

**GREAT EPOCHS IN AMERICAN  
HISTORY, DESCRIBED BY FAMOUS  
WRITERS FROM COLUMBUS TO  
ROOSEVELT; VOL. VI, THE  
JACKSONIAN PERIOD 1828-1840**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649189519

Great epochs in American history, described by famous writers from Columbus to Roosevelt;  
Vol. VI, the Jacksonian period 1828-1840 by Francis W. Halsey

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Cover @ 2017

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# GREAT EPOCHS IN AMERICAN HISTORY

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FROM COLUMBUS TO ROOSEVELT

Edited, with Introductions and Explanatory Notes

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PATRONS' EDITION, IN TEN VOLUMES  
ILLUSTRATED

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Vol. VI  
**THE JACKSONIAN PERIOD**  
1828—1840

**FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY**  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

## INTRODUCTION

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*(The Jacksonian Period.)*

Jackson was first elected President in 1828, but the period in our history so closely associated with his name virtually began four years earlier, when Adams, with fewer electoral votes, secured the office. This large vote for Jackson in 1824 and his splendid triumph in 1828 testified in the strongest way to the great change that had come over the country since the War of 1812. The building of roads and canals, and the use of steam for navigation on great rivers and lakes, had opened up the western country until it acquired great national importance. It was this western country that gave to Jackson his preponderance over Adams in 1824, and made easy his election in 1828. Moreover, it was this section which in 1832 greatly helped to secure for Jackson his 154 electoral votes and a popular majority of 157,000.

A new era had, in fact, dawned upon the whole country. Henceforth the people in the mass rather than a group of trained and socially superior men,

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## INTRODUCTION

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of whom John Quincy Adams was the last, were to rule the country. In Jackson's election the so-called aristocracy was overthrown and democracy pure and simple came into power. Of this new force in public life Jackson was the ideal. Strong of head, true of heart, perfectly honest, but thoroughly personal, partizan and aggressive, he enabled the people to realize in him a personification of their own most obvious characteristics. His election marked a revolution. That revolution was popular and its influence long endured.

The new industrial era that began in his time—the era of canals, farm machinery, steamboats, railroads and ocean steamships—not only sent population westward, but linked States together in an industrial union leading to a new realization of what nationality meant. In Jackson's time the tariff first came forward as a great national issue. Even when it became a "tariff of abominations" and led to nullification, Jackson's success in putting down nullification tended still further to promote sentiments of national unity.

So in the war on the United States Bank. That institution had unquestionably become unpopular, as being not in accord with current Democratic



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## INTRODUCTION

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ideas and customs. Moreover, it had been used for political purposes; it checked the operation of State banks, favored individuals, and there had been gross errors in its management. With all the good he thus did, historians no longer disagree as to some of the injurious effects of Jackson's war on the Bank. The Bank ought to have been destroyed—that is generally accepted; in fact, the harm it already had done would have seriously increased in another generation, because of the great industrial development then starting up throughout the whole country and the opportunities the Bank would have had to participate in it. Jackson's methods, however, provided no check to the wildcat speculation which set in almost at once—long before his second administration came to a close.

The country was now entirely free from debt, and had acquired a surplus, but this surplus, by act of Congress, was distributed among the States, the amount in three quarterly payments reaching \$28,000,000, which was a great sum for that day. A multiplication of banks of issue ensued all over the country. States were easily prevailed upon to grant charters without exercising judgment and almost without any kind of supervision or con-

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## INTRODUCTION

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trol. Banks having no capital at all were permitted to issue notes almost as freely as banks which did have capital. Paper money thus became abundant and speculation of every kind, and especially in Western lands, thrived and for a brief time, seemed to prosper.

The inevitable day of reckoning had already been foreshadowed when in 1836 Van Buren, as Jackson's choice, was elected President by the reduced majority of 46 in the electoral college. Van Buren indeed was inaugurated on the eve of the culmination of that overwhelming storm which now was to devastate the country from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. Vast sums of paper currency poured into the East from the West, asking for redemption, credit everywhere became impaired and frequently wiped out; many banks suspended specie payments; the cost of food rose phenomenally—flour from \$5 to \$11 per barrel, corn from 53 cents to \$1.15 per bushel.

Van Buren's defeat four years afterward is quite clearly understandable in the light of all these circumstances. He became a shining mark for distress voters. The wide-spread suffering, however, had not been due to him, but to causes

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## INTRODUCTION

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that antedated his election. The tremendous vote against him in 1840 was in large part caused by the hard times; but there were contributory causes, including the unpopularity of the Jacksonian method of making wholesale removals from office, and the anti-slavery question, which, with the organization of the Abolitionists in 1833, had begun by this time to become a force in public affairs of some consequence. When the movement for the annexation of Texas began in 1836, agitation against it by anti-slavery men in the North worked wholly to the advantage of the opposition to Van Buren.

The Jacksonian era, in the transformation it effected, was the most notable in the history of the country, between the Revolution and the Civil War. That economic transformation was really the basis of the political transformation. Both had been made possible largely by the mechanical inventions of the age. The first railroad had been built in 1830, and by 1840 there were 2,816 miles of such roads in operation opening up distant lands for settlement. What the building of canals meant in economics may be realized from the statement that in 1820 it had cost \$88 to carry