

Andrew Jackson

Jackson was born in a log cabin on the frontier. Both of his parents died before he turned 15 and he was forced to grow up quickly. He was a determined fighter – he joined the Patriots in the American Revolution at age 13, was captured by the British, and while captured even refused to clean the British officers' boots. The officer then took out his sword and slashed Jackson's hand and face.

He studied law in North Carolina and was elected to Congress in his twenties. He became famous following the Battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812. He had a very quick temper and dealt with enemies very harshly.

The Spoils System

Jackson knew that following his election the American people wanted change. After taking office, he fired more than 200 government employees and replaced them with his own supporters. Critics said he was just rewarding his friends rather than hiring the most qualified applicants. Jackson said he was allowing more citizens (especially those common citizens) participate in government. He also felt it would prevent a small group of wealthy men control the government.

A famous Jackson supporter said, "*To the victor belong the spoils.*" Spoils are profits or benefits – and from this day forth, the practice of rewarding supporters with government jobs became known as the **Spoils System**.

He awarded many of his supporters with jobs in his cabinet; most of them were not qualified for their positions. Only his Secretary of State Martin Van Buren was actually qualified. He seldom actually met with his cabinet. Instead, he relied on a group of "unofficial" advisors who became known as the **Kitchen Cabinet** because they conducted their meetings in the kitchen of the White House.

The Bank War

Jackson disliked the Bank of the United States. He thought it was too powerful and undemocratic. He especially disliked the current President of the Bank, Nicholas Biddle, because he felt Biddle used the Bank to benefit only the rich and also influenced Congress. Henry Clay and Daniel Webster sided with the Bank and had their own plan to save the bank and defeat Jackson. They persuaded Biddle to apply for an early renewal to the Bank's charter. Jackson vetoed the Bank Bill and the Bank of the United States closed in 1836 (which will lead to a national crisis).

States Rights

Tariff of Abominations

In 1828, Congress passed the highest tariff in the history of the United States. Southerners called it the Tariff of Abominations. It protected manufacturers from foreign competition (again) and hurt southern planters. They sold their cotton in Europe and bought European goods in return. The tariff meant that they had to pay more for these imports – and some thought it was unconstitutional.

Vice President Calhoun felt that a state had the right to **nullify** (cancel) a federal law that it considered to be unconstitutional. Daniel Webster disagreed, stating that nullifying actions of Congress could cause the nation to fall apart. Because Calhoun so vehemently disagreed with Jackson, he resigned from the Vice Presidency.

The Nullification Crisis

Anger in the South continued to increase. Congress, to appease the south, lowered the tariff slightly in 1832. South Carolina was not satisfied. They passed the **Nullification Act** declaring the new tariff illegal and threatened to **secede** from the Union. Jackson was furious but he publicly supported lowering the tariff and also asked Congress to pass the "Force Bill" allowing him to use military force to enforce the tariff. South Carolina repealed the Nullification Act but the tensions between the North and the South continued to increase.