Chapter Three

AFFAIRS OF OFFICE


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Shortly after the inauguration in March 1829 of Andrew Jackson as the seventh president of the United States, the influential Unitarian clergyman William Ellery Channing questioned the rationale for broadening the mandate of the government over which Jackson presided. The Constitution had established a national market, the federal courts had brokered disputes that might otherwise turn violent, and the Post Office Department had created a “chain of sympathies” that transformed the far-flung states into “one great neighborhood.” Why should legislators undertake new initiatives that might imperil the “actual beneficent influence” that these governmental institutions were already exerting? High tariffs impeded “unrestricted commerce”—the “most important means of diffusing through the world knowledge, arts, comforts, civilization, religion, and liberty.” Federal public works raised constitutional questions of “no small difficulty” that would almost certainly embroil Congress in “endless and ever-multiplying intrigues” and become a “fountain of bitterness and discord.” “In our republic,” Channing concluded, “the aim of Congress should be to stamp its legislation with all possible simplicity, and to abstain from measures, which, by their complication, obscurity, and uncertainty, must distract the public mind, and throw it into agitation and angry controversy.” As a people, we want “no new excitement”: “Our danger is from overaction, from impatient and selfish enterprise, from feverish energy, from too rapid growth, rather than from stagnation and lethargy.”

Channing’s remarks highlight two axioms of American politics that Jackson’s contemporaries took for granted but which present-day commentators sometimes forget. By 1829, the central government had already become a leading actor on the national stage, and any broadening of its mandate was likely to prove contentious and might even put the Union at risk. In this way, Channing provides a frame of reference for this essay, which explores the relationship between state building and party formation in the period between the Missouri crisis of 1819–1821 and the abolitionist mails controversy of 1835.

This essay contends that the rise of the federal executive departments in the decades preceding Jackson’s victory in the election of 1828 was a necessary precondition for the emergence of the Democratic party in the months immediately following Jackson’s inauguration. It further contends that the political orbit around which Jackson’s Democratic party revolved had been subtly yet fundamentally reoriented by the Missouri crisis of 1819–1821.

The federal executive departments were organized in the first federal Congress (1789–1793) in accordance with principles outlined in the federal Constitution. The most important were the Treasury Department, the State Department, the War Department, and the Post Office Department. Their rise during the next four decades was slow yet steady. As they grew larger and more geographically extensive, they assumed new responsibilities, increased their organizational capabilities, and acquired a considerable measure of bureaucratic autonomy—which, by the 1820s, tempted ambitious department heads eager to advance their political careers.

The Democratic party received its initial impetus from the heterogeneous political coalition that backed Andrew Jackson in the election of 1824. The coalition failed when, in a controversial decision, the House of Representatives rejected Jackson in favor of John Quincy Adams, even though Jackson had received more votes from both the electoral college and the electorate. It triumphed in 1828 when Jackson defeated Adams in the electoral college. In the months immediately following Jackson’s inauguration, the coalition became transformed into the Democratic party, the lineal ancestor of the Democratic party of today. The Democratic party was a genuinely new kind of institution, making its emergence an unusual event and, as such, one that invites explanation. It was, as is often noted, the world’s first mass party, in the sense that it was a self-perpetuating organization that mobilized a large and diverse electorate on a regular basis in order to win elections and shape public policy. In addition, it was the first political party in the United States to unreservedly champion democracy. For each of these reasons, its origins have long intrigued students of American public life. From whence did it come? What best explains its emergence during the opening months of Jackson’s administration, a half century after the adoption of the federal Constitution?

Recent scholarship on the making of the Democratic party traces its origins to a constellation of disruptive economic changes—often termed the “market revolution”—that triggered the Panic of 1819. Jacksonians and
Democrats are supposed to have opposed market expansion; National Republicans and Whigs to have embraced it. Proponents of this view typically examine party formation from the standpoint of the electorate rather than party leaders, and dismiss the central government as little more than the arena within which the struggle over market expansion was waged. To clinch their argument, they highlight social divisions within the electorate that postdated the establishment of the Democratic party. Few demonstrate how these divisions explain the initial organization of the party in the months following Jackson's inauguration, or why party leaders made government corruption rather than market expansion the focus of Jackson's 1828 election campaign. This is not altogether surprising, since the favored methodology of these historians—the analysis of aggregate data using behavioral assumptions—is unsuited to the analysis of specific events.

One limitation of the “market revolution” thesis is the tendency of its proponents to exaggerate the aversion of ordinary Americans to market expansion. “The pleasing rhetoric of Jackson's moralizing fables notwithstanding,” as one critic has aptly remarked, “Americans demanded the market revolution long before they understood it...” There is, in short, little reason to assume that hostility to market expansion hastened the Jacksonian ascendancy—or, for that matter, that the “revolution” that swept Andrew Jackson into the White House in 1828 originated with the people rather than with the politicians. On the contrary, as Robert V. Remini contended almost a half century ago, this “revolution” moved in “one direction only—from the top down.”

Just as scholars have exaggerated the economic traditionalism of the Democratic party, so, too, they have overstated its administrative modernity. Some three decades ago, historian Lynn L. Marshall and political scientist Matthew Crenson credited the Jacksonians with introducing to the central government the routinized administrative procedures that have come to be known as bureaucracy. For Marshall, bureaucracy was a solution to economic inefficiency; for Crenson, a response to social disorder. Both regarded it as a Jacksonian legacy and hailed Jackson's postmaster general, Amos Kendall, as its guiding spirit.

The Marshall-Crenson thesis has long been endorsed by political scientists interested in probing the origins of the modern American state. Yet it rests on a slim empirical base. Several of the bureaucratic precedents that the Jacksonians had supposedly invented had, in fact, originated in the eighteenth century and had been significantly refined by a previous generation of public administrators that included Treasury Secretary William H. Crawford, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, and Postmaster General John McLean. Once in office, the Jacksonians did little to modernize the administrative apparatus. If anything, their often clumsy directives made the administration of the executive departments even more burdensome and complex.

Symptomatic of the problems with the Marshall-Crenson thesis is its treatment of the deliberate reorganizations of the executive departments that took place during Jackson's presidency—the “first practical test,” Marshall gushed, of “innovative techniques of large-scale rational organization on a peculiarly American model.” A case in point was the reorganization of the Post Office Department that followed the enactment of the Post Office Act of 1836. Both Marshall and Crenson attributed this legislation to Kendall and hailed it as the quintessential Jacksonian administrative reform. In fact, however, the Post Office Act of 1836 originated with neither the Jacksonians nor the executive. Rather, it was a congressional response to a humiliating postal finance scandal that haunted the Jacksonians during Jackson's second term. It was pushed through Congress by Kendall but, rather, by a bipartisan coalition headed by anti-Jacksonian Whigs. For a time, Jacksonian party leaders actually opposed its enactment in the fear that public exposure of their administrative shortcomings might hurt them at the polls.

Marshall and Crenson's erroneous contention that the origins of the federal bureaucracy did not emerge until the 1830s—a half century after the adoption of the Constitution—is emblematic of an even more basic mischaracterization of the early American state. It has long been a cliché to dismiss the central government in the early republic as a “state of courts and parties,” an “innocuous reflection” of the wider society in which executive departments were unimportant and a “sense of statelessness” was a hallmark of American political culture.

The origins of this “courts and parties” school are complex. Its persistence owes more than a little to the continuing influence of the disparaging—and indeed almost comic—portrait of the early Washington political establishment that political scientist James Sterling Young limned in his prizewinning Washington Community. In this behaviorist tour de force,
first published in 1966, Young attributed congressional voting patterns in the period between 1800 and 1828 less to party loyalty, public demand, or considerations of public policy than to the highly localized, and largely idiosyncratic, alliances that legislators forged in Capitol Hill boarding-houses. Not until the Jacksonians established the mass party, Young concluded, would public figures devise effective ways to link the government and the governed.22

For over three decades, Young's Washington Community has beguiled historians and political scientists with its methodological novelty, artful argumentation, and literary charm. Unfortunately, as numerous critics have demonstrated, it is neither a full nor an accurate guide to the main events of American political development says more about the mistaken yet seductive and enduring appeal of a simple and uncomplicated past than it does about national politics in a formative age.

The remainder of this essay explores the relationship between the federal executive departments and the Democratic party. It builds on the insight, derived from political scientists and historical sociologists, that political events can have political origins and governmental institutions can be agents of change. In so doing, it challenges the common assumption that political events are, in some fundamental sense, the product of deeper or underlying social circumstances that originate outside of the political realm.23

Since arguments about the early American state are often misconstrued, it may be helpful to begin with a pair of disclaimers. It is not my intention to downplay the differences between the executive departments in the early republic and the administrative apparatus that has emerged since the Progressive Era. Much could be learned by tracing the continuities and discontinuities between, say, the War Department in the 1820s under John C. Calhoun and the Commerce Department in the 1920s under Herbert Hoover. Yet it would be anachronistic to treat the former as a microcosm of the latter—or, more broadly, to view nineteenth-century governmental institutions through a twentieth-century lens. This essay contends, on the contrary, that the origins of the Democratic party are best understood in relation to the rise of the executive departments in the period preceding the election of 1828.

Political commentators in the early republic took it for granted that the central government was an important institution and that the broadening of its mandate could threaten vested interests. Some, like Channing, opposed a broadened mandate; others, like John Quincy Adams, endorsed it. Few denied that the central government was an influential agent of change.

The ubiquity of this mental outlook owed much to the continuing influence in the early republic of certain habits of mind that had been influential in the late eighteenth century among the founders of the American republic. Known today as the "whig," "classical republican," or "country party" tradition, this mind-set had been popularized in seventeenth-century England by writers opposed to the consolidation of the English state and the establishment of the Bank of England. Among its tenets were the presumptions that political parties were evil, that economic conditions were a product of political fiat, and that the manipulation of government patronage for partisan ends was the essence of corruption.24 Paradoxically, some of the same historians who treat this mind-set with the utmost seriousness when it found expression during the revolutionary era dismiss it as anachronistic and even paranoid when it was revived in the early republic. This was true even though, by almost any measure, the central government in the 1820s was more powerful—in the sense of commanding more resources, controlling more patronage, and reaching farther into the hinterland—than the imperial state in British North America had been in the period prior to 1775. The cultural repertoire of the early republic—like that of any epoch—was limited, and antistatism was one of its defining motifs. The specter of governmental consolidation, declared French traveler Alexis de Tocqueville in his Democracy in America—in reflecting on a trip to the United States that he had taken between 1831 and 1832—was the "one great fear" that haunted public figures throughout the
United States, Tocqueville dismissed this fear as overblown, citing the diversity of the American people; for Channing, it was precisely this diversity that was cause for concern.

The Democratic party emerged in a political universe that had changed radically since the founders of the American republic drafted the federal constitution in 1787. The founders’ political economy had focused resolutely on Europe. With the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, a new generation of statesmen reoriented the American political economy toward the vast North American interior. To facilitate the expansion of the home market, legislators promulgated an ambitious legislative agenda that would later become known as the “American System.” Among its principal elements were a new national bank, a protective tariff, the orderly settlement of public lands, and the construction of public works. Beginning in 1816, much of this agenda was enacted. Legislative landmarks included the rechartering of the Bank of the United States in 1816; the tariffs of 1816, 1824, and 1828; the Land Act of 1820; and the General Survey Act of 1824. Its primary judicial expression was the affirmation of the constitutionality of the Bank of the United States by Chief Justice John Marshall in M'Culloch v. Maryland (1819).

Among the public figures to promote this ambitious agenda were Henry Clay, John Quincy Adams, and John McLean. John C. Calhoun also supported it early on, only to shift his position in response to changing conditions in South Carolina. For these “National Republicans,” as they would come to be known, the founders’ bold experiment in republican government was open-ended, and the central government a progressive, developmental force.

The implementation of this developmental agenda ensured the continuing elaboration of the federal executive departments, which had been growing steadily since the 1790s. In the United States, no less than in France, Germany, or Great Britain, big government preceded big business. By 1828, over 10,000 people staffed the myriad post offices, land offices, and customhouses that were scattered throughout the country. An additional 12,000 served in the military, half in the navy and marines and half in the army, stationed mostly in the West. The size and geographical reach of this administrative apparatus far exceeded that of any other institution in the country. No private enterprise could match the organizational capabilities of the Post Office Department, the Treasury Department, or the War Department. The Post Office Department alone had eight thousand offices, making it not only the largest public agency in the United States but also one of the largest, most administratively complex, and most geographically far-flung organizations in the world.

As the executive departments grew larger and more complex, ordinary Americans ratcheted up their expectations with regard to the kinds of benefits that they wished them to provide. In the realms of communications and transportation, popular demand for new and improved facilities was steady and insistent. Beginning in the 1790s, individuals throughout the United States successfully petitioned Congress to extend the postal network throughout the trans-Appalachian hinterland. Before long, many came to regard mail delivery as a fundamental right, or what we would today call an entitlement. Most postal petitioners requested merely that Congress increase the number of routes upon which the mail was transmitted; only occasionally, and in special circumstances, did they also demand that the central government improve the roads over which the mail was conveyed. By the 1820s, this began to change. For many, it now seemed but a matter of time before the citizenry would compel Congress to bring the transportation infrastructure up to the level that the postal network had already attained.

The General Survey Act of 1824 was a legislative response to this popular demand. By creating a Board of Engineers to oversee the design of future public works, it validated the growing popular presumption that the central government had a mandate to construct a national system of roads and canals. In so doing, it paralleled the Post Office Act of 1792, which had established an analogous precedent for the elaboration of the republic’s postal network. Following the enactment of the General Survey Act, popular expectations with respect to the kind of public works projects that the central government ought to undertake soared. Between 1824 and 1828, ninety public works projects received federal funding—including the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal—inaugurating an internal improvements boom that would continue well into the Jackson administration.

Talent gravitates to power, and, in the 1820s, the executive departments became nurseries for presidential aspirants. John McLean used his position as head of the Post Office Department to catapult himself from almost total obscurity into a perennial presidential contender. In the election of 1824, three of the five principal candidates—Adams, Calhoun, and William H. Crawford—were department heads, while a fourth, Henry Clay, would soon be appointed secretary of state. Political insiders took it for granted that Crawford, as treasury secretary, was manipulating the four years law—which mandated the reappointment of the principal treasury officers every four years—to build a political machine. Should Crawford win in 1824, it was publicly announced that he would sweep the offices, encouraging speculation about appointments to positions from which the incumbents had yet to be displaced. Calhoun, similarly, was assumed to be stealthily building a vast public works empire in the Department of War, to which the Board of Engineers had been attached.
In addition, Calhoun was quietly elaborating plans for the relocation of the remaining eastern tribes to the west of the Mississippi—laying the groundwork for the enactment, during Jackson's presidency, of the Indian Removal Act.

The alleged maladministration of the executive departments was a leading issue in the 1824 presidential campaign. Calhounites accused Crawford of official malfeasance, while Jacksonians attacked the federal bureaucracy as corrupt. For Jackson stalwart John Eaton, author of the anonymous *Letters of Wyoming*, Jackson's lack of executive experience became his most valuable asset—since it ensured that he, alone among the candidates, had never manipulated executive patronage to advance his career. For the first time in the history of the republic, a presidential aspirant was portrayed as a virtuous outsider determined to take on the Washington establishment.

The growing prominence of department heads in national politics helps to explain why numerous contemporaries, as well as many historians, have characterized the executive branch under James Monroe and John Quincy Adams as weak. Whether or not the presidents in this period were weak is a debatable point; there can be no question, however, that the department heads were strong. The postmaster general, the treasury secretary, and the secretary of war each enjoyed an impressive measure of bureaucratic autonomy, due, in large part, to their uncontested authority over the patronage that their departments disbursed. Predictably, they grew accustomed to negotiating directly with power brokers within Congress and the states, raising the specter of corruption and occasioning frequent embarrassment for Monroe and Adams.

The executive departments played an equally conspicuous role in the 1828 presidential campaign. The 1828 election was by far the most expensive to have been waged in the United States up to that point in time. Though it is impossible to know for certain, it probably cost around $1 million to elect Jackson president. This expense was borne primarily not by Jackson's supporters but, rather, by the Post Office Department through various hidden subsidies that postal patrons paid on their mail. Of these subsidies, the most important was the franking privilege, which granted certain public officers—including postmasters—the privilege to send an unlimited number of pamphlets, newspapers, and letters through the mail.

The Jackson campaign was coordinated from Washington, D.C., by Duff Green, a Missouri-based entrepreneur who in 1826 had secured the editorship of the Washington-based *United States Telegraph*. Green used the *Telegraph* to coordinate a far-flung media blitz that embraced a galaxy of strategically located Jacksonian newspapers. Had postal facilities remained as limited as they had been in 1800, it would have been technically impossible to mount such an elaborate campaign. In the absence of the franking privilege, it would have been prohibitively expensive.

Green recognized in the supposed maladministration of the executive departments a compelling campaign issue, and freely elaborated in the *Telegraph* on themes that Eaton had raised in his *Letters of Wyoming*. In editorial after editorial, Green lambasted the "corruption" that executive patronage had supposedly fostered and trumpeted the need for "reternchment and reform." No issue preoccupied Green more than Adams's appointment of Clay as Adams's secretary of state soon after Clay had secured Adams the vote of the Kentucky delegation during the 1824 presidential election—an outcome Green derided, in the best tradition of eighteenth-century English opposition writer James Burgh, as a "corrupt bargain." Adams, Green contended, had rewarded Clay with a lucrative office in an executive department in return for Clay's support in securing Adams's election.

In a certain sense, Green's anticorruptionism marked a shift in the Jacksonians' appeal. As recently as 1821, Jackson himself had denounced the "mania for retrenchment," while, as a Tennessee senator between 1823 and 1825, he had supported a protective tariff and federal public works. Yet Green's verbal assault reflected far more than merely his outrage at Adams's appointment of Clay. Eaton's *Letters of Wyoming*, after all, had been published before the House vote that decided the election of 1824. Rather, Green built upon, and exploited, the pervasive anxiety about the evils of governmental consolidation that Tocqueville had reflected upon in his *Democracy*. The rise of the executive departments—declared Jacksonian stalwart Thomas Hart Benton, in a congressional report on executive patronage that he authored in 1826—"completely falsified" James Madison's celebrated convention in *Federalist* 45 and 46 (1788) that the central government would never acquire the resources to challenge the prerogatives of the states. Should Congress fail to enact remedial legislation, Benton warned, the central government would soon dominate the states as effectively as if they were "so many provinces of one vast empire." Benton greatly exaggerated the impending demise of states' rights; yet his report documented the extent to which the rise of the executive departments had rendered anticorruptionism plausible. The growing popular demand for public works had an analogous effect. Had Adams not appointed Clay as his secretary of state, Green would have had little trouble inventing some other "corrupt bargain" with which to taunt the Adamsites and embolden the Jackson campaign.

Green's editorial stance helped bridge the ideological divide between Jackson's early supporters, most of whom hailed from the West, and the many southerners who had initially backed Crawford in 1824, but who eventually swung around to Jackson following Crawford's defeat. For
westerners intent on rapid commercial development, anticorruptionism cast the central government as an impediment to the release of entrepreneurial energy. For southerners fearful that the central government might imperil the institution of slavery, it provided reassurance that a Jackson administration would champion no new government initiatives that might put their interests at risk.

The rise of the executive departments might in other circumstances have benefited the Adams campaign. After all, Adams, as president, had—at least in theory—control over the patronage that his department heads disbursed. In practice, however, Adams refused to interfere with his department heads’ autonomy, depriving himself of a resource that might well have strengthened his campaign. Adams went so far as to retain John McLean as his postmaster general, even though McLean was widely presumed (correctly) to have been surreptitiously dispensing postal patronage in order to hasten Adams’s defeat—and, or so McLean hoped, boost McLean’s own presidential aspirations. “ Patronage is a sacred trust,” McLean sanctimoniously lectured Massachusetts Adamesite Edward Everett, in rebuffing Everett’s efforts to appoint Adams’s supporters to office: “It was never designed for the personal gratification of the individual holding it.” Should political supporters be rewarded with official preferment, the “struggle for office” would be perpetual and “thus would perish, perhaps forever, the best hope of man.” Everett saw matters differently. President Adams, Everett observed, made the “experiment” of appointing public officers with “exclusive regard to merit,” and “what has been the reward”? A “most furious opposition, rallied on the charge of corrupt distribution of office, and the open or secret hostility of three-fourths of the officeholders in the Union.”

In Great Britain, Everett elaborated, there existed a multitude of options for ambitious men seeking public renown, including the military and the peerage. In the United States, in contrast, there was nothing but public office. As a consequence, Everett explained, the lure of official preferment was virtually irresistible: “Office here is family, rank, hereditary fortune, in short everything out of the range of private life. This links its possession with innate principles of our nation; and truly incredible are the efforts men are willing to make, the humiliation they will endure, to get it.”

For Green, the promise of official preferment was a tempting reward to dangle before the party workers who coordinated the Jackson campaign. Ironically, the very practices that Green attacked as corrupt gave him a compelling incentive with which to tantalize his supporters. By lambasting the Adams administration for its manipulation of executive patronage, Green established a plausible rationale for a general sweep of the executive departments. Indeed, it was largely for this reason that party workers found anticorruptionism so compelling. From their perspective, it held out the promise of a rich harvest in offices and contracts should Jackson prevail. And who could have a better claim on these perquisites than the men who had engineered Adams’s defeat?

Jackson’s critics agreed. The “mass” of all the political parties of the day, Everett perceptively observed shortly before the election, was held together not by principle—as political parties had been in the 1790s, when the Federalists battled the Republicans—but, rather, by the “hope of office, and its honors and emoluments.” Should Jackson publicly proclaim, Everett wryly predicted, that, if victorious, he would dismiss none of his political antagonists and appoint no one on account of his political support, this would “cost him every vote out of Tennessee.”

For sensitive observers such as Channing, the brazenness of the scramble for office was appalling. The selection of a president, Channing warned, though a “comparatively inferior concern”—in relation to, for example, to the deliberations of Congress—had become so all-consuming that the quadrennial campaigns for the “Executive Department” had come to pose the single greatest immediate threat to the Union. It would be better, Channing concluded, to choose the president by lot, rather than to “repeat the degrading struggle through which we have recently passed.”

Jackson’s victory paved the way for the establishment of the Democratic party as a self-perpetuating organization. To set the stage for the much heralded purge, Green publicly announced in the Telegraph that Jackson would “reward his friends and punish his enemies.” In the “distribution of the federal patronage”—Green explained to one Jackson supporter, shortly before Jackson’s inauguration—General Jackson will have much in his power. He can enrich and strengthen his party by a transfer of the lucrative offices into sound hands.” With other Jackson supporters, Green was more forthright. “How is your postmaster?” Green queried a campaign worker shortly before Jackson’s inauguration: “Can’t I serve you there? Or can’t I obtain for you a mail contract? Let me hear from you fully on these points. . . . I am now in a position where I can serve my friends. . . .”

In response to Green’s call, hundreds of would-be-officeholders descended on Washington. Little wonder that Jackson’s inauguration turned into a near riot. The principal attendees were not sturdy backwoodsmen drawn to the capital to witness the “first people’s inaugural,” as generations of historians have naively assumed. Rather, they were expectant officeholders ravenous for spoils.

The partisan dismissals that began shortly after Jackson’s inauguration were a genuinely new development in American politics. Long before 1829, partisan dismissals had become familiar features of electoral poli-
tics in the Middle Atlantic states—and, in particular, in New York and Pennsylvania. Yet nothing even remotely like the purge that Green had prefigured in the Telegraph had ever before taken place in Washington, D.C. For the first time in American history, public figures throughout the country observed the workings of patronage politics as they had come to be practiced in Albany and Harrisburg. For many, including some of Jackson’s oldest supporters, it was an appalling spectacle, and one that would dominate popular perceptions of Jackson’s administration for one hundred years. The revulsion at the Jacksonians’ conduct was particularly widespread in the South, where northern patronage practices remained unknown. Writing in 1861, Jackson biographer James Parton articulated the shared consensus. Even if all of Jackson’s other executive decisions had been commendable, Parton concluded, his acquiescence in the partisan dismissal of meritorious public officers would still render his administration deplorable. Only after civil service reform had supplanted the “spoils system,” as the Jacksonian patronage policy would come to be known, would historians fix the spotlight on other features of Jackson’s administration, such as Jackson’s support for Indian removal or his war on the bank.

Among the first officeholders to be displaced was McLean. Since McLean had covertly backed Jackson’s election, he might seem like an unlikely victim of a partisan sweep. Yet Jacksonian party leaders had no intention of permitting him to retain control over a department that controlled such an abundance of contracts and jobs. After all, McLean had been a leading proponent of the public trust doctrine and had no desire to preside over a partisan turnout of his staff. Jackson neatly resolved what might otherwise have become his first cabinet crisis by appointing him to a vacant seat on the Supreme Court—somewhat to McLean’s chagrin, since he had hoped he might become head of the War Department, with all of the power and patronage that it controlled. Once McLean was out of the way—and the weak-willed William Barry installed as his successor—the purge of the Post Office Department could proceed, just as Green had intended. The significance of the partisan dismissals is easily overlooked. Consider the changes in the Post Office Department, the source of the vast majority of federal jobs. During the eight years of Jackson’s presidency, postal administrators dismissed 13 percent of the postmasters in the country. This percentage was not markedly different from that of previous administrations—and, in fact, it has often been interpreted as proof that the Jacksonians merely followed time-honored precedent. In fact, this percentage reveals little. Most postmasterships paid little and, thus, were not considered patronage plums.

If one breaks down the postal dismissals by region and level of compensation, a more revealing pattern emerges. During the first year of Jackson’s presidency, postal administrators dismissed 38 percent of all the postmasters holding offices worth more than $300 in New England and the Middle Atlantic states, and 33 percent in the Northwest. In the South Atlantic, in contrast, they dismissed only slightly more than 2 percent of the postmasters who fell into this category.

This pattern cannot be explained as a response to the economic inefficiency of the incumbents (pace Marshall) or the social disorder of the region in which the dismissals occurred (pace Crenson). Many took place in New England, a region much admired for the high quality of its mail service and little prone to social disorder. Rather, it was a product of the deliberate party-building strategy of Jacksonian party leaders such as Green. The Jacksonians’ political base was in the South and West; by rewarding supporters in the North and East, party leaders built a national party. “The aristocracy will retreat to New England and entrench themselves behind local patronage,” Green confided to a Jackson supporter shortly before Jackson’s inauguration: “Our policy then is obvious. We must carry the war into the enemies’ camp and break down the force of their patronage by the influence of our principles and the aid of the federal patronage.”

While party leaders sometimes claimed that the partisan dismissals had democratized the civil government, in fact, they displayed scant animus against officeholders of high social standing. Displacing incumbents was far less important than rewarding supporters. Had party leaders had some other kind of perquisite at their disposal, they might well have settled their debts in some other way and left the administrative apparatus intact. To expose the hidden logic of the Jacksonians’ strategy, follow the money. Many of the most lucrative public offices went to men who had invested heavily in Jackson’s election campaign. Party leaders rationalized their patronage policy by invoking the time-honored doctrine of rotation in office, which Jackson announced in his first annual message in December 1829. Rotation in office had long been urged by political theorists as a precaution against the evils that might ensue should ambitious and grasping men monopolize the most powerful and prestigious public offices such as the presidency. The Jacksonians’ innovation was to extend the doctrine to almost every office in the government, including thousands of minor positions—such as village postmasterships—that involved little administrative discretion. Rotation superseded—and, in large measure, overturned—the public trust doctrine that McLean had articulated during his tenure as postmaster general. McLean’s public trust doctrine had established the presumption that of-
ficeholders had the right to remain in office unless they had been guilty of a dereliction of duty. Rotation in office nullified this presumption.54

In no sense was rotation in office a core Jacksonian belief. It had never been broached during the 1824 campaign and was not openly discussed until after Jackson's inauguration—even by party insiders.57 Jackson himself does not appear to have alluded to it in writing until several months following his inauguration, when he observed in a private memorandum book that it would “perpetuate our liberty.”58 Only slowly and haltingly would it acquire a prominent place in the political lexicon. Indeed, it would hardly be an exaggeration to suggest that rotation in office has received more approving commentary from twentieth-century historians than it did in Jackson's own day. In the years immediately following Jackson's inauguration, for example, Jackson's congressional supporters only rarely invoked rotation to justify the staffing changes that Jackson's administrators oversaw. And almost never did they echo the blunt yet honest assessment of New York senator William L. Marcy, who in 1832 asserted that the new administration had a right to appoint supporters to office, since “to the victor belongs the spoils.”59 Most continued to maintain—sometimes with little effort to conceal their blatant hypocrisy—that the public trust doctrine remained intact, and that every dismissed officeholder was guilty of some kind of dereliction of duty. This was true even though everyone familiar with the specifics of the appointment process understood that the only impropriety with which the vast majority of ex-officeholders could justly stand accused was the possession of an office coveted by party leaders as a reward for party workers. Jackson himself repeated this outrageous canard in a private letter to a longtime supporter as late as 1832, in which he dared an opposition editor to name a single public officer whom his administration had dismissed who had “not been swindling the government or was not a defaulter.”60

Opposition to rotation was by no means confined to administration critics. It sparked sharp dissent from within Jackson's cabinet and among some of Jackson's most loyal supporters. Rotation was also unpopular among the influential Washington society matrons who in previous administrations had worked diligently behind the scenes to match promising young men with suitable government berths.61 Few doubted that the new doctrine was anything more than a thinly veiled rationalization for the bestowal of lucrative offices upon campaign workers. In the political vocabulary of the day, this was not reform but corruption—the same charge that the Jacksonians had leveled against the Adamsites during the preceding campaign.

Notwithstanding its unpopularity, rotation in office gave party leaders the necessary incentives to transform the Jacksonian coalition into the Democratic party. The partisan dismissals helped the Jacksonians pay their campaign debts; rotation in office changed the rules of the game. The significance of this shift was independent of, and can in no sense be conflated with, the percentage of officeholders whom the Jacksonians dismissed. By creating a mechanism for the periodic replacement of a substantial fraction of the civil government, rotation established the material basis for the mass party as a self-perpetuating organization—a new institution that, along with the voluntary association, was one of the most notable institutional innovations of the age. Prior to 1829, when a national public figure referred to the spoils of office, he typically had in mind the benefits that legislators bestowed upon their constituents.62 Following Jackson's victory, the spoils would increasingly come to refer merely to the perquisites that party leaders lavished on campaign workers. Rather than something to fight for, the spoils became, as it were, something to fight with.63

Granted by party leaders onto a preexisting administrative apparatus, Jackson's Democratic party grew in fertile soil. In less than a decade, the Post Office Department had been transformed from the central administrative apparatus of the early American state into the wellspring of the mass party. In the process, it helped underwrite the distinctive electioneering style that would dominate presidential politics in the United States for the next eighty years.

President Jackson is often credited with strengthening the presidency by establishing a direct relationship with the American people and by declaring, in his nullification proclamation, that secession was treason and the Union perpetual.64 Jackson may have strengthened the presidency, yet his administration significantly weakened the organizational capabilities of the central government. This was largely by design. The main thrust of Jackson's administration was to reduce, whenever possible, the role of government in American life.65 By blocking internal improvements, endorsing tariff reduction, disbursing the Board of Engineers, vetoing a major land bill, and opposing the rechartering of the Bank of the United States, Jackson affirmed his faith in an antidevelopmental, states' right agenda quite different from the prodevelopmental, nationally oriented agenda of Adams and Clay. Though Jackson is acclaimed a nationalist, in fact, he relied on states' rights principles even during the nullification controversy, when he deployed one variant of states' rights to challenge a competing variant promulgated by the nullifiers of South Carolina.66 Jackson's opposition to the bank was, similarly, less economic than political, and rooted in the traditional English "country party" fear that bank officials might deploy the patronage at their disposal to subvert the regime—or, what was for Jackson the same thing, to underwrite the election campaign of his oppo-
nents. Even Jackson's notorious struggles with his cabinet over Peggy Eaton and over the removal of the bank deposits had the effect—as may well have been their intent—of curtailing the bureaucratic autonomy of his department heads and undermining the relationships they had forged with local notables in the capital and the states.

Jackson's endorsement of the rapid and inexpensive disbursement of the public lands also had an antidevelopmental rationale. By hastening the privatization of the public domain, Jackson discouraged the accumulation of a surplus in the treasury that might provide the occasion for new federal initiatives that could threaten vested interests. Indian removal, the major legislative achievement of Jackson's first term, may have been dependent on the army for its enforcement, yet it greatly increased the stock of cheap land and, thus, decreased the likelihood that the sale of the public domain would become a source of general revenue. Tariff reduction had an analogous logic, as did Jackson's determination to eliminate the federal debt, a goal he briefly attained in 1835. If the Treasury Department's coffers were bare, ambitious congressmen would lack the resources to embark on expansive new programs that might challenge the status quo.

Rotation in office was consistent with this antidevelopmental agenda. By lowering the prestige of public office and forestalling the emergence of administrative expertise, it limited the ability of the executive departments to perform the tasks they had been assigned. Jacksonian appointees were almost always less qualified than the men they had supplanted and often became embroiled in scandal and graft. In every public agency that historians have scrutinized—the Post Office Department, the General Land Office, the military armory at Harper's Ferry, and the Army Corps of Engineers—the Jacksonians' administrative record fluctuated between the undistinguished and the abysmal. Not until the twentieth century would the executive departments regain the prestige that they had attained in the years immediately preceding Jackson's election. Early in Jackson's administration, Amos Kendall hailed Jackson's party for championing "simple, virtuous, and efficient government" and the abandonment of "all pretensions to power" that would "necessarily create collisions with the states." On the eve of the election of 1832, administration critic Alexander H. Everett offered up a rather less flattering assessment. By undermining federal prerogatives, defying the Supreme Court, and denying legislators "all their most important powers," the Jacksonians had attempted to "bring back the present Constitution to the imbecility of the Old Confederation."

Jacksonian antidevelopmentalism provides insight into the political ethos that historians term "Jacksonian Democracy." To the extent that the Jacksonians can be said to have had a guiding vision, it was reactionary—
Shifting demographics, however, rendered the future uncertain. During the revolutionary era, many statesmen had echoed James Madison's well-known prediction that slaveholders would retain control of the levers of power following the adoption of the Constitution, since the population of the slaveholding states would increase faster than the population of the nonslaveholding states. By the 1820s, few doubted that Madison's prediction was wrong. As the nonslaveholding states surpassed the slaveholding states in population, slaveholders recognized that they had best unite to prevent Congress from enacting legislation that might endanger prerogatives they had long taken for granted—including the right to own slaves.

Jacksonians understood the slaveholders' predicament. To articulate it, they recast in a popular idiom the antidevelopmental argument long espoused by the "Old Republicans"—a small yet purposeful group of southern and, indeed, mostly Virginian statesmen, writers, and editors who had held aloft the mantle of Thomas Jefferson and the Republican party of the 1790s. Often dismissed as hopeless reactionaries during the presidencies of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, the Old Republicans enjoyed a revival beginning in 1818, when they jousted with "National Republicans" over the merits of an extensive program of federal public works. This revival stemmed primarily from the growing realization among slaveholders that the rise of the executive departments had rendered their gloomy warnings about the dangers of governmental consolidation less a paranoid fantasy than a realistic fear.

Old Republicans exerted a major influence upon the 1828 election campaign and, eventually, the Democratic party. Few, to be sure, had supported Jackson's presidential aspirations early on; indeed, most supported Crawford rather than Jackson in the election of 1824. Yet with Jackson's controversial defeat, many concluded—if often begrudgingly—that Jackson was a superior alternative to Adams in 1828.

Old Republicans provided Jackson not only with votes but also with an intellectual rationale for his campaign. In particular, they made explicit the implicit threat that slaveholders had always believed a strong central government posed to the institution of slavery. Even before the Missouri crisis, North Carolina congressman Nathaniel Macon had warned that any augmentation in the mandate of the central government could foster certain kinds of civic engagement that might challenge slaveholder prerogatives. Macon found especially troubling the recent establishment of nationally oriented voluntary associations such as the American Colonization Society (1816). Should legislators "stretch" the Constitution by authorizing the construction of public works, Macon warned in a private letter to a political ally, these voluntary associations—animated as they were by a "character and spirit of perseverance, border-
of enactment. Had Congress opposed the relocation of free blacks, it could never have considered the question of emancipation, since all proposals to end slavery were vulnerable to the unanswerable objection that they might leave former slaves in close physical proximity to their former enslavers.

No Jacksonian was more forthright in his analysis of the political implications of the slavery issue than Duff Green. In the final months of the 1828 campaign, Green privately warned several correspondents of the perilous consequences for the Union should a North-West political alliance agitate the slavery issue to consolidate its power. "The antislave party in the North is dying away," Green wrote reassuringly to a Kentuckian a few months before the election, and a Jackson-Calhoun victory would "put it to sleep for twenty years": "Upon this subject I know more than I can prudently communicate by paper." It had been "part of my business"—Green boasted, in reference to the slavery issue—to "prevent the agitation of that question." Green's sensitivity on this score led him to oppose the substitution of DeWitt Clinton for Calhoun as Jackson's running mate. Clinton, as a nonslaveholder, might have been expected to appease antislavery voters in the North and, thus, help forestall the emergence of a North-West antislavery party. Yet Green opposed him anyway. "The very reasons which induce you as a slaveholder to support Mr. Clinton," Green explained to the Kentuckian, "prompt me as a slaveholder to oppose him." The only way to "keep down" the "antislave party" in the United States was to identify it with the antilaw Federalist party of 1812, which Clinton had led.

Characteristic of Green's prosouthern, proslavery orientation was his eagerness to run two slaveholders—Jackson and Calhoun—on the same presidential ticket, an event unique in American political history, and one that could conceivably have inflamed disunionist sentiment in the North. "Some object to the nomination of Mr. Calhoun because he is from the south and a slaveholding state," Green conceded. Yet this was "so much the better": "Now is the time to crush the demon of disunion—roll the chariot wheels of Jackson's popularity over it, and it will be ages before it can again raise its head in our land."

Green's candor on the slavery issue spoke directly to the new political realities that had grown out of the Missouri crisis. Green never doubted that Congress lacked the constitutional authority to regulate slavery within the states. Indeed, Green himself had forcefully argued this position as a delegate to the Missouri constitutional convention in 1820—and had publicly declared that liberty—including, presumably, the liberty to own slaves—was for him dearer than the privilege of remaining within the Union. Green recognized that, at least for the moment, the antislavery movement was weak and divided. Yet he was deeply troubled by the determination of northerners to make restrictions on slavery a condition for Missouri statehood—and with good reason. Restriction, after all, raised the specter that at some future juncture the central government might take even more direct steps to restrict slaveholder prerogatives—including those of Missouri slaveholders such as Green himself. And for Green, this was the crux of the matter. The very malleability of governmental institutions made it impossible to know for certain whether some antislavery scheme might someday succeed. In an age in which the central government was steadily broadening its mandate, the executive departments were becoming increasingly powerful and autonomous, and voluntary associations were fast emerging as effective vehicles of popular mobilization—and in the absence of stable political parties to direct and diffuse popular dissent—every presidential election became a referendum, not only on a particular candidate or on a specific policy agenda, but on the future of the Union.

Green's apprehensions concerning possible future assaults on slaveholder prerogatives were subtly reinforced by his personal familiarity with antislavery activism. Green was related by marriage to Daniel P. Cook, the Kentucky-born Illinois congressman who had forcefully attacked slavery during the Missouri crisis. And Cook, as it happens, was an ardent admirer of John Quincy Adams—and, apparently, something of an Adams protégé. In the critical state-by-state House vote that gave Adams the presidency, Cook, as the sole Illinois congressman, cast the state's vote for Adams. Several years earlier, during the Illinois statehood debate, Cook, as an Illinois newspaper editor, had urged the admission of Illinois as a free state—a controversial position that angered Illinois slaveholders, including Green's own brother-in-law, and one that Illinois slaveholders tried to overturn as late as 1824. And in the fall of 1817, as the slavery issue was beginning to emerge as a national issue, Cook published in a Washington newspaper two remarkable open letters on the topic. In these letters, Cook lambasted slaveholders as lazy and tyrannical, compared rebellious slaves to the patriots of the American War of Independence, and urged President Monroe to endorse legislation to hasten the abolition of slavery throughout the United States. Should future legislators emulate Cook's antislavery fervor, Green had little doubt that slaveholders would find themselves struggling to protect their prerogatives from a North-West antislavery alliance. Almost sixty years later, Green reprinted a substantial excerpt from the second of Cook's letters in his memoir, with the bold—and highly distorted—claim that their initial publication in 1817 marked the beginnings of the "antislavery conspiracy" to build a northern antislavery party. To combat this conspiracy, Green declared, had been the goal of his political career, and the primary impetus behind his endorsement of Andrew Jackson in the election of 1828.
Green's preoccupation with the slavery issue during the 1828 campaign was highly atypical, at least within Jackson's inner circle. Neither Kendall nor Francis P. Blair—nor even Jackson himself—gave the issue more than passing attention. In large measure, this was because they did not have to. With the exception of borderland outposts like Missouri and Illinois, the ramparts of slavery were so well defended that the Jacksonians could focus their attention on issues that were less potentially divisive. The paucity of references by Jacksonian party leaders to slavery—even in personal correspondence—during a political campaign notorious for its raucous vulgarity has often been cited to demonstrate the unimportance of the issue to the Jackson campaign. 44 From Green's vantage point—shaped, as it had been, by his personal familiarity with the precariousness of slavery in Missouri and Illinois—the submergence of the slavery issue was, on the contrary, a tribute to his success at preventing it from once again commanding attention on the national stage. 45

Green's Jacksonianism was unashamedly opportunistic. A Calhounite at heart, he abandoned Jackson shortly after the election; by 1830, he was endorsing public positions that Jackson opposed. In the 1840 election, Green backed the Whigs, and, in 1861, he cast his lot with the Confederacy, running iron mills in Alabama and Tennessee during the Civil War. In 1828, however, these events lay in the future. In the final, frenzied months of the 1828 election campaign, it was Green—the prime editorial spokesman for the Jackson campaign—who rallied the faithful with the promise of preferment. In many ways, this made Green the most representative Jacksonian of them all. 46

Almost half a century ago, British political scientist S. E. Finer underscored the administrative achievements of the central government in the United States in the period preceding the Jacksonian ascendancy. "On the eve of Jackson's election," Finer wrote, "the United States administrative system was a going concern, steadily expanding its services and progressively adapting its organization to the new burdens." As a student of British public administration—which, in the early nineteenth century, remained a patronage engine for the well connected and the well to do—Finer was in an excellent position to acknowledge this notably American achievement. 47

This essay has contended that the rise of the executive departments in the 1820s was a necessary—though not sufficient—precondition for the establishment of the Democratic party. Institutions beget institutions; nowhere was this truism more aptly illustrated than by the changes set in motion with Jackson's victory in the election of 1828. The Jacksonian coalition was midwife to the party the executive departments spawned. Jackson's Democratic party championed a legislative agenda that grew directly out of the determination of party leaders—such as Duff Green—to keep the slavery issue off the national political agenda. In pursuit of this goal, the Jackson administration supported policies that weakened the organizational capabilities of the central government and protected the vested interests of the slaveholders who dominated its party's political base.

The Jacksonian ascendancy—and, with it, the flowering of "Jacksonian Democracy"—is best understood as a problem neither of classes, nor even of regions, but of entitlements. In the years preceding the election of 1828, ordinary Americans presumed themselves entitled to an ever increasing array of government benefits. In response to this popular movement, Jacksonian Democracy was born. Here, then, was one of the most curious ironies of the age: the first national political party to call itself democratic was programmatically committed to limiting the role of the government in American life.

The influence of the Jacksonians on the democratization of American politics is easily exaggerated. White male suffrage antedated the Jacksonian ascendancy, as did the advent of an avowedly egalitarian and often populistic style of electioneering. 48 Long before the making of the Democratic party, and long after it as well, voluntary associations, often in conjunction with third parties and reform movements, popularized causes far more progressive than anything even the most radical Democratic party leader would have found politically possible to sustain. 49 To dismiss such impulses as peripheral to the "partisan imperative" of two-party competition makes sense only if one assumes a priori that the mass party was the logical fulfillment of the promise of democracy. Even rotation in office—the most avowedly democratic of the Jacksonians' innovations—did little to increase the access of previously underrepresented groups to public office. 50 In addition, by institutionalizing what has aptly been called an "alienating grammar of corruption," it might well have discouraged civic engagement. 51 It may, in short, be time to reconsider whether rotation ought to be regarded as a core element of the democratic creed.

The Jacksonians may have succeeded in limiting the role of the government in American life, yet they failed to keep the slavery issue off the national political agenda. The abolitionist mails controversy in 1835 dashed their hopes. When the leaders of the American Anti-Slavery Society used the facilities of the Post Office Department to agitate the slavery issue in the slaveholding states, they sparked a swift and hostile reaction not only from slaveholders but also from Postmaster General Kendall and President Jackson. Almost immediately, antiabolitionist mobs sprang into action in the North as well as the South, with the covert endorsement of prominent Jacksonians, including Vice President Martin Van Buren. Jackson himself proposed sweeping antiabolitionist legislation, which, though unsuccessful, fueled the growing suspicion of radical abolitionists...
that the central government had become the pliant tool of a grasping slaveholding cabal. No longer would the postal system remain the nation-building institution that Channing had proclaimed it to be as recently as 1829. Henceforth, it would exacerbate the long-smoldering conflict over slavery that would continue without interruption from 1835 until the Civil War.\footnote{1}

Jackson's strident antiabolitionism is a pointed reminder of the troubling legacy of the antidevelopmental agenda that his administration endorsed. In the absence of outside coercion, it is unrealistic to assume that a full-scale slave emancipation could have succeeded in the nineteenth-century United States. Peaceful emancipations required the intervention of a central government, as in the British West Indies; violent emancipations followed slave rebellions, as in Haiti.\footnote{10} The voluntary, state-sponsored emancipation upon which so many statesmen of Jefferson's generation invested such high hopes—including, albeit reluctantly, Jefferson himself—was doomed to fail.

It is impossible to know if the developmental agenda of Adams and Clay might, under different circumstances, have ended slavery peacefully within the United States. Indeed, it is entirely conceivable that slaveholder dominance in national politics was so formidable that any deliberate aggravation in the mandate of the central government would, alternatively, have hastened the nationalization of slavery—just as Abraham Lincoln would come in the 1850s to fear. Yet there can be little doubt that—just as Duff Green had intended—the antidevelopmental agenda of Andrew Jackson and Amos Kendall left slaveholder prerogatives intact. By weakening the organizational capabilities of the central government—the only institution that could have peacefully orchestrated a slave emancipation—Jackson's Democratic party made the perpetuation of the Union contingent on the suppression of antislavery, and the agitation of the slavery issue a prelude to civil war.

Notes

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1. William E. Channing, "The Union," in The Works of William E. Channing (Boston: George G. Channing, 1849), I:353. This essay was originally published in May 1829 in the Christian Examiner. All references are to the 1849 edition.

2. Ibid., 351.

3. Ibid., 350.

4. Ibid., 351.

5. Ibid., 345.
Post Office Act of 1836. In his memoir, Kendall credited himself with being the primary inspiration for its enactment—a remarkable claim for a department head, and one that, by marginalizing Congress, ignoring the Whigs, and downplaying the Jacksonians' own administrative shortcomings, has misled scholars for almost fifty years.


22. Young, Washington Community, xi.

23. Characteristic of Young’s underestimation of the importance of the central government in the early republic was his erroneous assumption that, in this period, the Post Office Department transmitted little besides personal correspondence. In fact, the Post Office Department also conveyed a large volume of public information—including newspapers, magazines, and government documents. Ibid., 31-32.


“There is no evidence in the records of the petitioning process of the Jeffersonian era”—Cunningham observed, in a pointed rejoinder to Young—to suggest a feeling that the national government was distant and unapproachable (303).


28. For an authoritative survey of the public policy debates of the early republic, see Merrill D. Peterson, The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Peterson traces the National Republicans' legislative agenda to the Madisonian wing of the Jeffersonian Republican party and, thus, considers it fitting that it was sometimes termed the "Madisonian platform." This ideological genealogy is worth underscoring, since commentators often assume—mistakenly—that the American System was little more than a warmed-over version of the Federalist political program of the 1790s. See also Howe, Political Culture of the American Whigs, 49, 90-91, and Larson, Internal Improvement, 160. See also Michael J. Lacey, "Federalism and National Planning: The Nineteenth-Century Legacy," in The American Planning Tradition: Culture and Policy, ed. Robert Fishman (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2000), 89-111.

29. Prior to 1788, the new republic could hardly be said to possess a central administrative apparatus at all. The outstanding exception was the Continental Army. Interestingly, several of the most influential proponents of a stronger central government (including George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Marshall) had been army officers, while several of the leading critics of the new regime (including Thomas Jefferson and James Madison) had never served in the military. On the legacy of this military heritage—and its often intentional neglect—see Charles Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), chap. 8, and Joseph J. Ellis, Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), esp. A. 54-55.

30. Richard R. John and Christopher J. Young, "Rites of Passage: Postal Petitioning as a Tool of Governance in the Age of Federalism," in Bowling and Kennon, House and Senate in the 1790s, 100-38.


34. Anticorruptionist rhetoric so dominated public discourse during the Monroe and Adams administrations that Robert V. Remini has dubbed the period between 1816 and 1828 the "Era of Corruption." Remini's novel periodization highlights the 'perception' among public figures in the 1810s and 1820s that the executive departments were becoming larger and more autonomous and, thus, more prone to corruption. Yet he connotes perception and reality when he hails Jackson with leading the "first reform movement in American political history." Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 13-15, 99.


38. McLean to Everett, August 9, 1828, in Proceedings, 366, 367.


42. Everett to McLean, August 19, 1828, in Proceedings, 376.


44. United States Telegraph, November 3, 11, and 18, 1828.


46. Green to Benjamin F. Edwards, December 17, 1828, Green letterbook, Green Papers.


48. John, Spreading the News, chap. 6, esp. 210-14.

49. Following Thomas Jefferson's victory in the election of 1800, there is no evidence that any government clerk complained about having been discriminated against on political grounds. Cunningham, Process of Government, 180.


52. John, Spreading the News, 221-36.

53. Green to U. Updike, February 1, 1829, Green letterbook, Green Papers.

54. For a different interpretation, see Shefter, Political Parties and the State, 66-68.

55. John, Spreading the News, chap. 6, esp. 220-21.

56. For a different account of the origins of rotation in office, see Robert V. Remini, The Legacy of Andrew Jackson: Essays on Democracy, Indian Removal,
and Slavery (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 30–31. Jackson, Remini contended, supported rotation not merely to “terminate a corruption he believed had long festered within the executive branch” but also to “establish the democratic doctrine that in a free country no one has a special privilege or right to control or run the nation” (30–31). See also Remini, The Revolutionary Age of Andrew Jackson (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), chap. 5 (“Who Shall Hold Office?”).


59. Even Remini conceded that Marcy’s attempt to excuse Jackson’s patronage policy was a “colossal blunder” that gave Jackson’s opponents a “telling quotation with which to bludgeon the administration during the election campaign.”

60. Jackson to William B. Lewis, August 18, 1832, cited in Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 185.


62. See, for example, Larson, Internal Improvement, chap. 5 (“Spoiling Internal Improvements”).

63. The indispensability of material incentives to the making of the mass party provides a new perspective on the influential thesis—originated by political scientist Theodore Lowi and popularized by historian Richard L. McCormick—that, in the nineteenth century, American politics had a distributional cast. Following the Jacksonian ascendancy, the primary beneficiary of political largesse was often, and sometimes exclusively, not the electorate, but the party. The preoccupation of nineteenth-century politicians with the judicious dispensation of patronage to party supporters will be evident to anyone who has read through their correspondence. Many politicians regarded it as one of their most important—and challenging—tasks.


65. Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, esp. 29, 116.

66. Richard E. Ellis, The Union at Risk: Jacksonian Democracy, States’ Rights, and the Nullification Crisis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). The nullification crisis, Ellis concluded, was “not simply, and perhaps not even mainly, a struggle between the proponents of nationalism and states’ rights. In a very fundamental way, it also involved a struggle between advocates of different kinds of states’ rights thought” (178).

67. Remini, Andrew Jackson and the Bank War, 44.

68. Shaffer, Political Parties and the State, 66–68.


71. Alexander H. Everett, The Conduct of the Administration (Boston: Stimpson and Clapp, 1832), 76. The “insane man-worship” of Jackson’s supporters, Everett added, had strengthened the presidency—and, in different circumstances, would “justly excite the most serious alarm for the permanence of our institutions.”


74. Ellis, Founding Brothers, chap. 3.


77. Larson, Internal Improvement, 126–35.

97. Macon to Bartlett Yancey, March 8, 1818, in Kemp P. Battle, ed., “Letters of Nathaniel Macon,” in James Sprunt Historical Monographs, no. 2 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1900), 48–49. “The states having no slaves,” Macon added, “may not feel as strongly as the states having slaves about stretching the Constitution, because no such interest is to be touched by it” (49). Macon’s assumption that broadening the mandate of the central government would foster social activism anticipated the contention of historical sociologist Theda Skocpol that the expansion in the administrative capacity of the state could encourage civic engagement. Theda Skocpol, “The Tocqueville Problem: Civic Engagement in American Democracy,” Social Science History 21 (1997): 455–79.

98. Cited in Larson, Internal Improvement, 143.


103. Register of Debates, February 18, 1825, 623; Fladeland, “Compensated Emancipation,” 176.

104. Freehling, Reintegration of American History, chap. 7; Ellis, Founding Brothers, 106–8.


109. For a related discussion, see Michael F. Holt, “Change and Continuity in the Party Period: The Substance and Structure of American Politics, 1835–1885,” in Shafer and Badger, Contesting Democracy, 106. Holt’s essay includes a compelling critique of the “party period” synthesis of nineteenth-century American political history that had been developed most fully by Joel H. Silbey and Richard L. McCormick. One of the most important things “structuring politics” in the mid-nineteenth century, Holt suggestively observes, was the belief among political actors that partisan loyalties among voters and leaders might “imminently be displaced” and, thus, that the entire political system was “malleable, mutable, and open to change and reorganization” (106). Holt intended this generalization to apply to the half century after 1835, when two-party competition was entrenched; it applies even more forcefully to the two decades preceding 1835, when it was not.

110. [Daniel P. Cook], “To James Monroe, President of the United States of America,” National Register, 13 and 20 September 1817; Duff Green, Facts and Suggestions, Biographical, Historical, Financial, and Political (New York: Richardson and Co., 1866), 32.

111. “We were favored by Heaven in our revolutionary struggle,” Cook declared in his second letter, “and believing ourselves injured, we even appealed to the Divinity to aid and assist us—we were fighting for our natural rights; those rights which we believed the God of Nature intended ‘all should equally enjoy.’ To that appeal the Heavens bowed propitiously. . . . With this recent example of the justice of Heaven before us can we, with any well-founded hope of escaping a similar visitation of divine justice, expect to go on, inflicting more unwarrantable oppressions upon others than were inflicted upon us? Not! The ways of Heaven are alike, are unalterable, and for us they will not swerve from their ordered course. . . .”

112. Green, Facts and Suggestions, 28, 30–33. The goal of this conspiracy, Green declared, was not to free the slaves but to enslave the “white man” by the “centralization of a corrupt, irresponsible power in the federal government, in open violation of the fundamental principles of the Constitution” (34).


114. For the more traditional view, see Remini, Legacy of Andrew Jackson, chap. 3, and Latner, Presidency of Andrew Jackson, 207–12. Remini faulted Richard H. Brown for exaggerating the role of the slavery issue in the Jacksonians’ ascendancy and claimed that Brown had been misled by the self-serving retrospec­ tive pronouncements of John Quincy Adams. Lamer contended that the slavery issue had little influence on Jackson’s supporters from the western border states, the “primary inspiration,” in his view, for the program of the Democratic party (208). Neither devoted much attention to Green, even though he was the primary editorial spokesman for the Jacksonian party during the 1828 campaign and hailed from the border state of Missouri.

115. The absence of a full-scale scholarly biography of Green is a major gap in the literature on nineteenth-century American politics, political economy, and proslavery thought.


117. Andrew W. Robertson, “ ‘Look on This Picture . . . and on This’ Nationalism, Localism, and Partisan Images of Otherness in the United States, 1787-
Chapter Four
THE LEGAL TRANSFORMATION OF CITIZENSHIP IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

WILLIAM J. NOVAK

We must not thrust our modern "State-concept" upon the reluctant material.
—Frederic William Maitland

As historians search for ways to reintroduce "the political" back into American history, one interpretive possibility that cannot be overlooked is the idea of citizenship. The concept of citizenship is in the midst of an extraordinary theoretical revival. For good reasons. First, citizenship has the potential to integrate social and political history. Citizenship directs attention precisely to that point where bottom-up constructions of rights consciousness and political participation meet the top-down policies and formal laws of legislatures, courts, and administrative agencies. Second, citizenship deals directly with what has become a preeminent social and political question in our time—inclusion and exclusion based on identity. Third, citizenship brings the state back in, focusing attention on the claims and obligations of the rights-bearing subject in distinctly modern nation-states. Fourth, citizenship brings democracy back in, illuminating issues of civic participation and the construction of civil society. Fifth (taking a cue from T. H. Marshall's influential discussion "Citizenship and Social Class"), the citizenship framework can expansively incorporate three different kinds of rights—civil, political, and socioeconomic—integrating in a single developmental story the early emergence of property and contract, nineteenth-century struggles over suffrage, and the rise of twentieth-century social welfare states. Finally, the language of citizenship transfers smoothly to the discussion of transnational politics in an increasingly global, multicultural world. Citizenship thus has much to recommend to American political historians.

But the so-called citizenship debates bring one potential hazard to a discussion of American politics (particularly nineteenth-century American politics), and that is the danger of anachronism. For most recent discussions of American citizenship have been framed by the thoroughly modern...
THE DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT
NEW DIRECTIONS IN AMERICAN POLITICAL HISTORY

Edited by
MEG JACOBS
WILLIAM J. NOVAK
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