

The Significance of President Andrew Jackson

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March 22, 2012

Andrew Jackson served two terms as President of the United States, elected in 1828 and 1832. Though he remains highly controversial to this day, there is little doubt Jackson built up the office of President during his 8 years in office. When he left office, for better or worse, the President was a more significant part of the government than when he entered. Examples of Jackson's active role as president included Indian removal, the Nullification Crisis, and his use of the presidential veto power. Despite his limited political experience, Jackson also demonstrated political savvy on those same issues as well as his use of the alleged Corrupted Bargain of 1824 to achieve election in 1828.

Andrew Jackson was one of four candidates for president in the 1824 election. Although Jackson received the most popular votes and electoral votes, he had a majority of neither. As per the Constitution, the election went to the House of Representatives to be decided. Henry Clay was out of the running because he had finished fourth place in electoral votes, but as Speaker of the House could use his influence to swing the election toward John Quincy Adams or Andrew Jackson. Clay's political beliefs were more in line with Adams and he acted accordingly. Adams appointed Clay his Secretary of State.

Jackson had already shown some political savvy in a series of letters – “The Letters of Wyoming” - published in 1823 advocating him for president. He wisely had them authored by his friend John Eaton and had them published anonymously. But the events of the election gave him ammunition he put to use. He publicly took the defeat with grace, but quickly got himself out of Washington and stayed away while privately rallied his supporters against alleged corruption of those in Washington. He denounced the events as a “Corrupt Bargain” wherein Clay and Adams had come to a secret arrangement. The term stuck and, regardless of its accuracy, became a rallying cry for Jacksonians.

Andrew Jackson began his campaign right away rather than waiting for 1828. He wisely made alliances with John C. Calhoun and Martin Van Buren, ensuring the four factions of the 1824 election became only two for the 1828 election: the Adams-Clay faction in power and the Jackson-led opposition faction with support across the country. Jackson had his supporters push those undecided to take sides and funded the purchase of the Washington Gazette by Jacksonian Duff Green to use as his media outlet. While not openly campaigning for himself, Jackson raised the level of direct involvement of a presidential candidate in his own campaign.

In Jackson's first message to congress in December 1829, he called for the relocation of Native Americans: those that still remained east of the Mississippi River would be moved out west, away from white civilization. This applied to the Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Seminoles. The reaction to this proposal was "cries of outrage" and "howls of protest" in both houses of Congress. Undeterred, Jackson consulted with fellow Democrats to figure out how to get an Indian Removal Act passed anyway and ensured the Speaker of the House was on his side. He wisely held back planned vetoes until after the Indian Removal bills were passed. Jackson continued to put pressure on his fellow Democrats to pass the bills despite much public disapproval and criticism that Jackson's direct involvement was wrong and possibly unconstitutional. But thanks to that involvement, the Senate and House passed the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This was the first time a president had been so directly involved in getting a piece of legislation passed.

The day after the Indian Removal Act passed, Jackson vetoed the Maysville Road Bill. The bill was to extend the National Road, but this next section of road lay entirely within the state of Kentucky. Even before the bill passed, Jackson had instructed supporters in Congress to keep him informed of any bills that were "in conflict with his stated objectives." Until Jackson's

presidency, presidents only used their veto power on laws they believed unconstitutional. Jackson's veto message did claim the bill was unconstitutional because the road would be constructed by the national government yet was "local in character". But Jackson largely opposed the Maysville Road Bill because it conflicted with his belief in economical government. Furthermore, the bill would have the national government become part of a corporation created by a state and Jackson believed that "corrupting" and destructive to the "purity of our government."

Jackson also vetoed a recharter of the Bank of the United States. While clearly anti-bank, Jackson let his opponents bring up the early recharter of the bank as a political issue then he calmly vetoed it as he had always intended to. In his veto message, Jackson clearly cited grounds beyond just constitutionality: "political, social, economic, and nationalistic reasons as well." He argued for the "equality and independence" of the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches. He broken new political ground in claiming any branch could deem a bill unconstitutional even if the other two approved of it. Remini calls it "the most important veto ever issued by a president."

The most important act of Jackson's tenure was his strong stand against South Carolina in the Nullification Crisis. Though an advocate for small government, Jackson was above all else a nationalist. While it was unclear whether nullification or secession were constitutional, Jackson had no doubts and acted decisively. He believed in "a confederation of perpetual union" and denied the rights of nullification and secession. Rather than leave the issue for Congress, he issue a presidential proclamation to the people of South Carolina making his stance clear: all Americans owed allegiance to the United States above whatever state they lived in and declared

“disunion by armed force is treason.” Remini calls it “one of the most significant presidential documents in American history.”

Jackson followed up by brandishing both olive branch and sword: he asked for and received both a bill to reduce the tariffs and a Force Bill to authorize military action against South Carolina if that state persisted in its defiance. All the while he avoided any public act to provoke anything but a compromise solution while building nationwide support for his actions. His clear and forceful yet calm leadership in this crisis was vital to reaching the peaceful Compromise of 1833 that followed.

Andrew Jackson’s political skill served him well in both reaching the presidency and being a strong leader once there. His many groundbreaking acts permanently changed the presidency. While many will not agree with Remini’s favorable view of Jackson’s decisions, all should agree on the importance of those decisions.