Chapter 11: The Growth of Democracy, 1824–1840

Chapter Review

1. AMERICAN COMMUNITIES A Community of Voters Moves from Deference to Democracy

By the 1820s, the status of artisans and workers had changed. The Market Revolution changed the economy, and as it did so artisans lost much of their independence and became wage workers in factories owned by other people. At the same time, the spread of universal manhood suffrage marked the end of traditional politics and the beginning of more democratic politics. This, in turn, led to a more divisive form of politics with many competing interests that has characterized American politics ever since.

1. THE NEW DEMOCRATIC POLITICS IN NORTH AMERICA

America’s acceptance of universal male suffrage was unusual for the time. In other countries, crises over popular rights were far more common.

a. Continental Struggles Over Popular Rights

In 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain. Colonel Agustin de Iturbide declared a constitutional monarchy in Mexico and guaranteed equal rights for everyone. This government and a series of weak governments to follow it were unsuccessful in creating a stable and lasting government for the newly independent country. Haiti gained its independence in 1804. However, Haitian independence destroyed the lucrative sugar trade there. By the 1830s the Caribbean islands were awash with revolt and the British parliament abolished slavery in all British colonies in 1834. A third crisis over popular rights emerged in Canada in 1837 when Canadians rebelled against the limited representative government that the British government imposed. In stark contrast to these upheavals over popular rights, the United States was characterized by the rapid spread of male suffrage and a stable democratic political culture.

b. The Expansion and Limits of Suffrage

Westward expansion changed the nature of American politics. Most of the new states extended male suffrage to all white men aged twenty-one and older. Older states began to extend the rights of suffrage after the War of 1812 when it became apparent that men who could not vote could be drafted to fight in the nation’s wars. Universal male suffrage, while radical for its time, overlooked the rights of free African American men and all women. Blacks were excluded because of pervasive racism and fear of party alignment while women were excluded for paternalistic reasons. This did not prevent women from participating in benevolent societies and quietly influencing politics in more appropriate ways.

c. The Election of 1824

The election of 1824 marked the end of James Madison’s “Era of Good Feelings.” The Republican Party ran five candidates for president in the 1824 election: William H. Crawford, John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, Andrew Jackson, and John C. Calhoun. Although Jackson won a majority of the popular vote, he failed to win a majority in the electoral college. The House of Representatives decided the election between Jackson and John Quincy Adams. Adams won. Although the Adams’ administration had few legislative victories, Adams did manage to secure funding for an extension of the national road.

d. The New Popular Democratic Culture

The election of 1824 illustrated that increased male suffrage and popular participation in the election process ended the dominance of the small political elite. New national parties with broad appeal were beginning to emerge and succeed. In New York, Martin Van Buren formed an organized political group known as the Albany Regency. Regencies, as they were known, began to form in other states as well. The print revolution also changed American politics by spreading political messages outside of major urban centers where they had previously remained. The new American politics placed a great emphasis on participation and party loyalty. In essence, these parties began to function as a sort of national men’s club.

e. The Election of 1828

The election of 1828 demonstrated the power and effectiveness of the new political culture and the new party system. With the help of Martin Van Buren, Andrew Jackson was elected president. Jackson’s party, the Democratic Republicans, spoke the language of democracy and of the common man. The most important aspect of Jackson’s election is that it was achieved through a political coalition. By securing support from the North, South, and West, Jackson’s party succeeded in becoming truly national.

1. THE JACKSON PRESIDENCY

Andrew Jackson’s election ushered in a new era of American politics known as the “Age of the Common Man.” Jackson’s popularity was due in part to his ability to adapt quickly to the ways that westward expansion and extended male suffrage had changed the American political arena.

a. A Popular Figure

On March 4, 1829, in front of a sizable crowd, Andrew Jackson was inaugurated as president of the United States. The crowd of well-wishers was not the typical Washington gathering but rather people from out west and other common people who had come to see Jackson inaugurated. This popular participation and interest marked something new in American politics.

b. A Strong Executive

Andrew Jackson dominated his administration and largely disregarded the presidential cabinet, instead opting for a group of friends from the West known as the “Kitchen Cabinet.” Jackson used the tools and powers of his office to strengthen the executive branch at the expense of both the legislature and the judiciary. Jackson used the presidential veto more often than all previous presidents combined. In doing so, he forced Congress to consider his opinions on issues.

c. The Nation’s Leader versus Sectional Spokesmen

As a national figure, Jackson was more interested in promoting strong national leadership rather than seeking sectional compromise. At the time of Jackson’s presidency, Congress was dominated by three powerful sectional figures. Southerner John C. Calhoun was uncompromising on the issue of slavery and its defense as an economic necessity. Daniel Webster, a Northerner, became the spokesman for new and powerful northern commercial interests. Finally, Henry Clay of Kentucky represented western interests and was eager to form compromises. This earned him the nickname “the Great Pacificator.” Despite Jackson’s efforts to promote a national agenda, sectional interests remained an important force to be dealt with in the Congress.

d. The Nullification Crisis

Protective tariffs became the economic issue that would symbolize the differences between the North and the South. The North’s new industries required protective tariffs to thrive. Southerners, who were dependent on cash crops and the importation of many finished goods from Britain, despised the protective tariffs so much that the 1828 tariff was nicknamed the “Tariff of Abominations.” South Carolina resorted to the doctrine of nullification, which argued that states were not required to enforce federal laws that harmed their citizens, in order to avoid the tariff. The Nullification Crisis, as it became known, was seen as a threat to national unity by some and as a safeguard of minority rights to others. In 1832, after the passage of another protective tariff, South Carolina threatened to secede from the Union. The Tariff Act of 1833 repealed the 1832 tariff and persuaded South Carolina to remain in the Union.

1. CHANGING THE COURSE OF GOVERNMENT

Jackson came to the presidency with a clear agenda. His main goals were the removal of the Indians from their western territories, stopping the abuses of the Federal government with regard to internal improvements, and finally to oppose the re-incorporation of the existing National Bank.

a. Indian Removal

At the time of Jackson’s election, the Five Civilized Tribes still lived in the Southwest United States. By the 1830s the tribes had ceded most of their tribal land to the United States but they still retained sizable land holdings in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida. Although protected by federal law requiring formal treaties to obtain Indian lands, the tribes were forcibly removed from their land when the states violated federal law by voting to invalidate the federal treaties that granted Indians self-governing status. The Cherokees fought back using the Supreme Court of the United States and actually won in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831) and *Worchester v. Georgia* (1832). President Jackson ignored the decisions and continued his policy of Indian removal. Although many approved of this policy, others were strongly against it. Indian removal became a divisive national issue.

b. Internal Improvements

Jackson refused to allow the Kentucky spur of the National Road to be funded by the federal government. He argued that federal funding for such expensive projects was unconstitutional and that it infringed on the reserved powers of the individual states. Despite Jackson’s objections, the country needed a transportation infrastructure to tie the national economy together. Without assistance from the federal government, the job was taken up by private developers with the assistance of individual states.

c. Legal Support for Private Enterprise

A series of Supreme Court decisions that overruled contrary decisions at the state level paved the way for greater federal governance of interstate commerce. These decisions encouraged commercial enterprise by limiting the powers of the states to regulate that commerce. The decisions also weakened the powers of the state governments.

d. The Bank War

In 1816 Congress granted a twenty-year charter to the Second Bank of the United States. The Bank’s most important job was to keep the state banks in line by forcing them to maintain adequate reserves and restricting speculative activities. In short, the Bank acted as a currency stabilizer by helping to control the supply of money. In 1832 Nicholas Biddle, the director of the Bank, filed for an early renewal of the Bank’s charter. While Congress approved the application, Andrew Jackson killed the Bank and the bill by vetoing it and declaring the bank unconstitutional.

e. Jackson’s Reelection in 1832

Jackson’s veto of the Bank was a great popular success. He won re-election in the presidential election of 1832. The campaign saw the introduction of America’s second-ever third party, the Anti-Masonic Party. While the party did not last long, it did make a lasting mark on national politics. The Anti-Masonic Party’s nomination convention process was adopted by other political parties. Jackson’s refusal to re-charter the Bank had both economic and political consequences. Economically it ushered in the economic policy known as *laissez faire.* Politically, the debate over the National Bank created the permanent division that is now characteristic of the American two-party system.

f. Whigs, Van Buren, and the Election of 1836

In 1833, Nicholas Biddle called in all of the Bank’s commercial loans. This caused a panic and recession. Merchants, businessmen, and planters blamed Jackson for his war on the Bank. These groups formed a formal political party known as the Whigs. Despite the formation of the new party, Jackson’s Vice President Martin Van Buren won the presidential election of 1836.

g. The Panic of 1837

The recession of 1833-34 was followed by a speculative boom. Newly chartered banks were eager to give loans, the price of cotton rose rapidly, and there was much speculation in western lands. Jackson became alarmed at the widespread use of paper money as a result of the boom. In July 1836 he issued the Specie Circular which required payment for federal lands be made in only hard currency. This action resulted in the Panic of 1837 and a recession that would last for six years. The banking system virtually collapsed and unemployment reached more than 10 percent of the population. Panics and depressions were considered to be a natural part of the business cycle. Therefore the government did not intervene.

1. THE SECOND AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEM

The political struggles of the Jackson era combined with the sweeping social changes brought about by expansion and economic growth created the basic American political system: two major parties known as the “Second American Party System.”

a. Whigs and Democrats

The two party system reflected newly emerging class and cultural differences. The parties, Whigs and Democrats, both had national appeal. Democrats favored expansion, Indian removal, and freedom of choice for the frontier. The Whigs believed in the importance of a strong federal role in the national economy and a strong central government. They also favored a protective tariff, the Bank of the United States, and internal improvements. Whigs favored government intervention in both social and economic affairs.

b. The Campaign of 1840

In 1840 the Whigs nominated William Henry Harrison as their presidential candidate. They balanced their ticket, and their appeal, by nominating Southerner John Tyler as the vice president. The Whig campaign tactics included blaming Van Buren for the continuing depression. These tactics worked and Harrison won an impressive electoral victory.

c. The Whig Victory Turns to Loss: The Tyler Presidency

William Henry Harrison died of pneumonia one month after his inauguration. Vice president John Tyler of Virginia became president. As president, Tyler vetoed a series of bills that were the essence of the Whig platform: tariffs, internal improvements, a new Bank of the United States. These actions in effect negated the Whig party’s victory in the 1840 election.

1. AMERICAN ARTS AND LETTERS

At this period in history a collective American identity was beginning to emerge in popular culture and among intellectual groups. The Age of the Common Man would prove to be the period when American writers and painters found themes with national appeal that allowed them to create the first distinctively American works.

a. Popular Cultures and the Spread of the Written Word

The print revolution had more far reaching effects than just politics. Newspapers and pamphlets nurtured a variety of popular cultures. Although religious literature was still the most commonly read throughout the country, a small middle class audience did emerge with an interest in literary magazines. The telegraph, invented in 1844 by Samuel F. Morse, had a revolutionary impact as well. Important news could now be sent from one side of the country to the other in a matter of minutes or hours rather than days and weeks as had previously been the case.

b. Creating a National American Culture

In the early nineteenth century there was still a lack of national culture. For writers and artists, the challenge was to find uniquely American themes. New England claimed to be the leader in the formation of an American culture, separate and distinct from the culture of Europe.

c. Artists and Builders

Artists, like authors, were successful in finding uniquely American themes. Thomas Cole founded the Hudson River school of American painting, which was nationalistic in its style and subject. The western and romantic painters, like Karl Bodmer, George Catlin, Albert Bierstadst, and Thomas Moran, made an important contribution to the American sense of the land and to the nation’s sense of identity through their works. American haste and movement were nowhere better exemplified than in the balloon-frame structures that could be built quickly, cheaply, and without the assistance of a skilled carpenter.

***Vocabulary:***

1. corrupt bargain

2. Election of 1824

3. Election of 1828

4. spoils system

5. John C. Calhoun

6. Nullification Crisis

7. Tariff of Abominations

8. Jacksonian Democracy

9. Indian Removal Act

10. Trail of Tears

11. Black Hawk War

12. Bank war

13. Anti-Masonic Party

14. Second American Party\System

15. Whigs

16. William Henry Harrison

17. John Tyler

***Answer the following questions from Chapter 11:***

1. **The Election of 1824:** How did changes manifest themselves in the 1824 election? What regions did each candidate represent? What was the result of the election and how was it decided? What was the “corrupt bargain?” What did Adams accomplish as president? Organizing Popular Politics: How did popular politics and the rise of the new party system complement each other? What was the crucial element in the success of the system? How was this connected to community?

2. **The Election of 1828:** What was the significance of the Election of 1828 to the new politics? Who were the candidates? What were the results? What coalitions did the Democrats achieve?

3. **A Popular Figure:** Why was Jackson such a popular figure? How was Jackson’s inauguration an example of the mass participation in politics or to his critics, the “reign of King Mob”?

4. **A Strong Executive:** What executive power of the president did Jackson increase? What was the Eaton Affair? How and why did Jackson use the veto power as he did? How extensive was his use of it?

5. **The Nation’s Leader vs. Section Spokesmen:** Who were the prominent leaders and what sections did they come from? How did each typify the new politics compared to Jackson?

6. **Nullification Crisis:** What led to the nullification crisis? How did Jackson respond? What views of nullification preceded Calhoun’s *Exposition and Protest*? What were the views Calhoun presented? How did the famous exchange of toasts illustrate the depth of the issue? What happened to Calhoun politically? What did South Carolina threaten to do and how serious was the situation? To what did the South Carolinian leaders attribute their success?

7. **Indian Removal:** What was the controversy between the president and the Supreme Court over Indian relations? Which tribe had accommodated to whites the most? What were the results of removal?

8. **The Bank War:** What were the causes of the Bank War? How did the Bank function? What political effects did it have? Who were the “sides” in this war? What was Jackson’s role in this war? What was the substance of his veto message?

9. **Jackson’s Reelection in 1832:** How did the Bank War issue affect the election? How did the results of the election for Jackson continue the Bank War? What did Jackson claim the election gave him?

10. **The Panic of 1837:** What was the extent of the Panic? How had Jackson’s actions provoked the panic? What types of reactions were there from its victims? What was the view of the proper role of government in this type of situation? How did this compare to intervention to promote growth?

11. **Whigs and Democrats:** What were the differences between these two parties? How were they different from their predecessors? What was the impact of Jackson’s style of appeal to the people?

12. **The Whig Victory Turns to Loss:** The Tyler Presidency: What happened to Harrison? What was the “first” to happen here? What actions did Tyler follow that denied the Whigs a victory? Why did this occur? What sectional problem was evident in the Tyler debacle?