

In the Spotlight: Andrew Jackson

Overview

Andrew Jackson, the seventh president of the United States, was born on March 15, 1767, just south of the border between North and South Carolina. His birth marked the beginning of an extraordinarily eventful life. While an orphaned teenager, he was taken prisoner during the Revolutionary War, leading to a lifelong animosity toward the British. He studied law, and during the 1780s and 1790s he held various judicial and legislative posts, including congressman, senator (a post he held again in the 1820s), and justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, he embarked on a military career, gaining a reputation for heroism during the War of 1812, particularly at the Battle of New Orleans. He also served as military governor of Florida after leading a controversial expedition against the Seminole Indians. Meanwhile, he was the owner of a plantation worked with slaves. The injuries he received in battle and in at least thirteen duels rendered him one of the nation's sickliest presidents. Nevertheless, his frontier toughness earned him the nickname "Old Hickory." Jackson entered presidential politics in 1824 when he was nominated for president by the Democratic-Republican Party. Although he received a plurality of the popular vote in a four-candidate race, he failed to win a majority in the Electoral College, throwing the election to the House of Representatives, which chose John Quincy Adams. In 1828, however, Jackson was elected to the first of two terms as president under a revived Republican Party, with its name changed to the Democratic Party.

Jackson was a forceful and active president and outlined his positions on several issues in numerous state documents. Despite the resentment he bore to the British, a resentment deepened by the War of 1812, he opened U.S. ports to British merchants in 1830. He was a firm believer in the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, so he was the force behind removal of Indians from the eastern states to western reservations. Drawing on his frontier roots, he opposed the existence of a national bank, which he believed concentrated financial power in the hands of the few at the expense of the common people. Yet at the same time he was a proponent of a strong federal government. Although he was a slave owner, he never supported the rumblings of secession in the southern states that would eventually spark the Civil War, and as president he spoke out forcefully during the Nullification Crisis in South Carolina in 1832.

In 1837 Jackson retired to Nashville, Tennessee. He died at his nearby plantation, the Hermitage, on June 8, 1845.

Featured Documents

- [Proclamation Regarding the Opening of United States Ports to British Vessels](#) (October 5, 1830)
- [Indian Removal speech](#) (part of second annual message to Congress; December 6, 1830)
- [Bank Veto](#) (July 10, 1832)
- [Proclamation to the People of South Carolina](#) (December 10, 1832)

Time Line

1767—Born March 15 at Waxhaw settlement, South Carolina.
1780–1781—Serves in American Revolution and taken as a prisoner of war.
1788—Appointed public prosecutor for Western District of North Carolina and migrates west.
1796—Participates in Tennessee Constitutional Convention.
1796—Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.
1797—Elected to the U.S. Senate.
1798—Elected judge of the Tennessee Superior Court.
1802—Elected major general of the Tennessee militia.
1812–1815—Leads troops in War of 1812.
1821—Appointed governor of Florida Territory.
1822—Nominated for president by Tennessee legislature.
1823—Elected U.S. senator.
1829–1837—Serves as seventh U.S. president.
1830—On October 5, Issues a proclamation reopening American ports to British West Indian trade.
1830—Signs Indian Removal bill; explains his position on Indian affairs in his Second Annual Message to Congress on December 6.
1832—Outlines his objections to a national bank in vetoing the recharter of Second U.S. Bank on July 10.
1832—December 10, issues proclamation to the people of South Carolina on nullification.
1845—Dies at the Hermitage on June 8.

Key Sources

Various papers of Andrew Jackson can be found at The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, The Papers of Andrew Jackson, and Web site at <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/presiden/jackpap.htm>. The University of Tennessee in Knoxville since 1971 has been in the process of gathering, editing, and publishing a seventeen-volume edition of Jackson's papers, which will represent his entire output; as of 2008, seven volumes, covering the period through 1829, have been published; see <http://thepapersofandrewjackson.utk.edu/>. Numerous of Jackson's papers are housed at the Library of Congress and reproduced on microfilm; see <http://www.loc.gov/rr/mss/text/jacksona.html>. Additional resources for study can be found at the Web site of The Hermitage: Home of President Andrew Jackson, at <http://www.thehermitage.com>.

Adapted from: O'Neal, Michael J. "Jackson, Andrew." In *Milestone Documents of American Leaders*, edited by Paul Finkelman. Dallas, Tex: Schlager Group, forthcoming.

