vice president, remain loyal? Would the defeated but hardly eliminated forces that had supported John Quincy Adams successfully regroup, and with what new coalition of their own?

Questions also arose for Jackson himself. By defeating Adams and winning the presidency, he had taken his continuing search for vindication to a new level, becoming the first man of lowly birth to occupy the presidency despite the numerous obstacles that fortune had placed in his way. While exonerating his personal honor, he had also, in his own mind, defeated the forces of privilege that threatened to destroy the basic principles of the American Revolution and restore British-style, aristocratic corruption. But how would Jackson, with so little experience in Washington, organize his new administration? And how would a self-declared outsider sustain that outsider’s image now that he and his political advisers had taken power?

More intimate matters also occupied Jackson’s mind during the weeks between his election and his scheduled inauguration in March. Having long anticipated victory, he told his jubilant friends that he felt strangely depressed when the results finally arrived. A month later, his depression turned to anguish when his beloved wife, Rachel—whose health, like his, had long been precarious—collapsed and died of heart failure. The stunning blow had political as well as personal implications. Jackson was convinced that the Adamsites’ scurrilous campaign attacks on Rachel had broken her spirit and caused her death. And for that cruelty he laid personal responsibility on his old foe and future nemesis Henry Clay.

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First-Term Troubles

The tumultuous inauguration of Andrew Jackson is one of the set pieces of American political lore. When the official ceremony at the Capitol concluded, thousands of spectators followed the new president to the White House, clogging Pennsylvania Avenue with their carriages and country wagons. At Jackson’s insistence, the president’s house had been thrown open for the day to the general public and preparations for a simple reception awaited the throngs, but the numbers proved overwhelming. Amid the melee, with well-wishers forced to climb through ground-story windows and minor damage inflicted on the official fixtures and furnishings, Jackson finally had to beat a retreat down a back stairway and return to his boardinghouse. Some observers thought the democratic spectacle sublime yet beautiful. Others agreed with Supreme Court justice Joseph Story that it appeared as if “[t]he reign of KING MOB” had commenced.

Nearly forgotten is Jackson’s terse and direct inaugural address. Jackson pledged to respect the sovereign powers of the states and the constitutional limitations on executive power, to sustain the military’s subordination to the civil authority, and to observe “a just and liberal policy” toward the Indians. Above all, he said, the recent election had mandated that he diligently pursue “the task of reform,” which included correcting those abuses that had placed power “in unfaithful or incompetent hands.”
By the end of Jackson's first term, his critics would charge that he had violated almost every one of these promises. Jackson and his supporters believed, on the contrary, that he had honored and even enlarged them. Always at stake was how Jackson defined "the task of reform."

Within a month of his inauguration, the new president was busy tracking down evidence of theft and corruption by the Adams administration, with concentrated investigations in the Treasury Department. He appointed his trustworthy supporter Amos Kendall as one of the department's auditors, and Kendall immediately turned up evidence of substantial pilferage—including several thousand dollars embezzled by the last man who held his job, an ally of Clay's named Tobias Watkins. "Assure my friends," Jackson wrote to one associate in April, "we are getting on here well, we labour night and day, and will continue to do so, until we destroy all the rats, who have been plundering the Treasury." Whether the thievery exceeded that of earlier outgoing administrations—and, if it did, by how much—is unclear. But Jackson proclaimed the scandals proved the Adams-Clay regime had been just as rotten as he had always claimed. The cure was to expand on the rotation-in-office policy he had introduced upon taking office.

Debates over rotation in office dated back to the earliest days of the Republic. During the ratification debates, anti-Federalist critics complained that the Constitution, lacking provisions for the regular automatic replacement of elected and appointed officials, would turn federal jobs into lifetime sinecures filled by abusive and insolent men. In the early months of his presidency, Thomas Jefferson enraged his Federalist adversaries by replacing numerous appointees (including several judges appointed at the last minute by his predecessor, John Adams) with Republicans. Jefferson's rotation policy was never as drastic as the Federalists charged (or as some of his more radical supporters had hoped it would be); the issue abated when the presidency remained in Virginia Republican hands through 1824, and John Quincy Adams's lofty nonpartisanship precluded a revival of the issue. Jackson, however, promised during the 1828 campaign to change all that dramatically, provoking concern among Adams-Clay men of a partisan purge of the government. With the discovery of the Treasury Department scandals, that concern turned into fears of what some called an imminent reign of terror.

The fears were exaggerated. Overall, Jackson's removals and reappointments during his presidency were roughly proportionate to Jefferson's, about one in ten. But the new president did make some sweeping changes, especially at the upper reaches of the civil service. Among government officers directly appointed by the president, the removal rate was about one-half. Land and customs officials, federal marshals and attorneys, and other high-ranking officials were subject to wholesale removal. Local postmasterships and deputy postmasterships changed hands by the hundreds. Newspaper contracts for publishing federal laws quickly fell under the control of loyal Jacksonians.

In making these replacements, Jackson had sincere reformist purposes—something his political adversaries, like many later historians, discounted. Apart from uprooting corruption, Jackson wanted to ventilate and democratize the government, especially the executive branch, by making official duties, he said, "so plain and simple that men of intelligence may readily qualify themselves for their performance." He aimed to build upon Jefferson's desire to make merit and performance, not birth and family connections, the basis for preferment. By insisting on repeated turnover of appointed executive branch officeholders—he suggested a four-year terminal limit for all jobs—he hoped to obstruct the rise of a permanent government. He also proposed limitations on the presidents who appointed them by restricting them to a single term in office of either four or six years. (Jackson further proposed eliminating the Electoral College and having presidents elected directly by the voters.) And although he restricted his idea of terminal limits to the
executive branch, he hoped to democratize the rest of the government as well. He thought U.S. Senate terms should be cut from six years to four, and he would eventually envisage eliminating lifetime appointments to the federal bench and making judgeships subject to popular election.

Other Jacksonians who favored rotation had crasser motives than Jackson’s. The use of government jobs as patronage for partisan loyalists had been growing at the state level since the 1790s—one reason why Jefferson, appalled by the practice, took a measured approach to rotation. By Jackson’s time, political operatives in state governments approached the issue matter-of-factly, so that in 1832, when one of Martin Van Buren’s right-hand men, Senator William Marcy of New York, justified the replacements and distorted Jackson’s program by declaring that “to the victor belongs the spoils of the enemy,” he gave the National Republican opposition a rhetorical club—“the spoils system.” Even before that, though, critics denounced Jackson’s appointments as partisan power grabs. “Rotation” became an opposition byword for corruption—the rewarding of unsavory party hacks with government jobs.

A combination of haste and (especially on Jackson’s part) gullibility lent credence to the criticisms. In making so many new appointments, Jackson came to rely on the recommendations of his political friends, which led to replacements based simply on partisan attachments. Jackson was also not always the best judge of character. Too often, he assumed that his most dependable followers shared his integrity as well as his principles. Disastrously, he made his worst appointment, an old friend and New York City fixer, Samuel Swartwout, to the collectorship of New York Port, a post with innumerable opportunities for theft. Van Buren, who was willing to go along with spoilsmanship up to a point, tried to warn Jackson about Swartwout’s shady tendencies, but the president would hear nothing of it. After nearly ten years on the job, Swartwout would abscond to Europe with more than one million dollars in government funds—more than the sum stolen by all of the Adams administration’s thieves combined.

The vilification of Jackson over rotation, however, was not wholly fair. By 1828, the pool of potential talent around the country had expanded well beyond the traditional criteria of worthiness. A self-made man, Jackson implemented rotation in office in order to combat insider corruption, not deepen it, or to substitute one corrupt system for another. Political thinkers with no partisan motives—including the renowned British utilitarian Jeremy Bentham—loudly applauded Jackson’s policy. Some of the worst abuses of rotation, like Swartwout’s, did not come to light until well after Jackson left the presidency. When Jackson did learn of misconduct—as when, early in his second term, corruption surfaced in the awarding of post office delivery contracts—he moved resolutely to end it. The great majority of Jackson’s appointments performed their jobs faithfully and in some cases (such as Amos Kendall) expertly, justifying Jackson’s idea about the capacities of ordinary men—including men with backgrounds like his own.

Much of the criticism directed at Jackson’s appointees stemmed from an initial, contemptuous distrust of a democratized civil service. Most of the rest of it involved the taste of sour grapes in the mouths of employees who were displaced. Dejected members of the opposition had their own self-interest and amour propre, and when they eventually captured the White House in the 1840 election, they would deploy rotation just as fervently as the Jacksonians had. (This turning of the tables would one day lead a dislodged Democratic customs officer in Salem, Massachusetts, Nathaniel Hawthorne, to describe his embitterment in the opening pages of The Scarlet Letter.) Jackson’s loftiest aspirations were compromised, sometimes by Jackson himself; reality betrayed the ideal, in this as in other areas of Jackson’s presidency; eventually, the system’s partisan excesses required correction, completed decades later in a series of civil service reform laws. Yet Jacksonian rotation in office introduced to Washington an important measure of democracy, with all its imperfections. To his credit, Jackson helped make the federal government more a government of and by as well as for the people.
Soon after the Treasury Department revelations, a second scandal, this one internal to the Jackson White House, hit the administration and nearly capsized it. Margaret O'Neale Timberlake, a dark-haired, vivacious beauty, was the daughter of a popular Irish-immigrant innkeeper in Washington, well known to congressmen and other government officials. Her husband, John Timberlake, a U.S. naval officer, was on active duty at sea for long periods of time, and Margaret acquired a reputation for infidelity. Especially notorious was her connection with Jackson's old friend and Tennessee neighbor Senator John Eaton, with whom she was seen in public all too often. When word arrived in 1828 that Mrs. Timberlake's husband had died at sea (a suicide, some said, depressed by Margaret's dalliances), Jackson urged Eaton to do the decent thing and marry her, and Eaton did. Jackson, paying no attention to the gossips, then named Eaton as his secretary of war, to ensure that he had one close associate in the cabinet.* But a large number of the wives of official Washington, including Vice President Calhoun's imperious wife, Floride, took offense at the presence of such an obviously low woman as Mrs. Eaton in their midst and snubbed her at any social function she attended. The snubbing effectively brought social life in the White House to a halt.

Jackson immediately likened the campaign against Mrs. Eaton (known familiarly as "Peggy," warmly by her friends, snidely by her detractors) to the attacks on his late wife by the Adams campaign during the election. Ambitious men, he surmised, wanted to control him by driving his friend Eaton out of the cabinet; their supercilious wives were helping them turn social snobbery to political ends. Jackson zealously searched for evidence exculpating the Eatons

*The rest of Jackson's cabinet, drawn from different elements of the coalition that elected him, consisted of men he had known only briefly: Secretary of State Martin Van Buren of New York, Secretary of the Treasury Samuel Ingham of Pennsylvania, Attorney General John Berrien of Georgia, Postmaster General William T. Barry of Kentucky, and Secretary of the Navy John Branch of North Carolina.

from any wrongdoing. At one bizarre cabinet meeting devoted entirely to the mounting scandal, he thundered, "She is as chaste as a virgin!"

Jackson initially fixed on Henry Clay as the manipulative genius behind the scenes, assuming that Clay was returning to his underhanded tactics of the "Corrupt Bargain" in 1824 and the campaign four years later. Then Jackson decided that the mastermind was actually his own power-hungry vice president John C. Calhoun. In fact, despite Mrs. Calhoun's prominence in shunning the Eatons, Calhoun was not the hidden instigator; and the Eaton "malaria," as it was soon called, appears to have had no clear-cut factional origins. It did, however, have immediate and important political repercussions. The cabinet wives most involved in the campaign were southerners, close friends of the Calhouns, or both, and all were long-standing fixtures in Washington salon society. The newcomers in the administration tended to side with the Eatons, and to regard her traducers as vain and ignoble. Secretary of State Martin Van Buren (a widower immune from wifely pressures) made the most of the disarray by openly soliciting the Eatons' company and doing all he could to arrange any kind of social invitation for the ostracized Peggy. Van Buren's stock with the president duly climbed as quickly as Calhoun's fell.

The furor continued for more than a year, worsening relations between Jackson and Calhoun, elevating Van Buren to become Jackson's chosen successor, and hampering orderly operations inside the executive branch. Finally, early in 1831, Jackson dismissed Calhoun's friends from the cabinet and replaced them with his own loyalists. To keep up appearances so as not to be seen as responding to a salon scandal, the president also had Van Buren and Eaton resign—although he quickly nominated the New Yorker as minister to Great Britain and arranged for Eaton's appointment as governor of Florida Territory. It was a startling shake-up, unprecedented in the new nation's history—and it placed official Washington on notice that Jackson intended to be the master of his own White House. In the aftermath of the controversy, Jackson came to
depend more on the counsel of his closest political friends from outside the cabinet, including Van Buren and Amos Kendall, joined by his new attorney general, the Marylander Roger Brooke Taney—an arrangement Jackson’s critics scorned as his “Kitchen Cabinet” government.

The Eaton “malaria” underscored how clashing perceptions of righteousness and sexual propriety, filtered through the parlor politics of the nation’s capital, could have tremendous political consequences. Jackson, in defending Peggy Eaton so passionately, played the dual part of fatherly protector of a distressed woman and defender of the more forgiving mores of the Southwest against the vindictive uprightness of eastern high society. At bottom, the scandal described a social divide that would reappear in Washington politics down to our own time, pitting sanctimonious social and moral arbiters against new arrivals and commoners whom they deemed vulgar and upitty. Jackson took the matter so personally that he invested in it more time and energy than he should have, thereby distracting him from his reform agenda and causing him to fall prey, as he himself recognized in 1830, to “things, that have corroded my peace, and my mind, and must cease.” Yet as a bit of cultural politics, the drawn-out Eaton controversy offered a fresh illustration of how clashes over cultural style and morality were linked to Jackson’s political rise. Later in Jackson’s presidency, the clashes would contribute to the growth of a viable popular opposition to Jackson’s democracy. In the short run, they intensified battles between Jackson and Calhoun over matters far weightier than Peggy Eaton’s reputation.

In the late spring of 1830, while the Eaton affair was at its height, Jackson began receiving from friends incontrovertible proof that Calhoun, as secretary of war in 1818, had secretly denounced him during the fracas over his Florida expedition. When Jackson confronted his vice president and received an unsatisfactory reply, he severed all communications, calling Calhoun a Brutus in disguise.

Not only had the South Carolinian besmirched Jackson’s honor in private, he had assembled about it for more than a decade, an unpardonable act of treachery. The revelation deepened Jackson’s mistaken impression that Calhoun was leading the persecution of Peggy Eaton. It also sharpened a growing division between the two men over the politics of state rights and federal power.

The conflict had been brewing for several years. In the late 1820s, pushed by a growing sentiment among political leaders in South Carolina and Georgia, Calhoun had reexamined the pro-nationalist ideas, similar to Henry Clay’s, that had formed the core of his thinking since the start of his political career. The protective tariff became the central issue of contention. In 1824, the Congress, led by Clay and with the backing of northeastern manufacturing interests, enacted a tariff that Deep South planters deemed oppressive. Forced to sell their chief staple crop, cotton, in an unprotected world market (where prices had been steadily descending), the planters found themselves having to buy manufactured goods in a highly protected national market. They also saw the lion’s share of the federal spending on internal improvements arising from tariff revenues going to the northeastern and border states. The protective tariff, they decided, was not only the source of their economic woes; it was blatantly unconstitutional, exceeding Congress’s powers to raise necessary revenues and oppressing one section of the country while enriching others.

Complicated congressional bargaining led to the enactment of even higher tariff rates in the summer of 1828—in a measure dubbed by one senator as the “tariff of abominations”—and soon angry protests were breaking out in Charleston and Savannah, warning of imminent secession. Vice President Calhoun, confident he would regain his job in the autumn elections, helped stifle the rumblings with the assurance that, by working within the new Jackson administration, he and his allies could defeat the protectionists. In November, Calhoun quietly began to draft, at the request of a South Carolina legislator, a reasoned manifesto, explaining how the
protective tariff was unconstitutional and outlining how individual states might fight its continued tyrannical imposition by the federal government.

The final document, approved by the state legislature in slightly diluted form and without Calhoun's signature, came to be known as the *South Carolina Exposition and Protest*. Since 1787, the *Exposition* contended, a hidden flaw in the Framers' constitutional design had emerged: a national majority, tied to a privileged sectional interest, could oppress a sectional minority with discriminatory, unconstitutional laws. The only means to ensure proper redress, in this era before the doctrine of judicial review had been fully established, was to recognize that the Constitution was a compact of completely sovereign and separate states. Should the federal government continue to oppress the minority, the *Exposition* asserted, any one state could reserve the right to revert to its original sovereignty and declare the offensive laws null and void within its borders. Should efforts to secure the abolition of those laws through constitutional amendment fail, the aggrieved state would then have the option of seceding from the Union.

Political leaders, including Jackson, strongly suspected Calhoun's authorship of the *Exposition*, which they interpreted as an effort to consolidate southern support for a later run for the presidency. But Jackson also took the idea of nullification seriously—and as a piece of rank heresy. According to his strict reading of the Constitution, Jackson held that Congress had full and direct authority over the enacting tariffs, including dictating tariff rates. To deny the rights of the majority in Congress to govern as it saw fit was, in this instance, an absurd breach of the Framers' explicit intentions. Worse, talk of nullification, let alone secession, endangered the Union. In Jackson's mind, it was an outrageously affront to the glorious embodiment of the American Revolution. "There is nothing I shudder at more than the idea of the separation of the Union," he had written to a South Carolina leader before the 1828 election. "It is the durability of the confederation upon which the general government is built, that must prolong our liberty. . . . [T]he moment it separates, it is gone."

As later events would show, Calhoun's stance on nullification was actually moderate compared to what more fiery southern disunionists were thinking. Until the end of his life, Calhoun would always regard nullification as an alternative to disunion—a rational, wholly constitutional way to sustain the nation and the basic intentions of the Framers without allowing a tyranny of the majority to run roughshod over minority interests. To Jackson, however, Calhoun was engaged in sophistical hairsplitting, drawing a distinction without a difference. Nullification, Jackson insisted, was only camouflage for secession, a profanation of the Constitution as merely a compact of separate and sovereign states. Toleration of that underlying theory of state sovereignty, he charged, would lead inevitably to the nation's dissolution.

The first important confrontation over the matter occurred in April 1830, at a political banquet in honor of Thomas Jefferson's birthday, sponsored by pro-state rights congressmen from the South and the West. Knowing Calhoun would be present, Jackson arrived prepared to attack nullification, but he was not ready for the extravagant state rights sloganeering that accompanied the celebration. When his turn to deliver a toast came around, Jackson rose, glared at Calhoun, and raised his wineglass. "Our Union," he intoned, "it must be preserved." (He had meant to say "Our Federal Union," but in the excitement of the moment, he spoke more bluntly.) Calhoun reportedly flinched, then delivered a wordy—some said flustered—reply, to the effect that liberty was even more important than the Union. While others in the room tried to smooth over the awkwardness, the breach between Jackson and Calhoun was now public. Shortly thereafter, and in the wake of the revelations about Calhoun's duplicity over Florida, Jackson broke off their relations.

The enmity between Jackson and Calhoun was real. For Jackson, it turned into a matter of honor, crossing into a realm where the
distinction between public and private affairs was murky. Henceforth, everything Calhoun now said or did would be, in Jackson’s eyes, further evidence of his disloyalty. There was nothing Calhoun could do or say to redeem himself. (Calhoun, for his part, had little inclination to do so.) Jackson would be as eager for a final showdown with the South Carolinian as he had been when he called out his dueling opponents back in Tennessee.

Jackson’s conflict with Calhoun was not, however, as some writers have alleged, built out of the offended president’s rage at his traducer. Crucial political principles were at stake. Jackson, the democratic nationalist, truly abhorred Calhoun’s view of the Constitution. Nullification, he thought, threatened the Revolution’s survival. To secure the legacy of 1776, Calhoun’s ideas would have to be crushed. As ever, Jackson was quick to personalize political disputes. But the clash concerned fundamentally different ideas about the nation and the national government—and in short order it would lead to a momentous constitutional crisis.

Jackson’s presidency faced trouble from a disagreeable Congress as well as from divisions within the administration. In the Senate, Jackson’s supporters held only a slender two-vote majority over the National Republicans; and that majority would weaken when, in 1831, the Kentucky legislature named the formidable Henry Clay to the Senate to succeed a Jackson loyalist. The administration’s command of the House of Representatives, with a large majority under Speaker Andrew Stevenson of Virginia, seemed much more assured, but sectional differences undermined the Jacksonians’ unity. To advance his reform agenda—and halt the National Republicans from enacting their own preferred program—Jackson would have to master quickly the intricacies of Washington power politics.

Along with rotation in office, Indian removal moved to the top of Jackson’s list of priorities. The controversies over the Indians that had plagued the Adams administration heated up in 1829. Having outmaneuvered Adams over the Creeks, Georgia’s governor George Troup and his successors, John Forsyth and George Rockingham Gilmer, decided to remove the Cherokees as well, a goal made all the more pressing when gold was discovered on Cherokee land in the summer of 1829. Jackson, whose dedication to Indian removal had not wavered, sympathized with the Georgians. But he also decided it was time to impose a coherent federal policy on Indian issues, removing on a voluntary basis the remaining eastern tribes to federal lands in the territories west of the Mississippi River in exchange for their existing tribal holdings—an extension of the piecemeal allotment and relocation efforts he had overseen between 1816 and 1820. In his first annual message in December 1829, Jackson asked Congress for the funds necessary to complete his ambitious plan.

A new controversy quickly erupted, very different from the earlier one over the Creeks. With the aid of religious missionaries from New England, the Cherokees had become a model of cultural assimilation to American norms. They had shifted from hunting to settled agriculture, converted in large numbers to Christianity, adopted a written alphabet, and approved a tribal constitution based on the U.S. Constitution. These adaptations led the Cherokees to assert their sovereignty as a separate nation, which only stiffened the Georgians’ resolve, and Jackson’s, to see the Cherokees removed. Yet all across the country (and especially in New England) Christian humanitarians joined in a massive petition campaign demanding that Congress uphold the Indians’ rights. On Capitol Hill, opposition forces, led by Senator Theodore Freylinghuyzen of New Jersey, denounced the Georgians and their friends in the War Department for their frequent violations of treaties with the Indians, and charged the administration with gross materialism and callous racial prejudice. Jacksonians replied that the protests were politically motivated, engineered by partisan pseudo-philanthropists whose true motivation was to undermine the administration.

Jackson, unperturbed by his critics, played hard-knuckle politics, by making sure that the relevant congressional committees were stacked with pro-removal men and by placing pressure on wavering
rank-and-file Jacksonians. The administration’s removal bill passed easily enough in the Senate, along strict party lines, but resistance in the House was fierce, even among many of Jackson’s nominal supporters. Pennsylvania representatives, fearing retribution from Quaker voters sympathetic to the Cherokees, were especially uneasy. Only at the very close of the congressional session in May 1829 did the House approve the bill, after protracted debate and several closely fought votes. Even then, twenty-four Jacksonians voted “nay” and twelve absent themselves. It took a solid turnout from Martin Van Buren’s loyal New York delegation to carry the day for the administration. Van Buren himself, who regarded Indian removal as chiefly a southern issue and wished it had never arisen, later remarked that the outcome was so unpopular with New York voters it nearly destroyed his own political base.

Indian removal has, in recent historical writing, become the great moral stain on the Jacksonian legacy, much as it was to Christian humanitarian reformers in 1829 and 1830—a policy, supposedly, that aimed at the “infantilization” and “genocide” of the Indians, and that signaled a transition from the ethical community upheld by anti-removal men to Jackson’s boundless individualism. The judgments confuse tragedy with melodrama. Compared to some of his chief political adversaries—notably Henry Clay, whose racist contempt for Indians had once prompted him to remark that their annihilation would cause “no great loss to the world”—Jackson was a sincere if unsentimental paternalist. He earnestly believed, with good reason, that his predecessors’ hypocritical combination of high-minded rhetoric, treachery, and abandonment had been disastrous. Removal, he wrote, was the only practical means “to preserve this much-injured race” by placing them under federal protection, “free from the mercenary influence of White men,” so that they might live as they saw fit. In view of the hard anti-Indian realities prevalent among whites in the lower South, that conclusion, although certainly patronizing to the Indians, was neither genocidal nor far-fetched.

The Cherokees’ demand for full tribal sovereignty was, to Jackson, unconstitutional as well as impractical. Article IV, section 3, of the Constitution stated that “no new State shall be formed or erected within the Jurisdiction of any other State” without the approval of that state’s legislature. If granted, tribal sovereignty would establish an irregular nation within a nation whose existence would present as great a potential threat to national integrity and security as the Carolina doctrine of nullification. Jackson’s policy owed something to his persistent fear that independent, sovereign Indian nations would prove easy prey for manipulation by hostile foreign powers. It also conformed with his developing views on the division of powers between the federal government and the states—respecting the strict integrity of the states under the Constitution, while giving the federal government considerable powers above and beyond those held solely by the state governments. In the end, quite apart from protecting the Indians, removal was, in Jackson’s view, the only way to safeguard the Constitution of the United States and the nation’s survival.

Yet if Jackson’s removal policy was not overtly malevolent, it was insidious—and, for the Indians, it was ruinous. Jackson the paternalist presumed that all Indians were “erratic in their habits” and inferior to all whites, a prejudice then widely but not universally shared. He presumed that he understood the Indians’ welfare better than they did. And, in practice, the policy never matched Jackson’s own high-minded professions. Jackson’s promises about voluntary and compensated relocation would be constantly undermined by delays and by sharp dealing by government negotiators that pitted one tribal faction against another to obtain land quickly and cheaply—actions that Jackson would condone. The removal bill’s allotment scheme invited an influx of outside speculators, who wound up buying from those Indians who chose not to relocate between 80 and 90 percent of their land at a fraction of its actual worth. The frauds persuaded many Indians who would have preferred to stay that they had no choice but to leave. So did the
sinister coercion that undergirded the entire plan: those Indians who did not relocate would be left to the tender mercies of state governments—governments whose hostility to the Indians was one of Jackson's stated reasons for favoring removal. Above all, Jackson was determined to minimize federal costs and extinguish the national debt, and provided woefully insufficient funds for the care and protection of the relocated. Although the worst suffering was inflicted after he left office, Jackson cannot escape responsibility for setting in motion a policy that uprooted tens of thousands of Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks during his presidency, and that would later cost the lives of upwards of eight thousand Cherokees on the long trek west along the "Trail of Tears"—an outcome some anti-removal advocates had predicted.

The politics of Indian removal also reinforced elements within the Jackson Democracy who presumed the supremacy of whites over nonwhites, and interpreted any challenge to that supremacy as pretended philanthropy. To be sure, some of Jackson's opponents, notably Henry Clay, seized upon the issue and aided the anti-removal petition effort, contradicting their earlier views of the matter. But to reduce all of the critics, as Jackson and his supporters did, to ambitious and "factious" partisans was to confuse the opportunists with sincere humanitarians like Senator Freylinghuysen. In the political turmoil of the 1830s and after, this turn of mind would complicate and compromise the Jacksonian ideals of equality and democracy, by rendering all kinds of benevolent reform as crypto-aristocratic efforts to elevate blacks as well as Indians at the expense of ordinary white men. Those complications and compromises would, in the future, create havoc and tragedy for Jackson's party.

Congress's enactment of Indian removal, although narrowly won, was a welcome political victory for President Jackson amid the tribulations of the Eaton affair and the fracas with Vice President Calhoun. Jackson had proved that, on at least one issue, he was resourceful enough to impose his will on his faction-ridden govern-

ment. He did so again, immediately after the removal bill passed, over the issue of internal improvements—this time by defying Congress instead of cajoling it.

Jackson approached federal support for road building, canal construction, and other internal improvements from a centrist posture that resembled his moderate position on the tariff. In opposition to the National Republicans who favored Clay's American System, he argued that calls for federal aid to make improvements not manifestly in the national interest were unconstitutional. Yet he would not go as far as those state rights champions, especially numerous in the South, who maligned all federal improvements; in Jackson's view, the national government had a role to play in aiding economic improvement as well as providing for the national security. Holding that middle ground inevitably led to conflict, pitting Jackson against members of his own party as well as against the National Republicans.

The divisive potential of internal improvements became apparent in March and April 1830, when Congress debated an ambitious road bill sponsored by the Pennsylvania Jacksonian Joseph Hemphill. Representative Hemphill proposed that the federal government construct a national highway running 1,500 miles from Buffalo, New York, to Washington, and then to New Orleans. The bill's backers said the road would provide a valuable military resource and a boon to national commerce and unity. To its critics, especially in the South, the bill augured an intolerable expansion of federal power that would benefit certain areas of the country more than others. In a sectional vote, the bill failed to pass the House.

More troublesome was the fight over the so-called Maysville Road bill, concerning a proposed route that would connect the town of Maysville, Kentucky, with the growing city of Lexington. Although the road would run in only a single state, its advocates claimed it would one day become an important section of a national road system and that it therefore deserved federal support. Key allies of the president, including Amos Kendall and Senator Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri, supported the measure. Southern
Jacksonians opposed it, just as fiercely as they had the Hemphill bill. This time, though, the opposition slackened, and the bill arrived on Jackson’s desk for signing just as Congress was getting ready to adjourn. Jackson, certain to disappoint some portion of his coalition no matter what he did, was in a quandary. He turned to his newfound confidant Martin Van Buren for advice.

Van Buren considered himself a strict state rights Jeffersonian and he found the bill objectionable on constitutional grounds. If approved, he claimed, the Maysville bill would encourage a breakneck scramble among local interests to secure federal funds and lead to congressional logrolling. Partisan considerations also came into play, above all ensuring that the South remained loyal to the pro-Jackson alliance Van Buren had helped to forge before the 1828 election. Van Buren accordingly advised Jackson to veto the bill—an unusual step that had been undertaken only eight times by all of Jackson’s predecessors. Jackson assented, and then decided to kill not just the Maysville project but a number of other improvement bills approved by Congress.

In his Maysville veto message—drafted mainly by Van Buren and by a young Tennessee congressman, James K. Polk—Jackson restated his determination, expressed in his inaugural address, to observe “a strict and faithful economy” in federal expenditures as well as “a proper respect” for the Constitution’s limitations of federal power. Yet the message also emphasized that Jackson had not abandoned his previously held views about federal spending on roads and other improvements. The Maysville Road’s proponents, Jackson contended, had failed to make their case that the project was of national and not merely statewide importance. But he reserved the power to approve any project, within “a general system of improvement,” that met his standard of constitutionality. He would adhere to that position over the rest of his presidency, eventually releasing more than ten million dollars in federal funds for road construction, river and harbor improvements, and other ventures—a total greater than that expended on improvements by the federal government over the entire period from 1789 to 1828.10

The internal improvements struggle showed, as did the fight over Indian removal, Jackson attempting to carve a middle path between the reflexive antagonism to federal power exhibited by George Troup and, increasingly, John C. Calhoun, and the expansive nationalism favored by John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay. More important, it signaled Jackson’s readiness to exert executive power to the utmost when his will conflicted with Congress’s. To Jackson, such exertions were perfectly in keeping with his pledge at his inauguration to adhere to “the limitations as well as the extent of Executive power.” To his adversaries, they would come to mark a usurpation of authority that threatened the Republic’s foundations.11

By the end of 1831, Jackson had finally gained a grip on his troubled presidency. His break with Calhoun, and his resolve to end the Eaton imbroglio once and for all, had moved him to isolate his enemies within the administration and cut them off. His successful dealings with Congress in 1830 had cleared the way for a full reorganization of the cabinet. As part of his effort to establish control, Jackson had also arranged for the establishment of a newspaper in Washington, the Globe, and for the installation as its editor a Kentucky loyalist, Amos Kendall’s friend Francis P. Blair. (Under Blair, Kendall remarked, the Globe would serve as “the friend of General Jackson and his administration, having no . . . political views other than the support of his principles.”12) Much remained to be settled, not least the future of Jackson’s national political coalition now that Calhoun and his friends were on the outs. But as a newly elected Congress assembled in December 1831 (with the Jacksonians clinging to a small majority in the Senate and still enjoying a sizable majority in the House), Jackson was ready to address the next item on his political agenda—an item he had been mulling over for some time but had addressed only briefly in public. With his new cabinet installed, he wrote to a supporter, “the great task of Democratic reform” would recommence, now as a “struggle against the rechartering of the United States Bank.”13