Chapter 10: Democratic Politics, Religious Revival and Reform, 1824-1840

THE RISE OF DEMOCRATIC POLITICS, 1824-1832

* By 1824 the Republican Party was coming apart under pressures generated by industrialization in New England, the spread of cotton cultivation in the South, and westward expansion.
* These forces sparked issues that would become the basis for the new political division between Democrats and Whigs.
* In general, those Republicans (augmented by a few former Federalists) who retained Jefferson’s suspicion of a strong federal government and preference for states’ rights became Democrats; those Republicans (along with many former Federalists) who believed that the national government should actively encourage economic development became Whigs.
* All leaders in the 1820s and 1830s had to adapt to the rising democratic idea of politics as a forum for the expression of the will of the common people rather than as an activity that gentlemen conducted for the people.

*Democratic Ferment*

* Political democratization took several forms
* One of the most common was the substitution of poll taxes for the traditional requirement that voters own property.
* Written ballots replaced the custom of voting aloud – which allowed for intimidation.
* Appointive offices increasingly became elective.
* The Electoral College survived, but the choice of presidential electors by state legislatures gave way to their direct election by the voters.
* Political democratization developed at an uneven pace. In 1820 both the Federalists and Republicans were still organized from the top down.
* To nominate candidates both parties relied on the caucus (a conference of party members in the legislature) rather than on popularly elected nominating conventions.
* Women and African Americans couldn’t vote.

*The Election of 1824*

* Sectional tensions brought the Era of Good Feelings to an end in 1824 when five candidates, all Republicans, vied for the presidency.
* Jackson entered the race late. He won more popular and electoral votes than any other candidate but failed to gain the majority required by the Constitution. Clay gave his support to Adams and the House of Reps voted for him. Then Adams gave Clay the secretary of state position. Many thought they struck a deal and this clouded Adams’s presidency.

*John Quincy Adams as President*

* He made several decisions that cloaked his presidency in controversy.
* In 1825, he proposed a program of federal aid for internal improvements. Strict Jeffersonians had always opposed such aid as unconstitutional.
* Adams next proposed sending American delegates to a conference of newly independent Latin American nations, a proposal that infuriated southerners because it would imply US recognition of Haiti, the black republic created by slave revolutionaries.
* He tried to practice non-partisan politics and it ended up giving him a one term presidency.

*The Rise of Andrew Jackson*

* Jackson was a national hero for his win at New Orleans, but many politicians were weary of him because of his hot temper and his fondness for duels.
* Martin Van Buren was a new breed of politician. In Albany he built a powerful political machine, the Albany Regency, composed mainly of men like himself from the lower and middling ranks.
* The election of 1824 convinced Van Buren of the need for renewed two-party competition.
* Jackson’s strong showing in the election persuaded Van Buren that “Old Hickory” could lead a new political party. In the election of 1828, this party, which gradually became known as the Democratic party, put up Jackson for President and Calhoun for vice president.
* Its opponents, calling themselves the National Republicans, rallied behind Adams and his running mate, treasury secretary Richard Rush. Slowly but surely, the second American party system was taking shape.

*The he Election of 1828*

* The 1828 campaign was a vicious, mudslinging affair.
* Jackson would win, he was seen as a more ordinary man, a man of the people.
* Adams was portrayed as an aristocrat and Jackson was seen as a common man, even though he was a wealthy planter.
* The popular vote was close, but Jackson won by many electoral votes. The country was split on sectional lines.

*Jackson in Office*

* His first policy was to support “rotation in office” – the removal of officeholders of the rival party, which critics called the “spoils system”.
* He did not invent this policy, but he enforced more fervently than his predecessors, so much that real estate slumped in Washington
* His stand on internal improvements and tariffs sparked even more intense controversy. Although not opposed to all federal aid for internal improvements, Jackson was sure that public officials used such aid to woo supporters by handing out favors to special interests. To end this lavish and corrupt giveaway, he flatly rejected federal support for roads within states.
* His strongest support lay in the South.
* The Indian Removal Act of 1830 enhanced his popularity in the South.
* The tariff issue would test his presidency – some of Jackson’s supporters in Congress had contributed to the passage of a high protective tariff that was as favorable to western agriculture and New England manufacturing as it was unfavorable to southerners, who had few industries to protect and who now would have to pay more for manufactured goods.
* Jackson bore the fury of the south over this tax.

*Nullification*

* The tariff of 1828 laid the basis for a rift between Jackson and his vice president, John C. Calhoun.
* During the late 1820s, however, Calhoun the nationalist gradually became Calhoun the states’ rights sectionalist. The reasons for his shift were complex. He had supported the tariff of 1816 as a measure conducive to national defense in the wake of the War of 1812. He said the tariff would free the US from dependence on Britain and provide revenue for military preparedness. By 1826 few Americans perceived national defense as a priority.
* The industries had demanded higher and higher tariffs.
* Calhoun wanted to succeed Jackson as president, but the high tariffs slowly turned the South against him. Tariffs not only drove up the price of manufactured goods but also threatened to reduce the sale of British textile products in the US. Such a reduction might eventually lower the British demand for southern cotton and cut cotton prices.
* The more New England industrialized, the clearer it became that Tariff laws were pieces of sectional legislation.
* Calhoun insisted that only tariffs that raised revenue for such common purposes as defense were constitutional. They were set so high that it deterred foreign exporters from shipping their products to the US, the tariff of 1828 could raise little revenue, and hence it failed to meet Calhoun’s criterion of constitutionality: that federal laws benefit everyone equally.
* Calhoun wrote that the tariff of 1828 was unconstitutional and that aggrieved states had the right to nullify the law within their borders.
* Southerners thought that if they favored one section over another that it would start with tariffs and move to slavery.
* To retain northern support and appease the south, Jackson devised two policies.
  + The first was to distribute surplus federal revenue to the states – he thought this would ease the sectional tensions because each state would get an even amount
  + Second, Jackson hoped to ease tariffs down from the sky-high level of 1828.
* Congress did slightly reduce tariffs in 1832, but not enough to appease South Carolinians.
* Jackson and Calhoun went head to head.
* In Nov. 1832 a SC convention nullified the tariffs of 1828 and 1832 and forbade the collection of custom duties – Jackson was furious.
* The crisis ended in March 1833 when Jackson signed into law two measures
  + Tariff of 1833 (Compromise tariff), which provided for a gradual but significant lowering of duties between 1833 and 1842.
  + Force Bill – authorizing the president to use arms to collect customs duties in South Carolina.
* The nullifiers hated Jackson.
* Clay became very popular in the South because it was his compromise tariff

*The bank Veto and the Election of 1832*

* Jackson recognized the increasing gap between rich and poor. He thought the Bank of the US was guilty.
* The bank was more powerful than any bank today, but private citizens controlled it.
* It was chartered by Congress, but was located in Philadelphian, not Washington.
* Nicholas Biddle was the president of the bank, he viewed himself as a public servant duty-bound to keep the bank above politics.
* Biddle secured passage of bill to re-charter the bank – Jackson vetoed it – Congress failed to override the veto.
* Jackson thought that the states’ should have freedom to govern themselves.
* He ran again for the presidency in 1832 with Martin Van Buren as his running mate.
* Henry Clay ran on the National Republican ticket. Jackson’s personal popularity swamped Clay. Jackson was now ready to finish dismantling the Bank of the US.

THE BANK CONTROVERSY AND THE SECOND PARTY SYSTEM 1833-1840

* Jackson’s banking policies spurred the rise of the opposition Whig party, mightily stimulated popular interest in politics, and contributed to the severe economic downturn, known as the Panic of 1837, that greeted his successor, Martin Van Buren.
* There was controversy in banking because there was no official paper money in the US. People would be paid in notes that they would collect on at banks. If a note depreciated then the owner stood to lose money.

*The War on the Bank*

* Jackson did not want the US Bank to regain power, so he began removing federal deposits from the Bank of the US and placing them in state banks.
* This policy allowed state banks to increase their lending capacity. But Jackson hated both paper money and a speculative economy in which capitalists routinely took out large loans. The policy of removal seemed a formula for producing exactly the kind of economy that Jackson wanted to abolish.
* During the next few years, fueled by paper money from the pet banks and by an influx of foreign specie to purchase cotton and for investment in canal projects, the economy experienced a heady expansion. He could not stop it. Pressured by Congress, he signed into law the Deposit Act, which both increased the number of deposit banks and loosened federal control of them.
* Aside from Jackson and a few others, the most articulate support for hard money came from a faction of the Democratic Party in NY called the Locofocos.

*The Rise of Whig Opposition*

* During Jackson’s second term, the opposition National Republican party gave way to the new Whig Party, which developed a broader base in both the South and the North than had the national Republicans.
* The Whigs were making significant inroads, particularly in southern market towns and among planters who had close ties to southern bankers and merchants.
* Social reformers in the North were infusing new vitality into the opposition to Jackson.
* They wanted to improve society by ending slavery and the sale of liquor, bettering public education, and elevating public morality.
* Native-born Protestant supported the Whigs and mostly Irish immigrants turned to the Democrats.
* Anti-masonry people supported Whigs, they did not like their secrecy and rituals.
* By 1836, the Whigs had become a national party with widespread appeal. In the North and the South they attracted those with close ties to the marked economy – commercial farmers, planters, merchants, and bankers. In the North they also gained supported from reformers, evangelical clergymen, Anti-Masons, and manufacturers.

*The Election of 1836*

* In 1836 the Democrats ran Martin Van Buren. The Whigs could not decide on one candidate. Three Whigs were William Henry Harrison of Ohio, Daniel Webster of Mass, and W.P. Mangum of NC – and one Democrat Hugh Lawson White of TN.
* Van Buren won.

*The Panic of 1837*

* May 1837, prices began to tumble and bank after bank suspended specie payments.
* It had a short revival, but fell again in 1839. The Bank of US – which was running as a state bank failed.
* The depression was long and severe
* The origins of the depression were both national and international. The Specie Circular (it made banks hesitant to issue more of the paper money that was fueling the boom, because western farmers eager to buy public land would now demand that banks immediately redeem their paper in specie) was a cause. There were international causes as well, most notably the fact that Britain, in an effort to restrain the outflow of British investment, checked the flow of specie from its shores to the US in 1836.

*The Search for Solutions*

* Van Buren called for the creation of an independent Treasury. The idea was simple: instead of depositing its money in banks, which would then use federal funds as the basis for speculative loans, the government would hold its revenues and keep them from the grasp of corporations. It was signed on July 4, 1840.
* It failed to address the issue on the state level, where newly chartered state banks – of which there were more than 900 by 1840 –lent money to farmers and businessmen.

*The Election of 1840*

* Despite the depression, Van Buren regained his party’s re-nomination. The Whig’s decided on William Henry Harrison and John Tyler as his VP candidate.
* Harrison portrayed himself as an ordinary frontiersman.
* “Tippecanoe and Tyler too”
* Harrison won convincingly – he campaigned traveling the country on trains. Van Buren wrote letters to key supporters.

*The Second Party System Matures*

* The second party system, which had been developing slowly since 1828, more than a decade.
* The tariff, banking issues, and reform also aroused partisan passions by 1840.