



Andrew Jackson

By Sean Wilentz

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The towering figure who remade American politics?the champion of the ordinary citizen and the scourge of entrenched privilege

"It is rare that historians manage both Wilentz's deep interpretation and lively narrative." - *Publishers Weekly*

The Founding Fathers espoused a republican government, but they were distrustful of the common people, having designed a constitutional system that would temper popular passions. But as the revolutionary generation passed from the scene in the 1820s, a new movement, based on the principle of broader democracy, gathered force and united behind Andrew Jackson, the charismatic general who had defeated the British at New Orleans and who embodied the hopes of ordinary Americans. Raising his voice against the artificial inequalities fostered by birth, station, monied power, and political privilege, Jackson brought American politics into a new age.

Sean Wilentz, one of America's leading historians of the nineteenth century, recounts the fiery career of this larger-than-life figure, a man whose high ideals were matched in equal measure by his failures and moral blind spots, a man who is remembered for the accomplishments of his eight years in office and for the bitter enemies he made. It was in Jackson's time that the great conflicts of American politics?urban versus rural, federal versus state, free versus slave?crystallized, and Jackson was not shy about taking a vigorous stand. It was under Jackson that modern American politics began, and his legacy continues to inform our debates to the present day.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In the latest installment of the American Presidents series edited by Arthur Schlesinger Jr., Princeton historian Wilentz shows that our complicated seventh president was a central figure in the development of American democracy. Wilentz gives Jackson's early years their due, discussing his storied military accomplishments, especially in routing the British in the War of 1812, and rehearsing the central crises of Jackson's presidential administration—South Carolina's nullification of the protective tariff and his own battle against the Bank of the United States. But Wilentz's most significant interpretations concern Indian policy and slavery. With constitutional and security concerns, Jackson's support for removal of Indians from their lands, says Wilentz, was not "overtly malevolent," but was nonetheless "ruinous" for Indians. Even more strongly, Wilentz condemns the "self-regarding sanctimony of posterity" in judging Jackson insufficiently antislavery; Jackson's main aim, he says, was not to promote slavery, but to keep the divisive issue out of national politics. Wilentz (*The Rise of American Democracy*) also astutely reads the Eaton affair—a scandal that erupted early in Jackson's presidency, over the wife of one of his cabinet members—as evidence that, then as now, parlor politics and partisan politics often intersected. It is rare that historians manage both Wilentz's deep interpretation and lively narrative.

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From [Booklist](#)

Best known now for beating the British in the 1815 Battle of New Orleans, Jackson is truly, monumentally important, Wilentz argues, as the first great presidential champion of the common man and indivisible union. He fought the plutocratic Bank of the United States' stranglehold on credit for the sake of farmers and small businessmen. His militant expansionism--the rationale for his Indian removal policies, which he felt were better than white settlers exterminating Native Americans, as had happened in New England--aimed to facilitate American settlement and prevent foreign, especially British, encroachment. He became founder-leader of the first modern political party, the Democracy (later called the Democratic Party), to prosecute the interests of ordinary citizens, too, going so far as to advocate direct senatorial and presidential election. Even his anti-states rights and anti-secession positions reflected his social sympathies, for he considered his southern opponents on those issues would-be aristocrats. Factor in his heroic courage, iron will, and remarkable pragmatism, and Jackson's presidential stature, especially as carefully expounded here, seems towering, indeed. *Ray Olson*

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About the Author

Sean Wilentz, a professor of history at Princeton University, is the author or editor of several books, including *Chants Democratic* and *The Rise of American Democracy*. He has also written for *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New Republic*, and other publications. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., (1917-2007) was the preeminent political historian of our time. For more than half a century, he was a cornerstone figure in the intellectual life of the nation and a fixture on the political scene. He won two Pulitzer prizes for *The Age of Jackson* (1946) and *A Thousand Days* (1966), and in 1988 received the National Humanities Medal. He published the first volume of his autobiography, *A Life in the Twentieth Century*, in 2000.

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