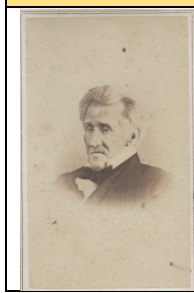


Chapter 108 -- Andrew Jackson's Enduring Legacy



Dates:
1829-1837

Sections:

- The Age Of Jackson
- His Farewell Address Warns Of Dangers Ahead
- Jackson's Final Years

Time: 1829-1837

The Age Of Jackson



Andrew Jackson is remembered as one of America's most ambitious, controversial and effective Presidents. He sets out his grand agenda in his first inaugural address and then proceeds to accomplish nearly every goal he identifies over his two terms.

In hindsight, several of these goals will be judged harshly, especially his cruel uprooting of the native tribes of the east, and his abrupt moves in regard to the Second Bank and the tightening of the money supply.

Andrew Jackson (1767-1845)

His critics will also charge him with expanding the powers of the Executive branch far beyond the guidelines laid out in the 1787 Constitution. For these men he will forever be cast as "King Andrew."

But what no one can question is his devotion to always doing what he feels is necessary to preserve and protect the sacred Union. Thus his famous dinner toast in 1829 challenging Calhoun and the "nullifiers"

Our Federal union: it must and shall be preserved.

His presidency is truly transformative. It is marked by a series of firsts that forever change the national political scene in America.

- He is the first president elected by the "common man" rather than by "land owners only" – a change in voting rights that boosts the popular vote from 353,000 in 1824 to 1,287,000 in 1832.
- He is the first "outsider" president, having served only briefly in Congress (1796-98) and never as either Vice-President or Secretary of State. Instead he sweeps into DC as the "hero of New Orleans," and unabashedly opens his inaugural party at the White House to the public.
- He is the first "western" president, and his election signals the population shift away from the original thirteen seacoast states and to the "new" thirteen inland states.
- He is the first truly "populist president," who sees himself as the protector of the average American against the special interests – especially the "money men" in banking and industry that he feels are rigging the system in their self-interest.

- He is the first president to accomplish what his predecessors have all called for – elimination of the nation’s public debt.
- He is the first president to face into a serious threat of Southern secession, stating that the Union is inseparable, and threatening to use force against South Carolina if it violates the federal tariff law.

He is also president at a time when the Second Great Religious Awakening is prompting many American’s to face inward in search of social reforms consistent with the founder’s vision of a “shining city on a hill.”

Among these reforms is the abolition of slavery – and during Jackson’s tenure the wheels are set in motion by which emancipation will occur and his sacred Union will dissolve.

As a lifelong planter and unrepentant slave owner he is quick to recognize this threat during the furor over the 1828 Tariff. As he says at the time:

The tariff was only the pretext, and disunion and southern confederacy the real object. The next pretext will be the negro or slavery question.”

Like his predecessors, Jackson lacks the know how to end the sectional tensions he sees developing – with the South needing to carry its slaves west of the Mississippi for economic reasons, and the North dead set against allowing any more blacks, slave or free, to take up residence in white men’s territory.

He does, however, have the foresight (despite his personal preference) to resist a mad long rush to annex Texas, an act certain to reignite the sectional conflict which accompanied the admission of Missouri as a slave state.

Jackson will also remain true to his role as the voice of the average white citizen, trying his best to protect the well-being of the many from the avarice of the few. As such, his popularity with “the majority of people” remains untarnished throughout his eight year term.

Time: March 4, 1837

His Farewell Address Warns Of Dangers Ahead

Like Washington before him, Andrew Jackson feels compelled to summarize his thoughts on the state of the Union in a farewell address which is published on March 4, 1837, the day he leaves office.

The address is lengthy and, while praising the nation’s progress to date, focuses mainly on the dangers that lie ahead.

The President begins by thanking the people for their support, and indicating that America is no longer a “doubtful experiment” but a proven success, “respected by every nation of the world.”

FELLOW-CITIZENS: Being about to retire finally from public life, I beg leave to offer you my grateful thanks for the many proofs of kindness and confidence which I have received at your hands...At the moment when I surrender my last public trust I leave this great people prosperous and happy, in the full enjoyment of liberty and peace, and honored and respected by every nation of the world.

We have now lived almost fifty years under the Constitution framed by the sages and patriots of the Revolution. We have had our seasons of peace and of war, with all the evils which precede or follow a state of hostility with powerful nations Our Constitution is no longer a doubtful experiment, and at the end of nearly half a century we find that it has preserved unimpaired the liberties of the people, secured the rights of property, and that our country has improved and is flourishing beyond any former example in the history of nations.

He references early on to the Indian Removal as one major advance domestically.

In our domestic concerns there is everything to encourage us, and if you are true to yourselves nothing can impede your march to the highest point of national prosperity. The States which had so long been retarded in their improvement by the Indian tribes residing in the midst of them are at length relieved from the evil, and this unhappy race--the original dwellers in our land--are now placed in a situation where we may well hope that they will share in the blessings of civilization

In foreign affairs, he says that America is presently enjoying good relations around the world.

If we turn to our relations with foreign powers, we find our condition equally gratifying

Still, he warns, it is important to recall Washington's admonitions in his farewell – most notably the potential for party politics and sectional disputes to erode the Union.

The necessity of watching with jealous anxiety for the preservation of the Union was earnestly pressed upon his fellow-citizens by the Father of his Country in his Farewell Address... and he has cautioned us in the strongest terms against the formation of parties on geographical discriminations, as one of the means which might disturb our Union and to which designing men would be likely to resort.

Jackson sees these same dangers growing at the moment, dangers which “excite the South against the North and the North against the South.” The source of these is a “delicate topic” which stirs “strong emotion.” While left unsaid, the President knows that topic to be the institution of slavery!

But amid this general prosperity and splendid success the dangers of which he warned us are becoming every day more evident, and the signs of evil are sufficiently apparent to awaken the deepest anxiety in the bosom of the patriot. We behold systematic efforts publicly made to sow the seeds of discord between different parts of the United States and to place party divisions directly upon geographical distinctions; to excite the South against the North and the North against the South, and to force into the controversy the most delicate and exciting topics--topics upon which it is impossible that a large portion of the Union can ever speak without strong emotion.

The sectional tension over slavery is already infecting the process of choosing the next president, and leading to talk of disunion.

Appeals, too, are constantly made to sectional interests in order to influence the election of the Chief Magistrate, as if it were desired that he should favor a particular quarter of the country instead of fulfilling the duties of his station with impartial justice to all; and the possible dissolution of the Union has at length become an ordinary and familiar subject of discussion

Jackson here elaborates on the many disasters that all Americans would suffer, were the union to come apart.

It is impossible to look on the consequences that would inevitably follow the destruction of this Government and not feel indignant when we hear cold calculations about the value of the Union and have so constantly before us a line of conduct so well calculated to weaken its ties.

The President admits that Congress may at time pass laws that are unpopular in one region or another, but any attempt to “forcibly resist their execution”— as with the “nullifiers” -- must be opposed.

But until the law shall be declared void by the courts or repealed by Congress no individual or combination of individuals can be justified in forcibly resisting its execution. It is impossible that any government can continue to exist upon any other principles. It would cease to be a government and be unworthy of the name if it had not the power to enforce the execution of its own laws within its own sphere of action.

At the same time, he admits that state’s rights are to be protected against overreach by the federal government.

It is well known that there have always been those amongst us who wish to enlarge the powers of the General Government, and experience would seem to indicate that there is a tendency on the part of this Government to overstep the boundaries marked out for it by the Constitution Every attempt to exercise power beyond these limits should be promptly and firmly opposed, for one evil example will lead to other measures still more mischievous

One example of federal overreach lies in taxation.

There is, perhaps, no one of the powers conferred on the Federal Government so liable to abuse as the taxing power. Congress has no right under the Constitution to take money from the people unless it is required to execute some one of the specific powers intrusted to the Government; and if they raise more than is necessary for such purposes, it is an abuse of the power of taxation, and unjust and oppressive.

The villains behind abuses such as exorbitant tariffs are the “corporations and wealthy individuals,” acting in their own self-interest at the expense of the common citizens – along with corrupt politicians who do their bidding.

The corporations and wealthy individuals who are engaged in large manufacturing establishments desire a high tariff to increase their gains. Designing politicians will support it to conciliate their favor and to obtain the means of profuse expenditure for the purpose of purchasing influence in other quarters; and since the people have decided that the Federal Government can not be permitted to employ its income in internal improvements, efforts will be made to seduce and mislead the citizens of the several States by holding out to them the deceitful prospect of benefits to be derived from a surplus revenue collected...

Jackson then takes out after the threats he has always seen lurking in a paper money supply rather than gold and silver coinage, and in the banking industry in general.

The Constitution of the United States unquestionably intended to secure to the people a circulating medium of gold and silver. But the establishment of a national bank by Congress, with the privilege of issuing paper money receivable in the payment of the public dues, and the unfortunate course of legislation in the several States upon the same subject, drove from general circulation the constitutional currency and substituted one of paper in its place.

The evils perpetrated by the soft money and unscrupulous bankers fall most heavily on the lower classes.

Some of the evils which arise from this system of paper press with peculiar hardship upon the class of society least able to bear it... the laboring classes of society... whose daily wages are necessary for their subsistence. It is the duty of every government so to regulate its currency as to protect this numerous class, as far as practicable, from the impositions of avarice and fraud.

For Jackson, of course, the leading symbol of this “avarice and fraud” is the Bank of the United States.

But when the charter for the Bank of the United States was obtained from Congress it perfected the schemes of the paper system and gave to its advocates the position they have struggled to obtain from the commencement of the Federal Government to the present hour... The distress and sufferings inflicted on the people by the bank are some of the fruits of that system of policy which is continually striving to enlarge the authority of the Federal Government beyond the limits fixed by the Constitution. The severe lessons of experience will, I doubt not, be sufficient to prevent Congress from again chartering such a monopoly, even if the Constitution did not present an insuperable objection to it.

The common man, the backbone of all that is good in the nation, is forever in danger of losing his liberty and his prosperity to the wealthy and privileged few who control the nation’s corporations.

The mischief springs from the power which the moneyed interest derives from a paper currency which they are able to control, from the multitude of corporations with exclusive privileges which they have succeeded in obtaining in the different States... The paper-money system and its natural associations--monopoly and exclusive privileges--have already struck their roots too deep in the soil, and it will require all your efforts to check its further growth and to eradicate the evil... Unless you become more watchful... and check this spirit of monopoly and thirst for exclusive privileges you will in the end find that the most important powers of Government have been given... away, and the control over your dearest interests has passed into the hands of these corporations.

He closes by returning to America’s remarkable progress so far, and the duty of those who follow to “preserve it for the benefit of the human race.”

The progress of the United States under our free and happy institutions has surpassed the most sanguine hopes of the founders of the Republic. Our growth has been rapid beyond all former example in numbers, in wealth, in knowledge, and all the useful arts which contribute to the comforts and convenience of man, and from the earliest ages of history to the present day there never have been thirteen millions of people associated in one political body who enjoyed so much freedom and happiness as the people of these United States. You have no longer any cause to fear danger from abroad.

Providence has showered on this favored land blessings without number, and has chosen you as the guardians of freedom, to preserve it for the benefit of the human race. May He who holds in His hands the destinies of nations make you worthy of the favors He has bestowed and enable you, with pure hearts and pure hands and sleepless vigilance, to guard and defend to the end of time the great charge He has committed to your keeping.

My own race is nearly run; advanced age and failing health warn me that before long I must pass beyond the reach of human events and cease to feel the vicissitudes of human affairs. I thank God that my life has been spent in a land of liberty and that He has given me a heart to love my country with the affection of a son. And filled with gratitude for your constant and unwavering kindness, I bid you a last and affectionate farewell.

Time: 1837-1845

Jackson's Final Years

Jackson is eleven days shy of his 70th birthday when he leaves the White House.

He has been sickly for years, suffering from assorted ailments. He carries a bullet so near his heart from his 1806 duel with John Dickinson that surgeons are fearful of removing it. The wound never heals fully, and causes an abscess in his lung leading on to fever and chills and spitting up blood. In 1813 his left upper arm has been shattered, again by a bullet, this time fired after a tavern brawl by the brother of Senator Thomas Hart Benton. During the War of 1812 he suffers a severe bout of dysentery, which becomes chronic in nature. He loses sight in his right eye in 1837 and is frequently racked by stomach cramps and a hacking cough.

Despite these afflictions, he soldiers on, returning to his Hermitage Plantation soon after leaving Washington.

His time there is spent organizing his presidential papers and restoring his long neglected property.

In 1840 he ventures out on his last extended trip, this time to New Orleans to celebrate the 25th anniversary of his victory over the British that brought him national fame.

His heart begins to give out and he is unable to walk by 1844.

He is still, however, mentally sharp, and begins to work on behalf of James Knox Polk, a fellow Tennessean, in the 1844 race for the Democratic nomination and the presidency.

By May 1845 he is bedridden and fighting constant shortness of breath and swelling from head to toe. The end comes on June 8, 1845, two days after he sends a final note to Polk with his comments on the Oregon crisis.

The President is 78 years old when he passes. He is buried with little fanfare next to his long deceased wife, Rachel, in the tomb he has designed at the Hermitage.

He is eulogized soon after his death by one Jefferson Davis, who is on the verge of running for Congress at the time.