



“The Interests of the Many”: The Expansion of Democracy in the Jacksonian Era

An Online Professional Development Seminar



The County Election,
George Caleb Bingham,
1851-52

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from the National Humanities Center

We will begin promptly on the hour.

The silence you hear is normal.

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The Expansion of Democracy in the Jacksonian Era



GOALS

- To deepen understanding of the ways in which American politics changed in the early nineteenth century.
- To introduce new resources for teaching the Jacksonian era.



The Expansion of Democracy in the Jacksonian Era



FROM THE FORUM

- How did elections change during the Jacksonian era?
- Who made these changes?
- How did they come about, and whom did they affect the most?
- How democratic was Andrew Jackson?
- Have any other elections been as important as those of 1800 and 1828?
- What was Jackson's role in Indian removal?
- How has the concept of the "common man" changed since Jackson's time?
- Was Jackson the first modern president?
- How does Jackson's presidency fit into the market revolution?



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FRAMING QUESTIONS

- How did the electorate change between 1800 and the 1830s?
- How did ideas about who was entitled to membership in the political community change?
- How did the practice of politics—the rules of the political game—change?
- Who gained power as the result of these changes? Who lost power? How democratic was the Jacksonian political order?
- What role did ordinary people play in bringing about those changes? What role did political operatives play? What role did Andrew Jackson play?



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ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Democratization and partisanship were not new in the early nineteenth century—those processes had gone a long way between 1793-1815, with the conflict between Republicans and Federalists.
- The years 1800-1840 witnessed a dramatic expansion of the electorate. Most white men won the vote, but African Americans were mostly excluded from the suffrage.
- Political parties became the central institutions of American political life after 1828.
- Party politics changed politics in numerous ways:
 - ❖ They turned politics into more of a grass-roots affair than ever before.
 - ❖ Parties organized among ordinary people, drawing them into the political process.
 - ❖ Partisanship became central to political culture. Most voters identified with one party or another, election after election.
- A special class of politicians came to dominate political life.
- The new partisan democracy brought about both increased popular participation in politics and popular discontent with the political system.



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Research focuses on the emergence of two-party democracy in the United States between the 1790s and the 1840s.

Origins of Jacksonian Democracy: The Remaking of American Politics, 1812-1828
(forthcoming 2012)

The Early American Republic: A History in Documents
(2010)

Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York
(2000)



Memorial of the Non-Freeholders of Richmond, 1829



. . . The existing regulation of suffrage . . . instead of the equality nature ordains, creates an odious distinction between members of the same community; robs of all share, in the enactment of the laws, a large portion of the citizens bound by them, and whose blood and treasure are pledged to maintain them



Memorial of the Non-Freeholders of Richmond, 1829



. . . For obvious reasons, by almost universal consent, women and children, aliens and slaves, are excluded. It were useless to discuss the propriety of a rule that scarcely admits of diversity of opinion. What is concurred in by those who constitute the society, the body politic, must be taken to be right.



Warren Dutton, Speech in the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention, 1820



He also considered it as unreasonable, that a man who had no property should act indirectly upon the property of others. . . . It was . . . wholly inequitable in its nature, that men without a dollar should, in any way, determine the rights of property, or have any concern in its appropriation.



Warren Dutton, Speech in the Massachusetts Constitutional Convention, 1820



[Universal male suffrage] greatly increased the number of voters, and those of a character most likely to be improperly influenced and corrupted. It enlarged the field of action to every popular favorite, and enabled him to combine greater numbers. The time might come, when he would be able to command, as truly as ever a general commanded an army, sufficient numbers to affect or control the government itself. In that case, the form of a republican constitution might remain, but its life and spirit would have fled. The government would be essentially a democracy, and between that and a despotism there would be but one step.



New York Constitution of 1821

Every male citizen of the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been an inhabitant of this State one year preceding any election . . . ; and shall have, within the year next preceding the election, paid a tax to the State or county, assessed upon his real or personal property . . . ; or being armed and equipped according to law, shall have performed within that year military duty in the militia of this State; . . . and also, every male citizen of the age of twenty-one years, who shall have been, for three years preceding such election, an inhabitant of this State; . . . and shall have been, within the last year, assessed to labor upon the public highways, and shall have performed the labor, or paid an equivalent therefor, according to law, shall be entitled to vote . . . ; but no man of color, unless he shall have been for three years a citizen of this State, and for one year next preceding any election shall be seized and possessed of a freehold estate of the value of two hundred and fifty dollars, . . . , shall be entitled to vote in any such election. . . .

Laws may be passed excluding from the right of suffrage persons who have been or may be convicted of infamous crimes.



Thomas Ford, History of Illinois (1854)

. . . Until 1824-25 . . . the people . . . had not . . . become inured to . . . political warfare . . . The contests in those days were of short duration, and were scarcely ever repeated on the same grounds or questions. There were no parties of Whig and Democrat, Federalist and Republican. The contests were mostly personal, and for men. As for principles and measures . . . there were none to contend for. Every election turned upon the fitness and unfitness, the good and bad qualities of the candidates.



Edward Patchell to Andrew Jackson, Aug. 7, 1824

“I did not know the use of a classic Education at the time, being a miner; therefore . . . I have stood in the rear rank, and never ventured in the front, untill Andrew Jackson . . . was announced a candidate for the peoples guift.”

“The first meeting which was held in the Courthouse in favour of your Election . . . was . . . much larger than any ever had been known before . . . Wm. H. Crawford got one vote, H Clay five, J.Q. Adams two, J.C. Calhoun four, and Gen Adw Jackson upward of 1000.”



Edward Patchell to Andrew Jackson, Aug. 7, 1824

“God . . . hath raised you up for to be a Saviour and a deliverance for his people.”



Martin Van Buren to Thomas Ritchie, 1827

I have long been satisfied that we can only get rid of the present, and restore a better state of things, by combining Genl. Jackson's personal popularity with the portion of old party feeling yet remaining. . .

We must always have party distinctions and the old ones are the best of which the nature of the case admits. Political combinations between the inhabitants of the different states are unavoidable and the most natural and beneficial to the country is that between the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North . . . If the old ones are suppressed, geographical divisions founded on local interests, or what is worse prejudices between free and slave holding states will inevitably take their place.



Thomas Ford, History of Illinois (1854)

. . . . There was no question of principle . . . involved in the first election of Gen. Jackson But as the measures of Gen. Jackson's administration were unfolded, it was discovered that he favored the doctrines of the old republican party. His attack upon the United States Bank, his veto of its charter in 1832, removal of the deposits of 1833, the expunging resolutions, and the specie circular, rallied all to his party who were of a nature to be hostile to the power of wealth. This is not to say that all wealthy men were excluded from, or all poor ones included in the democratic party. Many wealthy persons still remained democrats from principle, interest, or ambition; and many poor men attached themselves to the opposite party for like reasons



Thomas Ford, History of Illinois (1854)

[Many contended] that the whole convention system was a fraud upon the people; that it was a mere fungus growth engrafted upon the constitution; that conventions themselves were got up and packed by cunning, active, intriguing politicians, to suit the wishes of a few . . . If any one desired an office, he never thought of applying to the people for it; but passed them by, and applied himself to conciliate the [party] managers and idlers about the towns, many of whom could only be conciliated at an immense sacrifice of the public interest.

We are in favour of Monarchy, Aristocracy, Monopolies, Auctions, laws that oppress the Poor, Imposture and the rights of the rich man to govern and enslave the Poor man at his will and pleasure, denying the Poor the right to redress, or any participation in political power.

We are opposed to Monarchy, Aristocracy, Monopolies, Auctions, and in favour of the Poor to political power, denying the right of the rich to govern the Poor, and asserting in all cases, that those who labour should make the laws by which such labour should be protected and rewarded, and finally, opposed to degrading the Mechanic, by making Mechanics of Felons. Our motto shall be *Liberty, Equity, Justice, and The Rights of Man.*

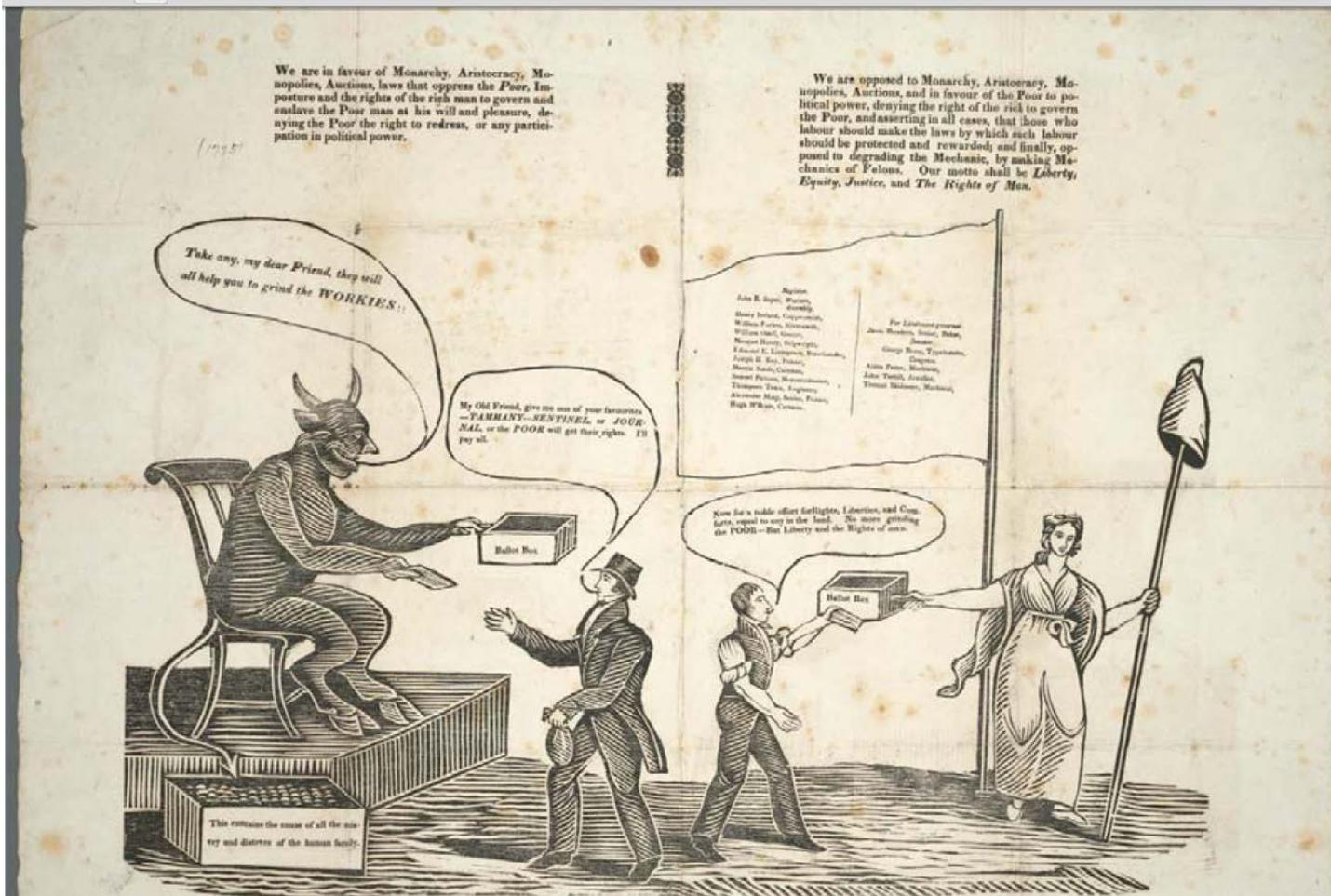
Take any, my dear Friend, they will all help you to grind the WORKERS!

My Old Friend, give me one of your favourites—TAMMANY—SENTINEL, or JOURNAL, or the POOR will get their rights. I'll pay you.

Register
John R. Soper, Mariner,
Assembly
Henry Ireland, Coppersmith,
William Forbes, Silversmith,
For Lieutenant-governor
William Odell, Grocer,
Jonas Humbert, Senior, Baker
Micajah Handy, Shipwright,
Senator,
Edmund L. Livingston,
Brassfounder,
George Bruce, Typefounder,
Joseph H. Ray, Printer,
Congress,
Merritt Sands, Cartman,
Alden Potter, Machinist,
Samuel Parsons,
Moroccodresser,
John Tuthill, Jeweller,
Thompson Town, Engineer,
Thomas Skidmore, Machinist
Alexander Ming, Senior, Printer,
Hugh M'Bride, Cartman

Now for a noble effort for Rights, Liberties, and Comforts, equal to any in the land. No more grinding the POOR—But Liberty and the Rights of man.

This contains the cause of all the misery and distress of the human family.



Liberty's banner:

Register
John R. Soper, Mariner,
Assembly
Henry Ireland, Coppersmith,
William Forbes, Silversmith,
For Lieutenant-governor
William Odell, Grocer,
Jonas Humbert, Senior, Baker
Micajah Handy, Shipwright,
Senator,
Edmund L. Livingston,
Brassfounder,
George Bruce, Typefounder,
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Congress,
Merritt Sands, Cartman,
Alden Potter, Machinist,
Samuel Parsons,
Moroccodresser,
John Tuthill, Jeweller,
Thompson Town, Engineer,
Thomas Skidmore, Machinist
Alexander Ming, Senior, Printer,
Hugh M'Bride, Cartman

Upper left: "We are in favour of Monarchy, Aristocracy, Monopolies, Auctions, laws that oppress the *Poor*, Imposture and the rights of the rich man to govern and enslave the *Poor* man at his will and pleasure, denying the *Poor* the right to redress, or any participation in political power."

Satan: "Take any, my dear Friend, they will all help you to grind the WORKERS." Box in Satan's hand: "Ballot Box"

Man in top hat: "My Old Friend, give me one of your favourites—TAMMANY—SENTINEL, or JOURNAL, or the *POOR* will get their rights. I'll pay you."

Box in lower left foreground: "This contains the cause of all the misery and distress of the human family."

Upper right: "We are opposed to Monarchy, Aristocracy, Monopolies, Auctions, and in favor of the *Poor* to political power, denying the right of the rich to govern the *Poor*, and asserting in all cases, that those who labor should make the laws by which such labor should be protected and rewarded and finally, opposed to degrading the Mechanic, by making Mechanics of Felons. Our motto shall be *Liberty, Equity, Justice, and The Rights of Man.*

Worker: "Now for a noble effort for Rights, Liberties, and Comforts, equal to any in the land. No more grinding the *POOR*—But Liberty and the Rights of man."

Box in Liberty's hand: "Ballot Box"



The County Election, George Caleb Bingham, 1851-52



Last Shot

Have we addressed your questions?



16th Century ✕ 17th Century ✕ 18th Century ✕ 19th Century ✕ 20th Century

The Expansion of Democracy During the Jacksonian Era

Lesson prepared by [Reeve Huston](#), Associate Professor of History, Duke University with assistance from the National Humanities Center staff.

How did the character of American politics change between the 1820s and the 1850s as a result of growing popular participation?

Understanding

Between the 1820s and 1850, as more white males won the right to vote and political parties became more organized, the character of American democracy changed. It became more partisan and more raucous, a turn that bred ambivalence and even discontent with politics and the dominant parties.

Text

- [George Caleb Bingham, *The County Election*](#) (Oil on canvas, 1851–52)
- [Richard Caton Woodville, *Politics in an Oyster House*](#) (Oil on canvas, 1848)
- New York City Workingmen's Party cartoon, 1835

The Expansion of Democracy During the Jacksonian Era — America in Class Lessons

All Lessons

Early Visual Representations of the New World

Failed European Colonies in the New World

Successful European Colonies in the New World

The American Revolution as Civil War

Lexington and Concord: Tipping Point of the Revolution

The Expansion of Democracy During the Jacksonian Era

Slavery and the Family Life of the Enslaved

Use The Forum

To continue the discussion.

To share fresh approaches and discussion questions that work.

We will monitor the forum until December 2.



Don't forget the poster. It's free.

Please submit your evaluations.

Request a poster.
(It's free.)



Thank You

The poster is free. Tell your colleagues.