

## 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!

### 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.

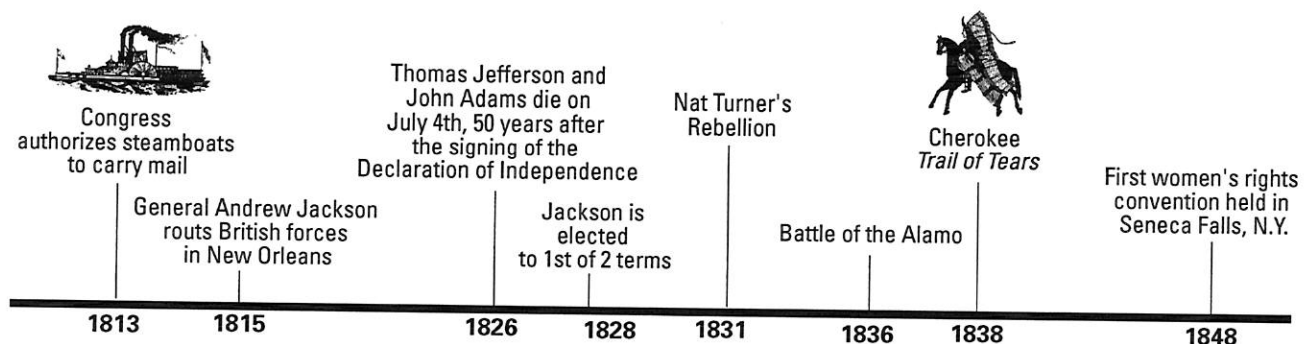
At age 17 Jackson's self-discipline improved, and he began his study of the law. At 21 he became a lawyer on the North Carolina frontier. Jackson soon moved west to Tennessee, married

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 US House and a year later was elected to the US 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.

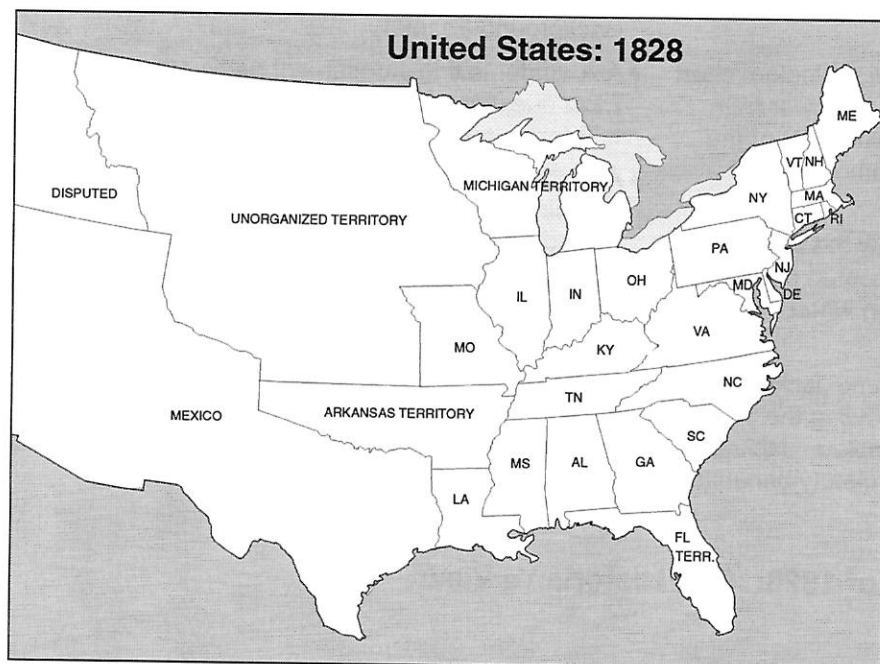
Jackson won American hearts not just because he won battles. Jackson never asked his men to endure more than he endured. During a bad patch of the Creek War, he ate acorns and cattle waste with his soldiers. He mailed home bone splinters to Rachel that occasionally pushed up through the skin in his arm. He carried a bullet next to his heart from a nearly fatal duel over the honor of his wife. Known affectionately as



Old Hickory, Andrew Jackson was tough and unbreakable, just like a hickory tree.

### 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. Because no candidate received a majority of the electoral votes, the election was decided in U.S. House of Representatives. In what Jackson called "the corrupt bargain," Clay traded his electoral votes to Adams for an 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?!

### Ideas About Democracy

Jackson became determined to create a new era of real democracy in America, where the people would be heard. From 1824-28 he campaigned by telling the People he would listen and do their will. Finally, in 1828, Jackson was elected President. He was reelected in 1832.

How well he listened to the People and did their will is left for you to decide.

The focus question of this DBQ is "How democratic was Andrew Jackson?" Remember, 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. He never considered Native Americans as potential citizens,

and he was one of the largest slave-owners in Tennessee at the time of his election. Enemies of Jackson claimed he behaved more like a dictator or king than a democratically elected president.

On the following pages are 11 documents that touch on several 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. Your task is to decide: *How democratic was Andrew Jackson?*