

# Andrew Jackson



Andrew Jackson was the seventh president of the United States, serving from 1829 to 1837. As a war hero, he was one of a handful of Americans who dominated the first half of the nineteenth century. As president he redefined and strengthened the executive office, championing the concept of a united nation against rising threats of disunion. In all estimates, he was one of the strongest presidents, as well as one of the most controversial. He lent his name to a movement, Jacksonian Democracy, and to an era, the Age of Jackson.

Jackson was born in the frontier settlement in South Carolina to Scotch-Irish parents from northern Ireland. Encouraged by his mother to enter the ministry, Jackson obtained a modest education and taught school for a brief time. The Revolutionary War interrupted his education, and Jackson volunteered his services to the American cause. About 1784 Jackson arrived in North Carolina, where he read law and received a license to practice in 1787. He commenced his profession in the state's Western District in Washington County (now Tennessee). By October 1788, he had received an appointment as district attorney in Mero District (now Middle Tennessee) and settled in Nashville. There he met Rachel Donelson, who soon became his wife. Over the next few years, he practiced law, speculated in land, bought the Hermitage property, and commenced general merchandising in partnership with family and friends. Generally managed by overseers and worked by slaves, the Hermitage was a model for Tennessee agriculture, with orchards, gardens, livestock, staple crops, cotton gins, and stills. At the Hermitage plantation, the Jacksons built a large home and hosted innumerable visitors.

As the new Territory South of the River Ohio organized for statehood, Jackson accepted election to its first constitutional convention, and in the fall of 1796, Tennessee voters sent him to Philadelphia as their first representative. A year later, the legislature elected him to the U.S. Senate. Jackson's role in both bodies was undistinguished, and he resigned in 1798 to become a judge of the Superior Court (now the Tennessee Supreme Court), an appointment he held until resigning in 1804. By 1806 Jackson had abandoned his legal practice and storekeeping to devote his time to farming, with occasional interruptions for local militia musters. Jackson's military duties continued for the next twenty years. Though this period brought him national honor, personal and political controversy clouded his fame. In 1803 he quarreled with John Sevier and caned Thomas Swann in January 1806. In May of that year he killed Charles Dickinson in a duel and ran a sword through Samuel Jackson the following year. In September 1813 he brawled with brothers Jesse and Thomas Hart Benton, taking a bullet in the arm, which was removed during his presidency.

Jackson's emergence as a popular national figure resulted from his distinguished service as major general in the War of 1812. Having been commissioned major general of the U.S. Army in May 1814, Jackson soon received orders to defend the Gulf Coast against an expected British invasion. In December of that same year, he led his troops into New Orleans, where in the early morning of January 8, 1815, a few weeks after the signing of the Treaty of Ghent, he resoundingly defeated the British. That victory brought immediate fame. To many, Jackson was second only to George Washington in service to the Republic.

Over the next several years, he negotiated land cessions in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky at treaties with the Cherokees, Choctaws, and Chickasaws, presaging his controversial presidential policy of Indian removal to accommodate advancing white settlement. In 1818, he led troops into Florida to suppress the Seminoles, seized Pensacola, and ordered the execution of two British subjects suspected of arming the Seminoles. The action precipitated a brief international crisis and a long congressional investigation. Jackson resigned his army appointment on June 1, 1821, and retired to Tennessee despite Tennesseans' desire to elevate him to the presidency. He consistently denied that he sought the office, but declared it his duty to serve if elected. In the presidential campaign of 1824 Jackson received both a popular and an electoral plurality over William H. Crawford, John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun. When the House of Representatives gave the presidency to Adams, and Adams appointed Clay secretary of state, Jackson labeled the transaction "a corrupt bargain" that violated the will of the voters. On that charge, Jackson's advisors launched the presidential campaign of 1828, one of the nation's dirtiest elections (his critics charged the Jacksons' with moral

depravity as evidenced by their marriage—Rachel was still legally married when she wed Jackson), in which he defeated Adams. On December 22, 1828, Rachel Jackson passed away, and her husband charged that her death had been hastened by his political rivals.

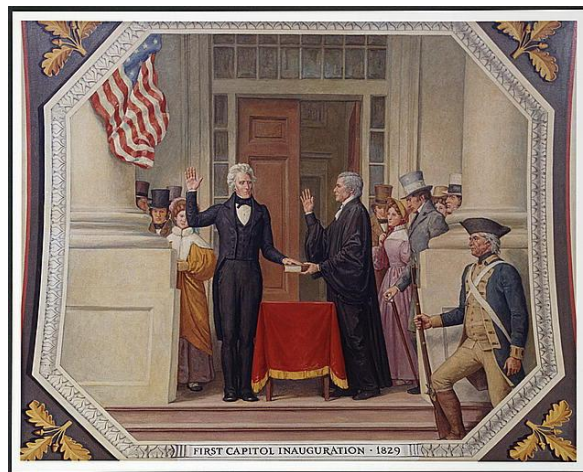
In January 1829, the widowed Jackson left Tennessee for his inauguration. Reform was the keynote of the bereaved Jackson's inaugural address in March 1829, and reform remained the theme of his two terms as president. As the Senate recessed in mid-March, Jackson initiated a series of removals and appointments that his opponents denounced as the spoils system. Jacksonians defended the practice as a restoration of honesty and integrity and the destruction of entrenched privilege. Nevertheless, Jackson maintained his commitment to reform and executed his will through the exercise of the veto. The recharter of the bank became the focal point of the 1832 election between Jackson and Clay. The real issue, however, was Jackson. Analysis of Jackson's election victory showed a decline in his support and the rise of a strong opposition. During his second administration, Jackson continued to use the veto and took unprecedented actions: in 1833, without congressional approval, he ordered federal deposits removed from the Bank of the United States and placed in state banks, forcing the resignation of the cabinet officer who refused his directive; and in 1836 he issued the Specie Circular, which required the payment of government debts in hard money. Jackson's 1833 proclamation against nullification, which defined the Union as indissoluble, assaulted state's rights. In consequence, his opponents denounced him as a tyrant, "King Andrew I," and united to form the Whig Party. By the end of the decade, the second American party system had emerged in all the states.

Jackson returned to the Hermitage in early 1837. Many still considered him a hero and the spokesman of the common man. He spent the remainder of his years in retirement, consulting with numerous politicians on the issues of the day, entertaining frequent visitors, and managing his farm. His health, much damaged by dueling wounds and the rigors of military campaigns, continued to decline. In 1845, at age seventy-eight, Jackson died at the Hermitage and was buried in the Hermitage garden two days later.

*Source: Harold D. Moser, University of Tennessee, <http://tennesseencyclopedia.net>*



Andrew Jackson statue at the National Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol. Courtesy of the Architect of the Capitol.



Chief Justice John Marshall administering the oath of office to Andrew Jackson on the east portico of the U.S. Capitol, March 4, 1829. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



“King Andrew the First.” By an unknown artist, 1832. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.