1 A New Era in Politics

Reading Focus
- How did the growing spirit of equality change voting rights in the 1820s?
- Why was there a dispute over the election of 1824?
- Why was John Quincy Adams an unpopular President?
- What new political parties developed?

Main Idea As President, Andrew Jackson became the symbol for the new democratic spirit that brought political and social changes to the nation.

Setting the Scene Harry Ward, a New England teacher, made a visit to Cincinnati, Ohio, during the 1824 presidential election campaign. Writing to a friend, he described how Ohioans felt about Andrew Jackson, who was running for President. Jackson's supporters, he observed were "Strange! Wild! Infatuated! All for Jackson!"

On election day, more people voted for Andrew Jackson than for any of the other candidates. Oddly enough, Jackson did not become President that year.

Growing Spirit of Equality

The spirit of democracy, which was changing the political system, affected American ideas about social classes. Most Americans did not feel that the rich deserved special respect.

Wealthy European visitors to the United States were surprised that American servants expected to be treated as equals. Others were amazed that butlers and maids refused to be summoned with bells, as in Europe.

Alexis de Tocqueville A visitor from France, Alexis de Tocqueville (TOHK veel) became especially well known for his observations on American Democracy. He arrived in the United States in 1831. The French government had sent him to study the American prison system. For several months, Tocqueville toured much of the United States. However, he observed much more than prisons. He observed a society that was becoming more and more democratic.

After his return to France, Tocqueville recorded his experiences and observations in a book titled Democracy in America. In it, he admired the American democratic spirit and its goals of equality and freedom. He found the results of the “revolution taking place” in America while “still far from coming to an end” were “already incomparably greater than anything which has taken place in the

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More Voters During the 1820s, more people gained suffrage, or the right to vote. Others, however, were denied full participation in the growing democracy.

The United States was growing rapidly. New states were joining the Union, and there were many citizens eager to participate in elections. Some of the first states to give voting privileges to white males without property were in the West. In these states, any white man over age 21 could vote.

Reformers in the East worked to expand suffrage. By the 1830s, most eastern states dropped the requirement that voters own land. In this way, many craftsmen and shopkeepers won the right to vote.

Throughout the country, growing numbers of Americans exercised their right to vote. Before 1828, the turnout of eligible voters was never more than 27 percent. That low percentage rose to nearly 58 percent in the election of 1828. By 1840, voter turnout was nearly 80 percent.

Limits on Suffrage Despite the nation’s growing democratic spirit, a great many Americans did not have the right to vote. They included women, Native Americans, and a vast majority of African Americans. Slaves had no political rights at all.

As more white men were winning suffrage, free African Americans were losing it. In the early years of the nation, most northern states had allowed free African American men to vote. In the 1820s, many of these states took away that right. By 1830, only a few New England states permitted African American men to vote on equal terms with white men. In New York, African American men had to own property in order to vote. White men did not.

The Disputed Election of 1824
There were four candidates for President in 1824. All four were members of the old Republican party. However, each had support in different parts of the country. John Quincy Adams was strong in New England. Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson had support in the West. William Crawford was favored in the South. However, he became too ill to campaign.

The Candidates John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts was the son of Abigail and John Adams, the second President. A graduate of Harvard University, the younger Adams had served as Secretary of State and helped end the War of 1812. People admired Adams for his intelligence and high morals. Adams, however, was uncomfortable campaigning among the common people. In fact, to most people he seemed hard and cold.
A Kentuckian, Henry Clay was a shrewd politician who became Speaker of the House of Representatives. In Congress, Clay was a skillful negotiator. He worked out several important compromises. Despite his abilities, Clay was less popular than the other candidate from the West, Andrew Jackson.

Most Americans knew Andrew Jackson for his military victories in the War of 1812. He was the “Hero of New Orleans.” He also earned the nickname “Old Hickory” after a soldier said that he was “tough as hickory.” Although he was a landowner and a slave owner, many saw him as a man of the people. Jackson had been born in a log cabin, and his parents were poor farmers. He was admired by small farmers and others who felt left out of the growing economy in the United States.

The “Corrupt Bargain” No clear winner emerged from the election of 1824. Jackson won the popular vote, but no candidate won a majority, or more than half, of the electoral votes. As a result, the House of Representatives had to choose the President from among the top three candidates. Because he finished fourth, Clay was out of the running. As Speaker of the House, though, he was able to influence the results.

Clay urged members of the House to vote for Adams. After Adams became President, he named Clay his Secretary of State. Jackson and his backers were furious. They accused Adams and Clay of making a “corrupt bargain” and stealing the election from Jackson.

As Jackson was riding home to Tennessee, he met an old friend. “Well, General,” said the friend, “we did all we could for you here, but the rascals at Washington cheated you out of it.”

“Indeed, my old friend,” replied Jackson, “there was cheating and corruption and bribery, too.”

The charges were not true, however. The election was decided as the Constitution stated. Still, the anger of Jackson and his supporters seriously hampered President Adams’s efforts to unify the nation.

An Unpopular President

Adams knew that the election had angered many Americans. To “bring the whole people together,” he pushed for a program of economic growth through internal improvements. His plan backfired, however, and opposition to him grew.

Promoting Economic Growth Similar to Alexander Hamilton and Henry Clay, Adams thought that the federal government should promote economic growth. He called for the government to pay for new roads and canals. These internal improvements would help farmers to transport goods to market.

Adams also favored projects to promote the arts and the sciences. He suggested building a national university and an observatory from which astronomers could study the stars.

Most Americans objected to spending money on such programs. They feared that the federal government would become too powerful. Congress approved money for a national road and some canals but turned down most of Adams’s other programs.
A Bitter Campaign In 1828, Adams faced an uphill battle for reelection. This time, Andrew Jackson was Adams’s only opponent.

The campaign was a bitter contest. The focus was not on issues, but on the candidates’ personalities. Jackson supporters, however, renewed charges that Adams made a “corrupt bargain” after the 1824 election. But they also attacked Adams as an aristocrat, or member of the upper class. Adams supporters replied with similar attacks. They called Jackson a dangerous “military chieftain.” If Jackson became President, they warned, he could become a dictator like Napoleon Bonaparte of France.

Jackson won the election easily. His supporters cheered the outcome as a victory for common people. For the first time, the politics of the common people were important. By common people, they meant farmers in the West and South and city workers in the East.

Jacksonian Democracy Andrew Jackson’s inauguration in 1829 reflected the growing spirit of democracy. The spread of political power to more people was part of what became known as Jacksonian democracy.

Jackson was also the first westerner to occupy the White House. His election represented the beginning of a shift of political power to the West.

As Jackson traveled to Washington to be inaugurated, large crowds cheered him along the way. For the first time, thousands of ordinary people flooded the capital to watch the President take the oath of office. After Jackson was sworn in, the crowd followed the new President to a reception at the White House. One onlooker described the scene with amazement:

“Country men, farmers, gentlemen, mounted and dismounted, boys, women and children, black and white. Carriages, wagons, and carts all pursuing [Jackson] to the President’s house.”

—Margaret Bayard Smith, The First Forty Years of Washington Society

The crowds were so huge, the observer continued, that the President was “almost suffocated and torn to pieces by the people in their eagerness to shake hands.”

Jackson’s critics said the scene showed that “King Mob” was ruling the nation. Amos Kendall, a loyal Jackson supporter, viewed the inauguration celebration in a more positive way: “It was a proud day for the people. General Jackson is their own President.”
New Political Parties

By 1820, the disappearance of the Federalist party temporarily ended party differences. In the 1830s, however, new political parties took shape. These parties grew out of the conflict between John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson.

People who supported Adams and his programs for national growth called themselves National Republicans. In 1834, they became known as Whigs. Whigs wanted the federal government to spur the economy. Those who supported the Whigs included eastern business people, some southern planters, and many former Federalists. Jackson and his supporters called themselves Democrats. Today’s Democratic party traces its roots to Andrew Jackson’s time. Democrats included frontier farmers, as well as workers in eastern cities.

New Ways to Choose Candidates The two new political parties developed more democratic ways to choose candidates for President. In the past, powerful members of each party held a caucus, or private meeting. There, they chose their candidate. Critics called the caucus system undemocratic because only a few powerful people were able to take part in it.

In the 1830s, each party began to hold a nominating convention, where delegates from all the states chose the party’s candidate for President. Party leaders might still dominate a particular convention, but the people could now have some influence in the nominating process. Also, state nominating conventions encouraged citizen participation in elections. Once citizens learned about the events of the convention, they would work for their party’s choices. Today, the major political parties still hold conventions.

Section 1 Assessment

Recall
1. Identify Explain the significance of
   (a) Alexis de Tocqueville,
   (b) John Quincy Adams,
   (c) Whigs, (d) Democrats.
2. Define (a) suffrage,
   (b) majority, (c) caucus,
   (d) nominating convention.

Comprehension
3. How did political parties reflect the growing spirit of equality?
4. Why did Andrew Jackson feel that the election of 1824 was unfair?
5. What programs did Adams propose that made him unpopular?

Critical Thinking and Writing
6. Exploring the Main Idea
   Review the Main Idea statement at the beginning of this section. Then, write a paragraph explaining how a Jackson supporter might respond to this question: “Does a man become wiser, stronger, or more virtuous and patriotic because he has a fine house?”

7. Supporting a Point of View
   Write a paragraph in which you agree or disagree with John Quincy Adams’s position that government should spend money to support the arts and sciences. Explain your answer.

Activity

Writing a Dialogue
Write a dialogue in which John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson discuss the election of 1824.