

Unit Packet: The Jackson Era

Vocabulary Terms

Create two columns. In the left column, define each vocabulary term. In the right column, describe the historical significance of each term.

People and Groups

- Andrew Jackson
- Democrats
- Whigs
- Martin Van Buren
- William Henry Harrison

Events

- Indian Removal Act
- Trail of Tears
- Nullification Crisis
- Panic of 1837
- Mexican-American War

Short Answer Questions

Answer each of the following questions in 3-5 complete sentences.

1. How did the election of 1824 lead to the outcome of the election of 1828?
2. How did the fight over the second National Bank reveal divisions in America? What did Jackson do about the bank?
3. How did the issue of tariffs create tension between the 3 major geographic regions in the United States?
4. What did Jackson mean when he said, "To the victor belong the spoils"? What does this quote reveal about American politics at this time?
5. How did Americans experience on the frontier reveal values (both good and bad) that were central to the American nation?
6. What events led to the United States annexing Texas? Why did this issue create controversy between the North and the South?

Performance Tasks

Choose one of the following tasks to complete to show your understanding of the historical era.

- Task #1 – Create a campaign poster for the election of 1828. On the back, write a one page speech supporting your candidate.
- Task #2 – Write a series of journal entries as a Cherokee Indian describing your experience on the Trail of Tears.
- Task #3 – Create a brochure encouraging Americans to travel west to one of the new territories gained by the United States. Make sure to include illustrations in your brochure.

Supplementary Reading: Poems on History

OLD HICKORY AND THE TRAIL OF TEARS

How tensions knotted and strained, those obstreperous years,
With regional quarrels so often grinding the gears!
As more and more voters, making camp in the West,
Were planters and plainfolk, with neither title nor crest.

And from a humble poor start on the rugged frontier,
Rose a man that most people could honor and cheer.
In touch with the common -- and not the high hats!
He led a new party, simply called *Democrats*.

Indeed, *Andrew Jackson*, of a log-cabin born,
Was loved for his toughness, rock-hard and hard-worn.
And this great man of war, so disdainful of *classes*,
Rode a wave of high spirits that stirred in the *masses*.

Who turned out in droves on the balloting date,
To vote for their hero in 1828.
And like a colt newly freed, no slyness, no trickery,
He did bolt into office, the dashing *Old Hickory*.

Ah, but fears of mob rule lead some menfolk to worry:
This coarse new President would make people sorry.
And, indeed, his well-wishers acted rowdy and low,
-- They near wrecked the White House when invited to go!

But Hickory proved firm in support of the aims
Of the settlers laying stake to more and more claims.
For, heeding no treaties, and with no pity or tact,
He signed into law *The Indian Removal Act*.

And to throw out the tribes from the lands highly prized,
Jackson forced them at gunpoint to uproot their whole lives.
The Cherokee and Choctaw pushed past the Mississipp.
-- Alas, thousands did die on the grueling long trip!

'Twas a cruelty most bare, and such sorrow inflicted,
To heartlessly have a whole people evicted.
And may souls not forget the great sin of those years,
The grand march of despair along a *Trail of Tears*.

ANDREW JACKSON AND HIS CRITICS

Now, opinions of Jackson ranged from best to worst,
With his critics appalled by "King Andrew the First!"
Who indeed wielded power like an imperial sword
In cutting foes loose and taking supporters on board.

--'Twas hardly new, of course, to reward a man's loyals,
Or as his friend said: "To the victors go the spoils!"
Ah, but this practice would grow, and stink of corruption,
With men seeking money through power's seduction.

And Jackson's great blunder, which crashed down with a clank,
Was his shutting the doors of the National Bank.
Which he saw as the tool of rich city men,
Who made government work for no others but them!

So now cash in the country went to state banks called
"pets,"
Which were prone to let farmers run dangerous debts.
While Misters Webster and Clay fumed with such rage,
That King Andrew succeeded and commanded the stage!

And while it seemed that Old Hickory favored the states,
He let tariffs be raised, and thus angered his mates.
Like John C. Calhoun, who then spear-headed the cause,
Of a state's right to reject any improper laws!

Yes, an argument of old, called *nullification*,
Which incensed this leader and much of the nation.
As a new threat to secede from South Carolina came,
And stirred the great fury in Jackson's lean frame!

With North and South now at odds over federal power,
Their discords did simmer, their dispositions did sour.
But the tariff was lowered and so it came not to pass
-- Though tensions still loomed like a beast in the grass!

Trying times, to be sure, but the Union sustained,
Though they left Andrew Jackson clearly quite pained.
His regrets, when asked, sang a bittermost tune:
"I didn't shoot Henry Clay! I didn't hang John C.
Calhoun!"

Supplementary Readings

Note: You will find the supplementary readings from the previous unit (A Growing Nation) very useful when completing your work for this unit. I especially suggest reading the sections on Regionalism and Political Parties, The Bank Fight, Westward, and the Expansion of Slavery.

POLITICAL PARTIES

In the 1830s, new political parties were taking shape. They grew out of the conflict between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson. People who supported Adams and his programs for national growth called themselves National Republicans. In 1834, they became known as Whigs. Whigs wanted the federal government to spur the economy. Whigs included most eastern business people, some southern planters, and former Federalists. Jackson and his supporters called themselves Democrats. Today's Democratic Party traces its roots to Jackson's time. Democrats included frontier farmers as well as factory workers in the East.

THE SPOILS SYSTEM

In 1828, Andrew Jackson knew that Americans wanted change. "The people expected reform, he said. "This was the cry from Maine to Louisiana." After taking office, Jackson fired many federal employees. He replaced them with his own supporters. Although most other Presidents had done the same thing, Jackson did it on a larger scale. Critics complained that Jackson was rewarding Democrats who had helped elect him. He was not choosing qualified and experienced men, they said. Jackson replied that he was fulfilling a goal of democracy by letting more citizens take part in government. He felt that ordinary Americans could fill government jobs. A Jackson supporter explained the system in the following way: "To the victory belong the spoils." From then on, the practice of rewarding supporters with government jobs became known as the spoils system.

Jackson rewarded some supporters with Cabinet jobs. Only Secretary of State Martin Van Buren was truly qualified for his position. Jackson rarely met with his official Cabinet and instead relied on advice from Democratic leaders and newspaper editors. These men had a good sense of the nation's mood. Because Jackson met with them in the White House kitchen, the group became known as the kitchen cabinet.

THE BANK WAR

From the first, the Bank of the United States had been controversial. The Bank had great power because it controlled loans made by state banks. When the Bank's directors thought that state banks were making too many loans, they limited the amount these banks could lend. The cutbacks angered farmers and merchants who borrowed money to buy land or finance new businesses.

Jackson and other Democrats saw the Bank as undemocratic. Although Congress created the Bank, it was run by private bankers. Jackson especially disliked Nicholas Biddle, president of the Bank since 1823. Biddle and other Whigs worried that the President might try to destroy the Bank. Two Whig senators, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster, thought of a way to save the Bank and defeat Jackson at the same time. The Bank's charter was not due for renewal by Congress until 1836. But Clay and Webster wanted to make the Bank an issue in the 1832 election. They convinced Biddle to apply for renewal early. The Whigs believed that most Americans supported the Bank. If Jackson vetoed the bill to renew the charter, they felt sure that he would anger voters and lose the election.

Congress passed the bill renewing the Bank's charter and sent it to Jackson to sign it into law. In an angry message to Congress, Jackson vetoed the bill. Jackson gave two reasons for his veto. First he declared the Bank unconstitutional, even though the Supreme Court had ruled in the Bank's favor. Jackson believed that only states, not the federal government, had the right to charter banks. Second, Jackson felt that the Bank helped the rich at the expense of the common people. As planned, the Whigs made the Bank a major issue in the election of 1832. They chose Henry Clay to run against Andrew Jackson. When the votes were counted, Jackson won a stunning victory. The common people had supported Jackson and rejected the Bank.

THE TARIFF AND NULLIFICATION

In 1828, Congress passed a tariff that was the highest tariff in the nation's history to that point. Like earlier tariffs, this new one protected northern manufacturers from foreign competition. However, southern planters were hurt by the tariff because they had to pay higher prices for imported goods. John C. Calhoun led the South's fight against the tariff. Using the same argument that Jefferson and Madison used in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, Calhoun argued that a state had the right to nullify any federal law that it considered unconstitutional.

Calhoun raised a serious issue: Did individual states have the right to limit the power of the federal government or did the federal government have the final say on controversial issues? Calhoun support states' rights and argued that since the states had created the federal government then the states should have the final say. Other politicians (especially Daniel Webster) disagreed. Webster argued that the U.S. Constitution united the people, not the states, and if any state could nullify federal laws then the nation would fall apart.

Calhoun and other southerners expected Andrew Jackson to support their view. After all, Jackson had been born in the South and raised in the West. However, Jackson took the opposite position. Southerners' anger with the tariff grew and in 1832 South Carolina passed the Nullification Act, which declared the current tariff illegal. In addition, South Carolina threatened to secede (or withdraw) from the Union if the federal government challenged its authority.

When he heard this news, Jackson was furious. Clearly aware of the threat that nullification posed to the United States, he declared, "it leads directly to civil war and bloodshed." But instead of immediately taking drastic action, Jackson agreed to a compromise proposed by Henry Clay. Clay proposed a law that lowered tariffs but at the same time gave Jackson the authority to use the U.S. army to enforce the tariff in South Carolina if necessary. Faced with Jackson's firm stand, no other state supported South Carolina. Calhoun gave in and agreed to Clay's compromise. South Carolina repealed the Nullification Act and the Nullification Crisis passed... at least for the time being.

ECONOMIC CRISIS

After two terms in office, Jackson stepped down as President. In the election of 1836, voters elected Jackson's friend and Vice President, Martin Van Buren, to the White House. Van Buren was very different from Jackson. He was a politician, not a war hero. Davy Crockett, a member of Congress of Tennessee, once described Van Buren as "an artful, cunning, intriguing, selfish, speculating lawyer."

Unfortunately for Van Buren, Jackson's veto of the Bank bill would have devastating consequences for the nation's economy. Two months after taking office, the nation faced the worst economic crisis in its history, which became known as the Panic of 1837. The panic had several causes. During the 1830s, the government sold millions of acres of public land in the West. Farmers bought some land, but speculators bought even more. To pay for the land, speculators borrowed money from state banks, which could lend money without limit now that the National Bank had been closed. To meet the demand for loans, state banks printed more and more paper money. However, they printed so much money that when people began demanding gold and silver in exchange for their paper money (which was allowed at this point in U.S. history), they were unable to meet their obligations and were forced to close.

As banks started close, panic spread. More and more people hurried to banks to trade in their paper money. Hundred of banks failed, leaving many of their customers empty-handed. The panic got worse when cotton prices went down because of oversupply. Cotton planters often borrowed money, which they repaid when they sold their crops. With low prices, planters could not repay their loans, leading to even more bank failures. The nation was plunged into a deep economic depression. The panic was not Van Buren's fault but he was blamed for it. Once it began, he took little action, following his belief in a weak central government. As the depression dragged on, support for the President fell. In 1840, the Whigs saw a chance to win the White House. Learning from their opponents, they chose a candidate who would appeal to the common people – William Henry Harrison. Harrison was known as the hero of the Battle of Tippecanoe.

ELECTION OF 1840

Harrison's campaign reflected a new sort of politics that was emerging. Politicians made speeches and candidates campaigned at rallies and banquets. Political parties competed for votes by offering exciting entertainment. Most Americans knew little about William Henry Harrison's stand on political issues. To appeal to voters, the Whigs focused on his war record. They also created an image for Harrison as a man of the people. They presented him as a humble Ohio farmer who had been born in a log cabin. In fact, Harrison was a wealthy, educated man from Virginia whose family had owned a large estate.

Harrison won the election easily, forcing the Democrats out of the White House for the first time in 12 years. Once in the White House, the Whigs had a clear-cut program. They wanted to create a new Bank of the United States, raise tariffs, and improve roads and canals. But Whig hopes were soon dashed when Harrison died of pneumonia only a few weeks after taking office. John Tyler, Harrison's Vice President, then became President. As President, Tyler disappointed the Whigs. He had once been a Democrat and opposed the Whigs plan to develop the economy. When Congress passed a bill to recharter the National Bank, Tyler vetoed it. In response, all but one member of Tyler's cabinet resigned. The Whigs also threw Tyler out of their party. With few friends in either party, Tyler could do little during his term in office.

THE FRONTIER AND THE AMERICAN NATION

The frontier -- the point at which settled territory met unoccupied land -- began at Jamestown and Plymouth Rock. It moved in a westward direction for nearly 300 years through densely forested wilderness and barren plains until the census of 1890 revealed that at last the United States no longer possessed a clear line of settlement. At the time it seemed to many Americans that a long period had come to an end. In 1893, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared that the frontier had created a nation with a culture that was energetic, individualistic, and democratic. According to Turner, the existence of large areas of available land (which of course was settled by American Indians) had provided a "safety valve" for people unhappy with life in cities and other settled areas.

After more than a hundred years scholars still debate the significance of the frontier in American history. Few believe it was quite as all-important as Turner suggested. Some have gone farther, rejecting the Turner argument as a romantic glorification of a bloody, brutal process -- marked by a war of conquest against Mexico, near-genocidal treatment of Native-American tribes, and wonton destruction of the environment.

Yet it remains hard to believe that three centuries of westward movement had no impact on the national character. It is revealing that many people in other countries, when hearing the word "American," so often identify it with a symbol of the Western frontier that has come to embody the values of individualism and opportunity -- the American cowboy.

MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

The war between Mexico and the United States had its beginnings with the struggle over who would control Texas. American settlers began moving to the Texas territory in the early 1800s. The Louisiana Purchase had stretched the western boundaries of the United States farther west than they had ever been and the success of Lewis and Clark encouraged more and more Americans to move west into the Louisiana Territory. And right next to Louisiana was Texas. Texas was big land, rich with resources and possibilities. It was also owned by Mexico. As more and more Americans moved to the Texas territory, the cry grew for Texas to be part of the U.S.

In 1835 Texas declared itself independent from Mexico. Mexico was not at all happy about this and they told the Americans so. Angry words were exchanged and Mexico soon tired of words. The first major action was at the Alamo, a fort near the city of San Antonio that was controlled by Americans. The fort was taken by the Mexican army, resulting in the deaths of 189 defenders, including such famous Americans as Jim Bowie and Davy Crockett. In the same year, at Goliad, following the Battle of Coleto Creek, Mexican General Santa Anna ordered the massacre of 342 American prisoners.

The massacres at the Alamo and Goliad outraged many in America and many in Mexico. American soldiers responded by fighting back. At the Battle of San Jacinto, a force of several hundred Americans defeated a much larger Mexican force. Half of the Mexican soldiers were killed and most of the rest were taken prisoner. The Republic of Texas gained its independence, but was not allowed to join the United States. While Texas was very large and had a lot of resources, Northerners objected to the idea of adding another slave state to the Union. Also, annexing Texas would likely cause war with Mexico.

After several years of debate, the U.S. eventually decided to annex Texas. Two years later, war erupted between the United States and Mexico. The first major battle was at Palo Alto, in Texas, and neither side could claim victory. The Battle of Monterrey soon followed, and American forces under General Zachary Taylor seized the strategic Mexican city. Fighting also took place further west. The American Army of the West, under Colonel Stephen Kearny, marched toward California. In January 1847, American troops occupied Los Angeles.

In Texas and Mexico in 1847, American troops enjoyed many successes. At the Battle of Buena Vista, 5,000 American troops commanded by General Zachary Taylor went up against 14,000 Mexican troops commanded by Santa Anna. Despite being outnumbered almost 3-to-1, the Americans won the battle. In March, 12,000 American troops under the command of General Winfield Scott landed near the city of Vera Cruz. After a weeklong siege, Mexico surrendered the city. Several more battles followed, resulting in more American victories and more Mexican retreats. Finally, in September, American forces captured the Mexican capital of Mexico City.

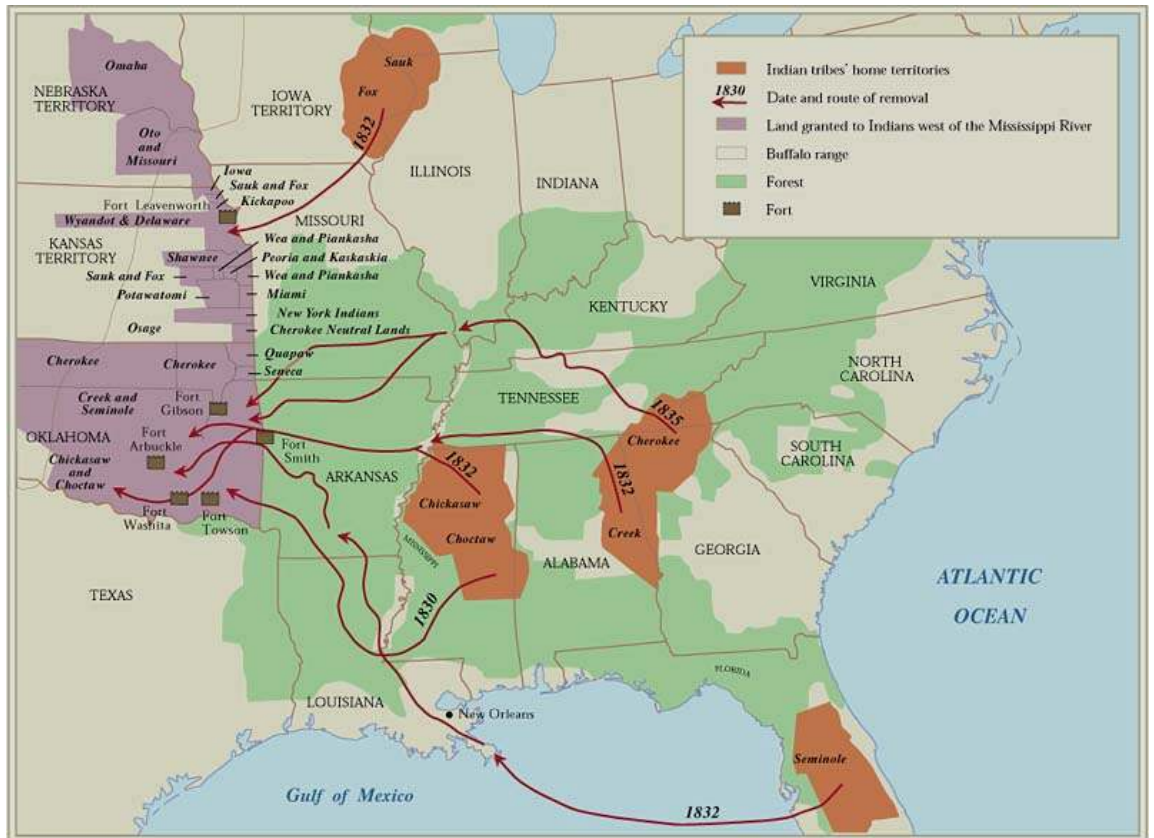
With the occupation of Mexico City by American forces, both sides were ready to talk peace. On February 2, 1848, both sides signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, ending the war. Mexico agreed to give up about 55 percent of its territory and got \$15 million in return. The territory that the U.S. gained as a result of the treaty was called the Mexican Cession. It included all of the present-day states of California, Nevada, and Utah and also parts of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming. The two countries weren't exactly on friendly terms after that, but war did not resume. American explorers and settlers flocked to the new territories and the Westward Movement was on.

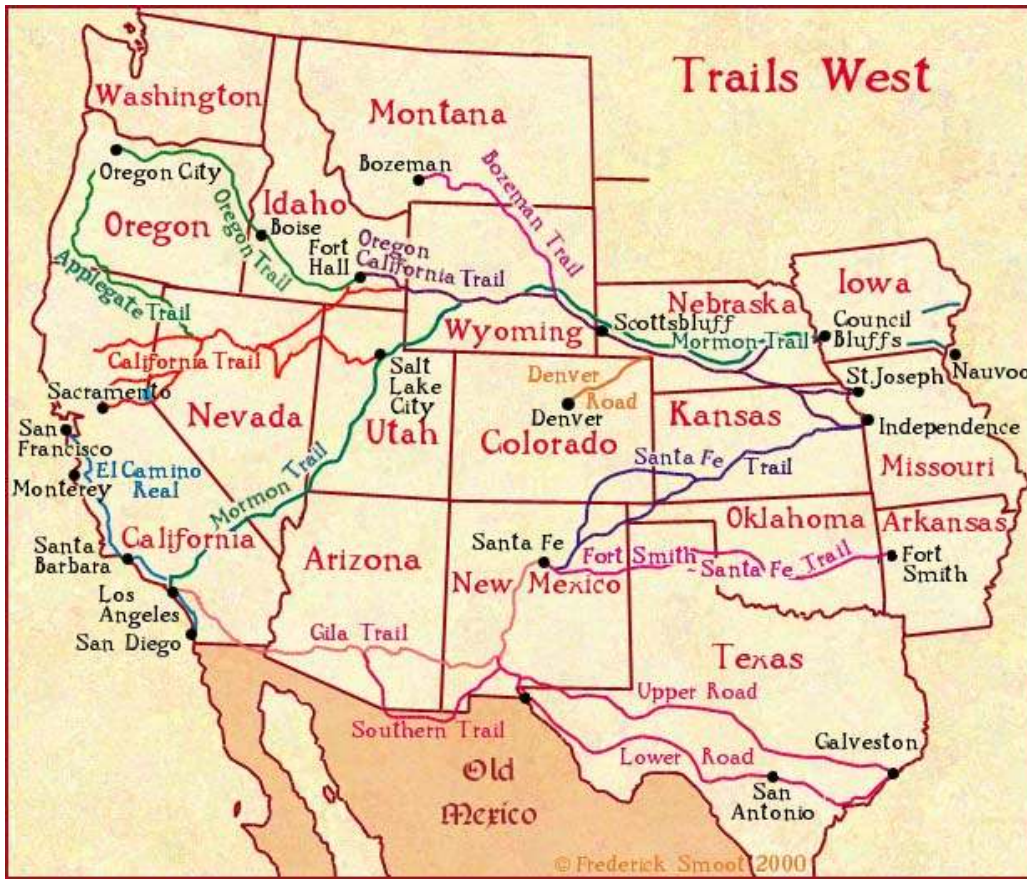
Supplementary Readings: Maps and Images



To his opponents, Jackson's veto of the Bank Bill and his refusal to enforce a Supreme Court decision favoring the Cherokee Indians was an abuse of his power. This Whig cartoon from the 1830s shows Jackson trampling on the Constitution.

In the 1830s, around 100,000 southeastern Indians were driven from their homes and forced to march to "Indian Territory." This map shows this process of forced removal.





This map shows some of the major trails that Americans used to move west. Through westward expansion and conquest, Americans came to control all lands from “sea to shining sea.”

This map shows the growth of the United States between its independence in 1783 and the Gadsden Purchase in 1853. Major territories that were added include: the Louisiana Purchase (1803), Florida (1819), Texas (1845), Oregon Country (1846), and lands from the Mexican cession (1848).

