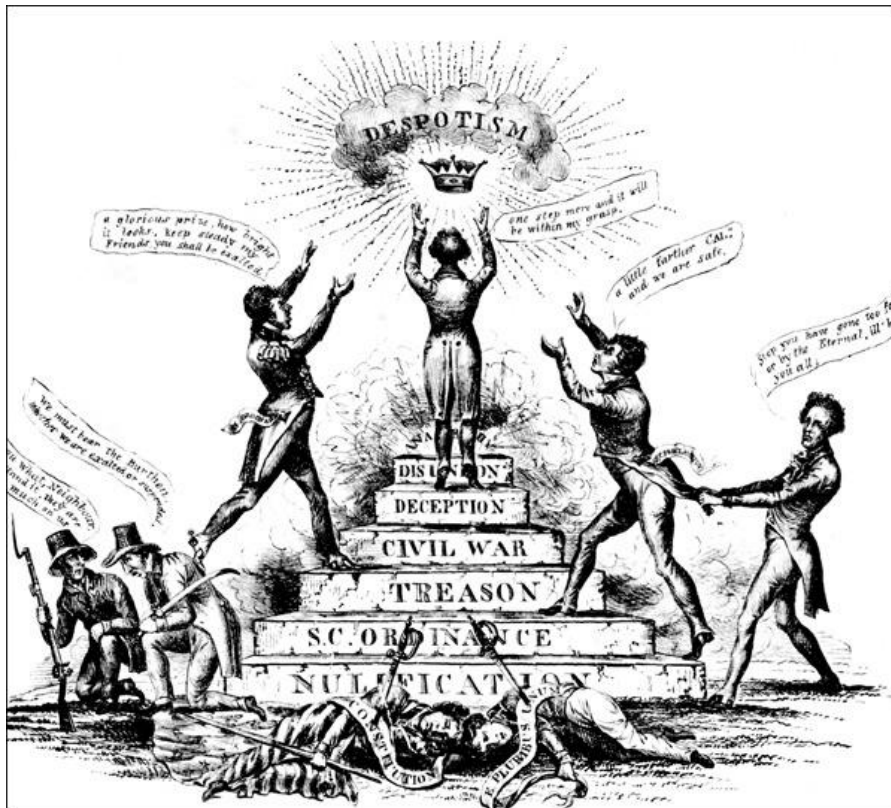
Jackson's opponents called the practice of rewarding political supporters with government jobs the **spoils system** [**spoils system: the practice of rewarding political supporters with government jobs**]. This term came from the saying "to the victor belong the spoils [prizes] of war."

Jackson's opponents also exaggerated the number of Republicans removed from office. Only about 10 percent of civil servants were replaced—and many deserved to be. One official had stolen \$10,000 from the Treasury. When he begged Jackson to let him stay, the president said, "I would turn out my own father under the same circumstances."

Unit 5: The Nullification Crisis

Andrew Jackson’s approach to governing met its test in an issue that threatened to break up the United States. In 1828, Congress passed a law raising **tariffs [tariff: a tax imposed by the government on goods imported from another country]**, or taxes on imported goods such as cloth and glass. The idea was to encourage the growth of manufacturing in the United States. Higher tariffs meant higher prices for imported factory goods. American manufacturers could then outsell their foreign competitors.

Northern states, humming with new factories, favored the new tariff law. But southerners opposed tariffs for several reasons. Tariffs raised the prices they paid for factory goods. High tariffs also discouraged trade among nations, and planters in the South worried that tariffs would hurt cotton sales to other countries. In addition, many southerners believed that a law favoring one region—in this case, the North—was unconstitutional. Based on this belief, John C. Calhoun, Jackson’s vice president, called on southern states to declare the tariff “null and void,” or illegal and not to be honored.



Library of Congress

In this cartoon, John C. Calhoun, who believed states have the right to nullify federal laws, is reaching toward a crown. The crown symbolizes his desire for power. Andrew Jackson is pulling on the coat of a Calhoun supporter. He wants to prevent Calhoun from trampling on the Constitution and destroying the Union.

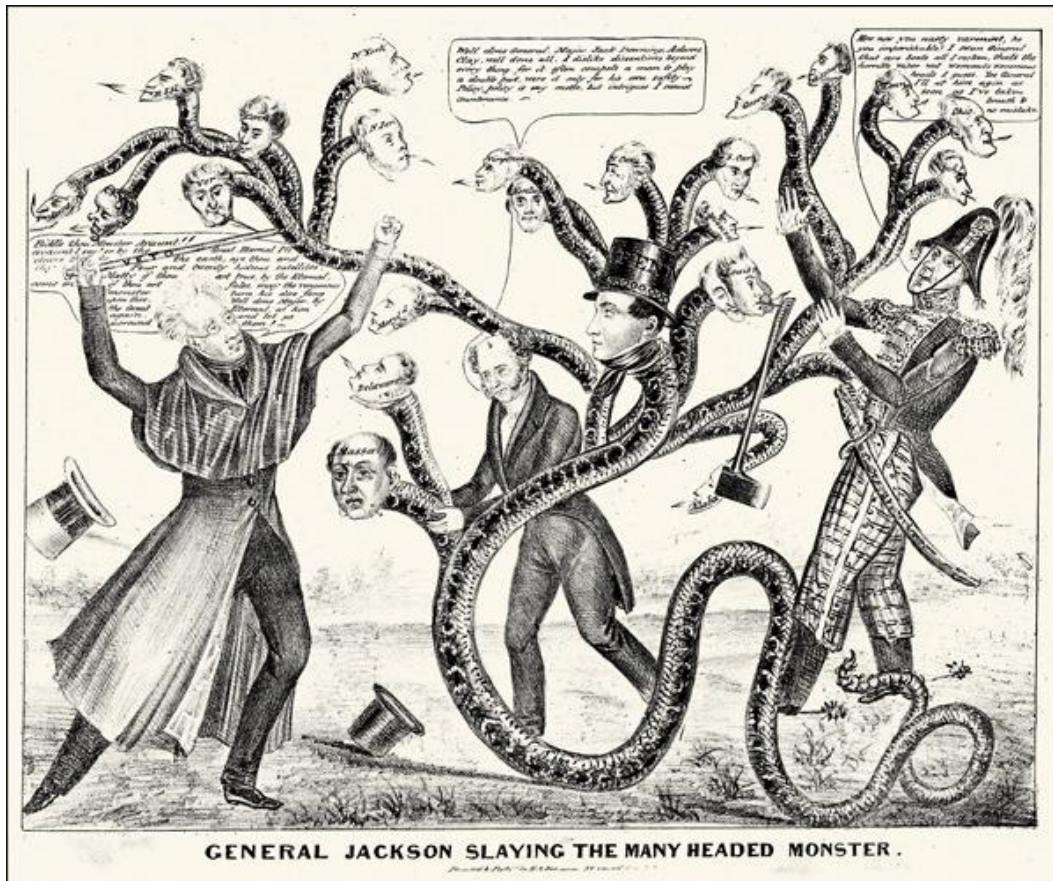
Jackson understood southerners' concerns. In 1832, he signed a new law that lowered tariffs—but not enough to satisfy the most extreme supporters of states' rights in South Carolina. Led by Calhoun, they proclaimed South Carolina's right to nullify, or reject, both the 1828 and 1832 tariff laws. Such an action was called nullification.

South Carolina took the idea of states' rights even further. The state threatened to **secede** [**secede: to withdraw from an organization or alliance**] if the national government tried to enforce the tariff laws.

Even though he was from South Carolina, Jackson was outraged. "If one drop of blood be shed there in defiance of the laws of the United States," he raged, "I will hang the first man of them I can get my hands on to the first tree I can find." He called on Congress to pass the Force Bill, which would allow him to use the federal army to collect tariffs if needed. At the same time, Congress passed a compromise bill that lowered tariffs still further.

Faced with such firm opposition, South Carolina backed down and the nullification crisis ended. However, the tensions between the North and the South would increase in the years ahead

Unit 6: Jackson Battles the Bank of the United States



Library of Congress

Andrew Jackson, on the left, attacks the many-headed Bank of the United States with a veto stick. Bank president Nicholas Biddle, in the center, wears a top hat. The many heads represent the 24 state directors of the bank. Vice President Martin Van Buren, in the center, chokes Massachusetts and Delaware.

Andrew Jackson saw himself as the champion of the people, and never more so than in his war with the Bank of the United States. The bank was partly owned by the federal government, and it had a monopoly on federal deposits.

Jackson thought that the bank benefited rich eastern depositors at the expense of farmers and workers, as well as smaller state banks. He felt that the bank stood in the way of opportunity for capitalists in the West and other regions. He also distrusted the bank's president, Nicholas Biddle, who was everything Jackson was not: wealthy, upper class, well educated, and widely traveled.

The bank's charter, or contract, was due to come up for renewal in 1836. Jackson might have waited until after his reelection to "slay the monster." But Henry Clay, who planned to run for president against Jackson in 1832, decided to force the issue. Clay pushed a bill through

Congress that renewed the bank's charter four years early. He thought that if Jackson signed the bill, the farmers who shared his dislike of banks would not reelect him. If Jackson vetoed the bill, he would lose votes from businesspeople who depended on the bank for loans. What Clay had forgotten was that there were many more poor farmers to cast votes than there were rich bankers and businesspeople.

Jackson vetoed the recharter bill. Even though the Supreme Court had held that the bank was constitutional, Jackson called the bank an unconstitutional monopoly that existed mainly to make the rich richer. The voters seemed to agree. In 1832, a large majority elected Jackson to a second term.

Rather than wait for the bank to die when its charter ran out, Jackson decided to starve it to death. In 1833, he ordered the secretary of the treasury to remove all federal deposits from the bank and put the money in state banks. Jackson's enemies called these banks "pet banks" because the president's supporters ran them.

Delegations of business owners begged Jackson not to kill the bank. Jackson refused. Abolishing the bank, he believed, was a victory for economic democracy.

Unit 7: Jackson's Indian Policy



Library of Congress

Sequoyah (seh-KWOI-uh) developed an 86-letter alphabet for the Cherokee language. The alphabet contained both Roman letters and symbols Sequoyah created. Even though these Indians developed what many whites considered an advanced civilization, wealthy planters and poor settlers were determined to force them out and seize their lands.

As a frontier settler, Andrew Jackson had little sympathy for American Indians. During his presidency, it became national policy to remove Indians who remained in the East by force.

White settlers had come into conflict with Indians ever since colonial days. After independence, the new national government tried to settle these conflicts through treaties. Typically, the treaties drew boundaries between areas claimed for settlers and areas that the government promised to let the Indians have forever. In exchange for giving up their old lands, Indians were promised food, supplies, and money.

Despite the treaties, American Indians continued to be pushed off their land. By the time Jackson became president, only 125,000 Indians still lived east of the Mississippi River. War and disease had greatly reduced the number of Indians in the East. Other Indians had sold their lands for pennies an acre and moved west of the Mississippi. Jackson was determined to remove the remaining Indians to a new Indian Territory in the West.

Most of the eastern Indians lived in the South. They belonged to five groups, called tribes by whites: the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and Seminole. Hoping to remain in their homelands, these Indians had adopted many white ways. Most had given up hunting to become farmers. Many had learned to read and write. The Cherokee had their own written language, a newspaper, and a constitution modeled on the U.S. Constitution. Whites called these Indians the “Five Civilized Tribes.”

While the Five Civilized Tribes may have hoped to live in peace with their neighbors, many whites did not share this goal. As cotton growing spread westward, wealthy planters and poor settlers alike looked greedily at Indian homelands. The Indians, they decided, had to go.

The Indian Removal Act

In 1830, urged on by President Jackson, Congress passed the Indian Removal Act. This law allowed the president to make treaties in which American Indians in the East traded their lands for new territory on the Great Plains. The law did not say that the Indians should be removed by force, and in 1831 the Supreme Court held that Indians had a right to keep their lands. An angry Jackson disagreed. Groups that refused to move west **voluntarily [voluntarily: done willingly, without being forced]** were met with military force, usually with tragic results.

This was true of the Sac and Fox Indians of Illinois. Led by a chief named Black Hawk, the Sac and Fox fought removal for two years. Black Hawk’s War ended in 1832 with the slaughter of most of his warriors. As he was taken off in chains, the chief told his captors,

Black Hawk is an Indian. He has done nothing for which an Indian ought to be ashamed. He has fought for his countrymen, the squaws [women] and papooses [young children], against white men who came, year after year, to cheat them of and take away their land. You know the cause of our making war. It is known to all white men. They ought to be ashamed of it.



The Granger Collection, NYC

This artist painted an unrealistic picture of the Trail of Tears. Most of the Cherokees had no horses or warm blankets. They were dragged from their homes and allowed to take only the clothes they had on. Many died as they walked barefoot for hundreds of miles.

The Trail of Tears

Many whites were ashamed over the treatment of Indians and sent protests to Washington, D.C. Still, the work of removal continued. In 1836, thousands of Creek Indians who refused to leave Alabama were rounded up and marched west in handcuffs. Two years later, under President Martin Van Buren, more than 17,000 Cherokees were forced from their homes in Georgia and herded west by federal troops. Four thousand of these Indians died during the long walk to Indian Territory, which took place in the winter. Those who survived remembered that terrible journey as the **Trail of Tears** [**Trail of Tears: the removal of Cherokee Indians from Georgia to Indian Territory in 1838 and 1839**]. A soldier who took part in the Cherokee removal called it “the cruelest work I ever knew.”



In the 1830s, American Indians were removed from their homelands and sent to a government-created territory in the West. Many Indians became ill or died during this forced removal.

Led by a young chief named Osceola (ah-see-OH-luh), the Seminoles of Florida resisted removal for ten years. Their long struggle was the most costly Indian war ever fought in the United States. A number of Seminoles were finally sent to Indian Territory. But others found safety in the Florida swamps. Their descendants still live in Florida today.

When Andrew Jackson left office, he was proud of having “solved” the American Indian problem for good. In reality, Jackson had simply moved the conflict between American Indians and whites across the Mississippi River.