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Politics and Parties in Jacksonian America

Politics is, as it were, the gizzard of society, full of grit and gravel, and the two political parties are two opposite halves,—sometimes split into quarters, it may be, which grind on each other.

Henry David Thoreau (1863)

THE CENTRAL PROBLEM IN WRITING about the recent historiography of Jacksonian politics is one of terminology. What was once called the "Age of Jackson" has taken on almost as many names as it has historians.[1] Older terms such as the "Age of the Common Man" and "Jacksonian Democracy" have proved to be as one historian said of the latter, "logically indefensible."[2] The 1970s historians searched unsuccessfully for Progressivism; Ronald P. Formisano called off the search for a new synthesis of studies of Jacksonian America halfway through the decade. He wrote in 1976, "The old syntheses are gone or modified beyond recognition. One often hears

[1] On this matter and so many others see: Ronald P. Formisano, "Toward a Reorientation of Jacksonian Politics: A Review of the Literature, 1959-1975," *Journal of American History* 53 (June, 1976): 42-65, especially n. 2, p. 43. Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality and Politics* (Homewood, 1978). The following notes are designed to direct the readers' further investigation.

[2] Benjamin G. Rader, "Jacksonian Democracy: Myth or Reality," *Social Studies* 65 (January, 1974), 18.

expressed hope that a 'new synthesis' will emerge to bring order to confusion. Yet neither the intellectual climate nor the ways in which historical knowledge is produced should encourage expectations of salvation."[3]

Since the appearance in 1961 of one of the most iconoclastic books ever written on American political history, Lee Benson's *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, Jackson's personal importance has been in question.[4] A quick look at textbooks may reassure traditionalists that the Old Hero is "alive and well," but to students of the period this simply raises further anxiety about the distance between textbooks and serious historical scholarship. Benson had written Jackson out of the "Age of Egalitarianism" and recently Sean Wilentz noted that among the new social historians, "Andrew Jackson—indeed politics—virtually disappeared from what had once been called the 'Age of Jackson.'"[5]

In his essay on the subject Wilentz gleefully traced the decline in the interest in Jacksonian politics between 1969 and 1980 when only three related articles appeared. At one time historians viewed "Jacksonian Democracy" as a key moment in the political and social development of America. Jackson himself was considered one of the great presidents—"A Symbol for An Age" that bore his name.[6] Such concepts and images are now as fragmented as the society in which he lived.

In order to understand this process we must return first to the events themselves and to the last major synthesis of the Jacksonian era. Jackson lived seventy-eight years from the time of the Revolution to the eve of the Mexican War, which he did so much to encourage.[7] His reputation was synonymous with the War of 1812 and the forays

[3] Formisano, "Toward a Reorientation," 43-44.

[4] Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961).

[5] Sean Wilentz, "On Class and Politics in Jacksonian America," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December, 1982), 51.

[6] John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: A Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1955).

[7] The best short biography is James C. Curtis, *Andrew Jackson and the Search for Vindication* (Boston, 1976). Robert Remini has recently completed the "definitive" Jackson biography of our time: *Andrew Jackson and the Course of Empire, 1767-1821* (New York, 1977); *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 1822-1832* (New York, 1981); and *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Democracy, 1833-1845* (New York, 1984).

against the southern Indian tribes following it. In 1824 he received a plurality of both the popular vote and the electoral vote in a four way race for the presidency but was deprived of that office by a Congress that chose John Quincy Adams. For the rest of his life Jackson, along with many of his supporters, believed this was the result of a "corrupt bargain" between Adams and Henry Clay, who became Secretary of State. In 1828 Jackson avenged his earlier loss, defeating Adams for the presidency; four years later he rousted Clay. The symbolism and policy orientation associated with Jackson were carried on by his hand-picked successors Martin Van Buren and James K. Polk.[8] Although Jackson was dead, the Democrats in 1852 continued to appeal to his authority, labelling their candidate Franklin Pierce the "Young Hickory of the Granite Hills."[9] On the other side of the ledger Clay became the leader of the Whig party that provided close competition for the Democrats from the mid-1830s into the 1850s and controlled the presidency eight of these years.[10]

However, Jacksonian America was also swept by currents of change that had no relationship to the General in the White House. After 1815 every indicator of social and economic development registered high rates of change.[11] Although there were financial panics and subsequent depressions in 1819 and 1837, the economy was growing

[8] There are discussions of each election during these years in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Fred L. Israel, eds., *History of American Presidential Elections*, (New York, 1971), written in turn by Robert Remini (1828-1832), Joel Silbey (1836), William Chambers (1840), Charles Sellers (1844), and Holman Hamilton (1848). One of our best political biographies is that of Polk by Charles Sellers. Two volumes, *James K. Polk: Jacksonian, 1795-1843*, and *James K. Polk: Continentalist, 1843-1846*, have been published (Princeton, 1957 and 1966). In the course, the author seems to become disillusioned with the subject. After years of neglect Van Buren has become the center of attraction: James C. Curtis, *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1841* (Lexington, 1970); Major Wilson, *The Presidency of Martin Van Buren* (Lawrence, 1983); John Niven, *Martin Van Buren: The Romantic Age of American Politics* (New York, 1983); and Donald B. Cole, *Martin Van Buren and the American Political System* (Princeton, 1984).

[9] There is a discussion of the election in Schlesinger, Jr., and Israel, eds., *Presidential Elections*, but one must read Roy Franklin Nichols: *The Democratic Machine, 1850-1854* (New York, 1923); *Franklin Pierce, Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia, 1958), and *The Invention of American Political Parties: A Study of Political Improvisation* (New York, 1975).

[10] Clay lacks a good biography. The most recent is Clement Eaton, *Henry Clay and the Art of American Politics* (Boston, 1957).

[11] Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, cites most of the relevant studies.

to one of capitalist complexity on the eve of the Civil War. The classic historian of these years, Frederick Jackson Turner, focused on "The Rise of the West," because the geographical center of the country steadily crept in that direction.[12] Immediately after the War of 1812, Indiana, Illinois, Alabama, Mississippi, and Missouri entered the Union, followed later in the period by Arkansas, Michigan, Iowa, Florida, Texas, and Wisconsin. At the expense of both the native American population and the Afro-American slaves, these were "flush times." The population continued to double every 22.5 years and toward the end of the era, its nature changed with new torrents from Ireland and the German states.[13] Catholics and non-believers were moving into a society "burned over" by the fires of Protestant revivalism.[14] Peasants were transplanted to a country already deranged by extreme rates of social and geographic mobility, industrialization, and urbanization.

The rates and forms of change had a social cost. The stratification of wealth became more clearly pronounced.[15] Both a working class and a middle class appeared.[16] Reformers worried about alcoholism,

[12] Turner is not well understood. He is known for one or two of his essays, but he wrote a fine little book, *The Rise of the New West*, that was the best in the American Nation Series. However, his unfinished book, *The United States, 1830 to 1850* sparkles with as yet undeveloped insights.

[13] The interest in immigration history has shifted toward the "new" immigration. Historians of the period must still deal with Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, 1941). An excellent resource is Stephan Thernstrom, ed., *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, 1980).

[14] Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, 1950); Timothy L. Smith, *Revivalism and Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (New York, 1957); Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago, 1977); Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1980); and Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeepers Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York, 1978).

[15] Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class and Power Before the Civil War* (Lexington, 1973); Lee Soltow, *Men and Wealth in the United States, 1850-1870* (New Haven, 1975); Michael Katz, Michael J. Doucet, and Mark J. Stern, *The Social Organization of Early Industrial Capitalism* (Cambridge, 1982).

[16] Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, 1976); Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York, 1981); Stuart M. Blumin, "The Hypothesis of Middle Class Formation in Nineteenth Century America: A Critique and Some Proposals," *American Historical Review* 90 (April, 1985): 299-338.

prostitution, and street gangs. While one historian called it "The Happy Republic," another termed these "The Turbulent Years" in which people took to the streets about economic, social, religious, and moral issues.[17] Ironically, it is in this sense that we might look upon the first half of the nineteenth century as "The Age of the Common Man."

Finally, we also know that these common white men, in the North as well as the South, were racists.[18] The constitutions of the new states and the revisions of those in older states discarded property qualifications for suffrage, but they disenfranchised blacks at the same time. New York retained a property qualification for blacks; Pennsylvania's reform constitution excluded them entirely after 1838. The Anti-Masons, and to a lesser degree the Whigs, protested this aspect of Jacksonian Democracy. The "expanded" electorate of these years was made up of white adult males. Questions about race and slavery lurked beneath the surface of politics and attached themselves, barnacle-like, to most issues. Between 1819 and 1821 the crisis over the entrance of Missouri brought forward the slavery issue. The debate over nullification has been termed "the indirect defense of slavery."[19] In the 1830s abolitionist protest was met by mob violence and the "gag" rule that was supported by the Congressional Democrats in the hope of quieting southern concerns about Van Buren's position on slavery. Polk, then Speaker of the House, wrote that the support of "the friends of Mr. V. Buren . . . on Pinckney's resolutions, must satisfy the country that they are sound upon that subject."[20] Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison was dragged through the streets of Boston with a noose around his neck and Philadelphia's Pennsyl-

[17] George E. Probst, ed., *The Happy Republic: A Reader on Tocqueville's America* (New York, 1962); Michael Feldberg, *The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America* (New York, 1980).

[18] Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*, (Chicago, 1961); George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York, 1971); and Phyllis F. Field, *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, 1982).

[19] William W. Freehling, *The Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversey in South Carolina, 1816-1836* (New York, 1965).

[20] Polk to William R. Rucker, February 22, 1836, in Herbert Weaver and Kermit L. Hall, eds., *Correspondence of James K. Polk* (Nashville, 1975), III, 511-13.

vania Hall was burned amid rumors of the mixing of the races at an abolitionist lecture. Philadelphia Jacksonians seem to have enjoyed "hunting the Nigs."

Relatively small antislavery parties managed to affect the results of the elections of 1844 and 1848. New York was crucial. The Liberty party made no dent at all in Pennsylvania, and the Free Soil effort was limited to David Wilmot's district. It must be understood that the Free Soil movement was predominantly racist.[21] They proposed free soil for white men only. Wilmot was proud of his anti-abolitionist record. The anti-slaveholder nature of their position was captured in a letter from a Yankee farmer to Duff Green, "The Northern Democracy are beginning to be tired of . . . such men as you, and Mr. Rhett, the Son of a Bitch who had the audacity to call the honest and enlightened Yeomanry of New England low peasantry."[22] Jacksonian politics evolved against this background.

The son of a Harvard University professor, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., put together the accepted wisdom of the day in magisterial fashion and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1945 for *The Age of Jackson*.[23] In a larger sense, the book is about the meaning of democracy and the nature of liberalism in America. Schlesinger's thesis structured three decades of historiographical debate. Recently the young Marxist historian, Sean Wilentz, wrote that *The Age of Jackson* "still stands as the most comprehensive (and the most provocative) historical survey of the 1830s and 1840s."[24] Certainly, it drew a benchmark from which any discussion of recent trends in the study of Jacksonian politics must proceed.

For Schlesinger, Jackson represented a crucial link in the liberal chain that joined Franklin D. Roosevelt and Thomas Jefferson. Schlesinger even quoted Roosevelt's praise of Jackson's "unending contribution to the vitality of our democracy."[25] Jackson was given credit for shifting liberalism from a faith in laissez-faire to the acceptance of an active executive and positive government. The Jacksonian move-

[21] Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980), 77-93.

[22] Quoted in James C. N. Paul, *Rift in the Democracy* (Philadelphia, 1951), 93.

[23] Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945).

[24] Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984), 428.

[25] Schlesinger, Jr., *Age of Jackson*, x.

ment typified the "liberalism in America" that Schlesinger believed was best characterized by attempts "on the part of other sections of society to restrain the power of the business community."[26] While he did briefly discuss nullification in order to portray Jackson as a strong president and a nationalist, Schlesinger concentrated on economic policy, most particularly in relation to banking. The "Bank War" revealed the essence of Jacksonian Democracy. Jackson's veto of the new charter for the Second Bank of the United States represented a victory for the nation's farmers, urban workers, and the new democracy generally. He emphasized the idea that Jacksonian Democracy was rooted in the conflict between classes— "the house of Have and the house of Want"—rather than sections and that its basic ideology radiated from the emerging urban areas of the East. There was "a clash of ideas in these years" that produced "reasoned systematic notions about society."[27] Such desires were funneled through the workingmen's parties into the Democratic party, headed by Jackson, who gained the allegiance of the economic groups that benefited from his policies. As one might assume from the statement quoted above, Jackson's was a rather negative record: the Bank veto, the Maysville Road veto, tariff reduction, the specie circular after the "pet bank" fiasco, and finally (under Van Buren) the Independent Treasury bill. According to Schlesinger, each struck at entrenched privilege and helped create a fair track open to all competitors.

In the two decades following the publication of *The Age of Jackson*, critics working with Schlesinger's questions disputed his answers. They generally agreed on the importance of Jacksonian Democracy, but they argued about its nature. One group of historians focused upon Schlesinger's analogy between the role of labor in the 1930s and the 1830s.[28] They showed rather clearly that there was little relationship between the nascent unions and self-styled workingmen's parties. The leadership and the publicists of the latter were thoroughly middle class. Finally, they showed that in most cities, including Newark and

[26] Ibid., 505.

[27] Ibid., x.

[28] Edward Pessen, "The Working Men's Movement of the Jacksonian Era," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43 (December, 1956): 428-43; Walter Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class* (Stanford, 1960); and William A. Sullivan, *The Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania, 1800-1840* (Harrisburg, 1955).

Philadelphia, working-class wards were not particularly Jacksonian. One critic pronounced Jackson a "strikebreaker" and another termed the labor radicals the "most uncommon Jacksonians."[29]

Other critics of Schlesinger focused upon the "Bank War."[30] They decried his depiction of Biddle's Philadelphia-based bank as a monster and praised it as a quasi-central bank. Even scholars friendly to Jackson were forced to note his ignorance in these matters.[31] At the same time the critics who came to be called the "entrepreneurial school" emphasized the importance of conflicts within the banking fraternity in bringing on the "Bank War." Jacksonian Democracy became a phase in the rise of liberal capitalism in which "men on the make" smashed a log jam that held back the rising waters of petite bourgeois greed.[32] Wall Street, state bankers, and "Democrats by trade" laid siege on Chestnut Street and combined to strike down the Bank of the United States.

Building upon these views, another Schlesinger critic, Marvin Meyers, completely altered our understanding of the Jacksonians.[33] Rather than picturing them as harbingers of progressive change, he said they basically were reactionaries. The Jacksonians were, in fact, confused; they were unable clearly to comprehend their own motives and were undermined by a basic "ambivalence." According to Meyers, "The Jacksonians wanted to preserve the virtues of a simple agrarian republic without sacrificing the rewards and conveniences of modern capitalism."[34] Thus, with the onset of the 1960s students of Jacksonian politics faced a situation in which Jackson had little to do with the modest democratic changes of the era. The socioeconomic difference

[29] Richard B. Morris, "Andrew Jackson, Strikebreaker," *American Historical Review* 55 (October, 1949): 54-68; Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, 1967).

[30] Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in the United States from the Revolution to the Civil War* (Princeton, 1957); Thomas P. Govan, *Nicholas Biddle: Nationalist and Banker* (Chicago, 1959).

[31] Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson and the Bank War: A Study in the Growth of Presidential Power* (New York, 1948).

[32] Richard Hofstadter's early essay in *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York, 1948) remains the best statement of this view.

[33] Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Beliefs* (Stanford, 1957).

[34] Ibid., vii.

between Whigs and Democrats seemed minimal, and their issue orientation a matter of conflicting interpretations of liberal capitalism.

In the early 1960s two books changed the nature of the debate. Both responded to Schlesinger, but each moved off in a new direction. Lee Benson in *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* challenged traditional views and portrayed the Democrats as an undemocratic group that had to be dragged kicking and screaming into the nineteenth century. Most importantly, Benson introduced the idea that at certain stages of capitalist development, ethnic and religious relationships might be the most salient factors defining political behavior.[35] In two crucial articles, and then in his book, *The Second American Party System*, Richard P. McCormick emphasized the development of modern parties during these years.[36] Unlike Benson, he stressed the importance of presidential politics and seemed to deny the social analysis of politics in any form. The two most interesting revisionist studies in the 1960s thus differed on very elemental issues. They redefined the boundaries of the pitch and influenced the most radical departures from the debate over *The Age of Jackson*.

In the past two decades a number of historians have wrestled with traditional topics in generally traditional ways. On the "Bank War" and the subsequent issue of banking in the states, a consensus has been reached on two points. In its genesis the "Bank War" was a personal and political affair that had little to do with working-class perceptions or the interests of state bankers.[37] The Bank was well run and generally popular. The veto grew out of Jackson's own—as well as those of some of his advisors'—suspicions about banks generally, along with his belief that the Bank had acted against him politically. Jackson's motives and the veracity of these charges remain in dispute.

[35] Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961). See also his essays in *Toward the Scientific Study of History: Selected Essays* (Philadelphia, 1972).

[36] Richard P. McCormick: "Suffrage Classes and Party Alignments: A Study in Voter Behavior," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 46 (December, 1959): 397-410; "New Perspectives on Jacksonian Politics," *American Historical Review* 65 (January, 1960): 288-301; and *The Second American Party System: Party Formation in the Age of Jackson* (Chapel Hill, 1966).

[37] Jean Alexander Wilburn, *Biddle's Bank: The Crucial Years* (New York, 1967); Donald B. Cole, *Jacksonian Democracy in New Hampshire, 1800-1851* (Cambridge, 1970); and John M. McFaul *The Politics of Jacksonian Finance* (Ithaca, 1972).

New Hampshire and Kentucky politicians fed the rumor mill, and when Van Buren was denied his place at the Court of St. James the New York Democrats fell into line. The Pennsylvanians supported the Bank to the end and even gave it a state charter after Jackson withdrew the deposits.

Somewhat ironically, after the historians of the 1950s blamed Jackson for the economic problems at the end of the decade, the "new" economic historians have minimized the importance of his policies.[38] For them the veto was sound and fury signifying nothing. Yet, the other point on which there is consensus is that after 1837 Whigs and Democrats divided most clearly on questions concerning money and banking in the states.[39] The Jacksonians moved toward reliance on "hard" money; their opponents searched for a flexible credit system. Scholars continue to disagree about the meaning of party policies and the allegiance of socioeconomic groups that supported each party.

Similar problems involve the tariff, nullification, and land policy. As with the Bank, Jackson had taken no clear position on the tariff in 1828 and local politicians were free to take whatever position they deemed most expedient. Although one may blame certain Jacksonians for the "Tariff of Abominations" in 1828 and point out the overwhelming pro-tariff posture of the Pennsylvanians, on the whole Jackson's supporters opposed protection. The Compromise of 1833, mandating staggered tariff reductions over ten years, came relatively easily.[40] Nullification grew out of a peculiar set of circumstances within South Carolina and was also defeated with relative ease, because of widespread support for the version of state rights Unionism that Jackson espoused.[41]

In the area of land policy, however, Jackson accepted a form of

[38] Peter Temin, *The Jacksonian Economy* (New York, 1969); Susan Previant Lee and Peter Passell, *A New Economic View of American History* (New York, 1979).

[39] James Roger Sharp, *The Jacksonians Versus The Banks: Politics in the States After the Panic of 1837* (New York, 1970); Erling A. Erickson, *Banking in Frontier Iowa, 1836-1865* (Ames, 1971); and William Gerald Shade, *Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865* (Detroit, 1972).

[40] Merrill D. Peterson, *Olive Branch and the Sword—The Compromise of 1833* (Baton Rouge, 1982).

[41] Major L. Wilson, *Space, Time and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrespressible Conflict, 1815-1861* (Westport, 1974).

nullification. He and his supporters pushed programs that would, as quickly as possible, alienate federal lands within state boundaries. The most recent study of land policy during these years details how the issue shifted from a sectional matter in the 1820s to a partisan one in the 1830s. "On the land issue Old Hickory's second term had witnessed the crystallization of party positions along lines visible in 1833—the Whigs for distribution, the Democrats for preemption and equivocally for graduation."[42] Schlesinger had little to say about land policy, perhaps because management of the public lands became the arena of widespread abuse of the spoils system. Malcolm J. Rohrbough wrote in *The Land Office Business*, "Not one of these land officers distinguished by integrity and attention to duty was a Jacksonian appointee. The men put into the land business by Andrew Jackson and his party were politicians not public servants."[43]

Historians have continued to debate the impact of Jacksonian "reform" through "rotation in office."[44] It has long been acknowledged that Jackson did not invent the spoils system. Yet, there can be little doubt that he punished enemies and rewarded friends. During his two terms Jackson probably replaced only twenty percent of the men in offices at his disposal. Deaths and retirements certainly account for some of this, and many people who held office had supported the Old Hero. Ironically, Nicholas Biddle had voted for Jackson in 1828, and John McLean, whom Jackson elevated to the Supreme Court, had been Postmaster General under Adams.

The Jacksonians claimed that rotation democratized office holding and broke down elite control of government. The general expansion of the size of government and the increase in the number of jobs probably did have that effect. However, the most detailed study of civil service appointments shows that while Jackson's appointees differed from those of Jefferson in their regional origins, their socioec-

[42] Daniel Feller, *The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics* (Madison, 1984), 186.

[43] Malcolm J. Rohrbough, *The Land Office Business: The Settlement and Administration of American Public Lands, 1789-1837* (New York, 1968), 293. He argues that "The Jacksonian reformation was deep and wide, especially in the Old Northwest" (p. 273).

[44] Mathew A. Crenson, *The Federal Machine: Beginnings of Bureaucracy in Jacksonian America* (Baltimore, 1975).

onomic status was approximately the same.[45] In Pennsylvania and Maryland the Jacksonian appointees came from traditional ruling elites.[46]

Lynn Marshall argued that the ideology underlying rotation in office fit neatly with the needs of bureaucratic modernization.[47] Some Jacksonians such as Amos Kendall did bring a new level of organization to their departments. However, it is doubtful if this was Jackson's intention. His initial appointment policy smacked of cronyism. If a few Jacksonians proved to be efficient managers, most were like those described by Rohrbough. In 1840 they were replaced by Whigs cut from the same cloth and the quality of the civil service continued to deteriorate.[48]

Schlesinger completely ignored Jackson's Indian policy. Given the space devoted to it by Jackson in his public messages, the time spent and the roll calls taken in Congress, and the rivers of ink spilled in the press, one might argue that Jackson's presidency can be best characterized by the revolution it brought in federal policy toward the Indians. Although opposed by the Supreme Court, Congress passed laws in 1830 and 1834 to remove the Indians west of the Mississippi. The Jackson administration renegotiated ninety-five treaties and established a Bureau of Indian Affairs that would proceed on to a career of corruption in the name of reform.

Since the 1950s, a few historians have tried to deal with this matter. Although one has defended Jackson's motives,[49] they have been generally critical of "Jacksonian Justice."[50] In the most recent book on

[45] Sidney H. Aronson, *Status and Kinship in the Higher Civil Service: Standards of Selection in the Administration of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson* (Cambridge, 1964).

[46] Whitman Ridgway, "McCulloch vs. the Jacksonians: Patronage and Politics in Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 70 (Winter, 1975): 350-62. Bruce J. Ambacher's ongoing study of Pennsylvania supports this view although he believes there was a greater democratic effort than Ridgway.

[47] Lynn Marshall, "The Strange Still-birth of the Whig Party," *American Historical Review* 72 (January, 1967): 445-68.

[48] Leonard D. White, *The Jacksonians: A Study in Administrative History, 1829-1861* (New York, 1954).

[49] Francis Paul Prucha, "Andrew Jackson's Indian Policy: A Reassessment," *Journal of American History* 56 (December, 1969): 527-39.

[50] Mary E. Young, "Indian Removal and Land Allotment: The Civilized Tribes and Jacksonian Justice," *American Historical Review* 64 (October, 1958): 31-45; idem, *Redskins, Ruffleshirts and Rednecks: Indian Land Allotments in Alabama and Mississippi, 1830-1860* (Ithaca, 1961); Ronald N. Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln, 1975).

the subject, Michael P. Rogin joined the Indian and slave issues.[51] Most of the Indians moved beyond the Mississippi were originally located in southern states. Their presence had always threatened the peculiar institution; one of Jackson's generals commented that the struggle with the Seminoles was a "Negro War."[52] Rogin portrayed Jackson as a southern candidate whose political philosophy had southern roots, and whose administration stood opposed to any challenge to slavery. "The Jacksonian system defended southern interests on a national basis," he wrote, pointing out that "the majority southern strategy triumphed in the Age of Jackson."[53]

Rogin described Jacksonian support for Manifest Destiny as the culmination of this proslavery and prosouthern policy. Schlesinger believed that "Manifest Destiny signified a glowing faith in democracy" and he said little about the Mexican War other than to chastise Thoreau and others for their opposition: "Little men covering cowardice with a veil of self-righteousness."[54] Most recent historians have accepted expansionism as an essential aspect of Jacksonian policy as it took root under Polk.[55] Although one could support the annexation of Texas and the Mexican War for other reasons, there was a clear connection between the perpetuation of slavery and Jacksonian foreign policy.

One historian, Major L. Wilson, has contrasted party ideologies in relation to their conceptions of space and time. "By 'extending the area of freedom,'" Jacksonianism, according to Wilson, "meant the development of the Union across space rather than through time."[56]

[51] Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York, 1975).

[52] Kenneth W. Porter, "Negroes and the Seminole War, 1835-1841," *Journal of Southern History* 30 (November, 1964): 427-40.

[53] Rogin, *Fathers and Children*, 297-98.

[54] Schlesinger, Jr., *Age of Jackson*, 388.

[55] Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and the American Mission* (New York, 1963); idem, *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism*, (New York, 1968); idem, *Slavery and the Annexation of Texas* (New York, 1972); David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon and the Mexican War* (Columbia, 1973); John H. Schroder, *Mr. Polk's War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848* (Madison, 1975); and Thomas R. Hietala, *Manifest Design* (Ithaca, 1985).

[56] Major L. Wilson, "The Concept of Time and the Political Dialogue in the United States, 1828-48," *American Quarterly* 19 (Winter, 1967): 619-44.

The Whigs who joined "the parties of memory (and) hope" saw the expansion of freedom in evolutionary terms. Consequently, Whigs supported economic development and resisted expansionism.

Schlesinger's simplistic liberal dichotomy will not stick. Neither Whigs nor Democrats cared much about their opponents' civil liberties. Whigs championed moral reforms tinged with nativism that directed various minorities to adapt to their version of what sociologist Milton Gordon called "Anglo conformity."[57] The Democrats' "negative liberalism" may have benefited some ethnic and religious minorities because of its emphasis on individual liberty and hostility to active government. However, blacks and Indians, ideologically proscribed from the notion of the common man, represented the exceptions. What little support these groups received came from the "positive liberalism" of paternalistic Whigs. Although they still disagree about its meaning, historians agree that the slogan "State Rights, Strict Construction, and a light and simple government" represented the essence of Jacksonian policy.[58]

The most interesting new perspectives on Jacksonian politics have come from those scholars who have followed the lead of Benson and McCormick and moved away from the questions that structured *The Age of Jackson*. Initially both men were part of the debate. Benson coined the terms "positive" and "negative" liberalism used above.[59] Basically, however, he directed historians to the analysis of voting behavior, thus expanding the criticisms of those who disputed Schlesinger's "labor thesis." McCormick demonstrated the inaccuracy of the view that the newly enfranchised masses swept Jackson into office and questioned simplistic economic determinism. McCormick argued instead that American party history should be related to "the stages

[57] Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion and National Origins* (New York, 1964); Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, 1971); Michael Fitzgibbon Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven, 1969).

[58] Although their focus is on a slightly later period, the most relevant books are: Robert Kelley, *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 1969); Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York, 1977); and Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, 1983).

[59] Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, 86-109.

of American political development."[60] The American past since 1789 could be characterized by a series of five fairly stable party systems disrupted by brief periods of realignment. McCormick emphasized the importance of "The Presidential Game" in the formation of parties in Jacksonian America and adopted an electoral machine conception of the parties that dismissed the social analyses of voting behavior.[61] Younger scholars, however, found it relatively easy to mold the two perspectives together. They tended to accept the idea of a second party system during these years while searching for the economic and ethnocultural basis of voting at the time.[62]

Schlesinger had depicted a revival of the Federalist and Republican parties in the 1820s under new names. After a bit of confusion, they became the Whigs and the Democrats who contested elections until the 1850s. In his study of the election of 1828, Robert Remini filled out the story. Earlier he had focused upon Martin Van Buren's role in the construction of a modern Democratic party and here he spoke of the "Triumph of the Politician" referring to Jackson.[63] Detailed studies of New Hampshire and New Jersey confirmed the importance of 1828.[64] Jackson won big in Pennsylvania.

There are, however, a number of problems. One is the matter of the timing of party formation in the nation as a whole. McCormick described steps of party development that were not completed until 1840 when "Harrisonian Democracy" swept the hero of Tippecanoe into the White House. Benson chose to examine the election of 1844 to plumb the essence of "Jacksonian Democracy," but Edward Pessen who agreed with Remini on little else seems to date "Jacksonian America" from the 1820s into the early 1840s. In the original Amer-

[60] William Nesbit Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, eds., *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development* (New York, 1967).

[61] Richard P. McCormick, *The Presidential Game: The Origins of American Presidential Politics* (New York, 1982); M. J. Heale, *The Presidential Quest: Candidates and Images in American Political Culture, 1787-1852* (London, 1982).

[62] This literature is summarized in William G. Shade, "Political Pluralism and Party Development: The Creation of a Modern Party System, 1815-1852," in Paul K. Kleppner et al., *The Evolution of American Electoral Systems* (Westport, 1981), 77-111.

[63] Robert V. Remini, *Martin Van Buren and the Making of the Democratic Party* (New York, 1959), and idem, *The Election of Andrew Jackson* (Philadelphia, 1963).

[64] Cole, *Jacksonian Democracy in New Hampshire*; Herbert Ershkowitz, *The Origin of the Whig and Democratic Parties: New Jersey Politics, 1820-1837* (Washington, 1982).

ican Nation series "Jacksonian Democracy" was limited to the years 1828 to 1837.[65] In the updated version of 1959, "The Jacksonian Era" covered 1828 to 1848.[66]

Not only did historians have to decide the set of phenomena on which they would focus, but they faced the far more difficult task of how to define what they meant when they talked about political parties. McCormick, most aware of the matter, wrote most clearly about it. He combined impressionistic use of newspapers on the development of local committees and the infrastructure of the parties with quantitative evidence (state level voting returns) which showed a jump in turnout and an increase in party competition after 1836. The supporters of Van Buren and Harrison were fundamentally different from those who divided over Jackson and Adams in 1828.[67] Not only were there many more of them, but they came from different areas. Although McCormick stopped his series of electoral data in 1844, it is easy to extend the pattern he found through the election of 1852. In other words, the second party system may have been influenced by an aura of Old Hickory, but it coalesced after his administration and outlived him by almost a decade. Electoral studies using congressional, gubernatorial, and scattered state legislative data reinforce the point. Jackson was extremely popular in Pennsylvania but his vote in 1828 and 1832 correlates neither with the contemporary gubernatorial elections nor the 1836 presidential election. After 1838, there was a clear and consistent pattern. Historians are now debating *why* rather than *when* the change came.[68]

The pattern of electoral results is reinforced by the examinations of both the Congress and the state legislatures. Nothing resembling modern parties existed in the 1820s. Recent critics have pointed out problems with the details in James S. Young's brilliant book, *The*

[65] William McDonald, *Jacksonian Democracy, 1829-1837* (New York, 1906).

[66] Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *The Jacksonian Era, 1828-1848* (New York, 1959).

[67] Shade, "Political Pluralism," 82-88.

[68] Michael F. Holt, "The Election of 1840, Voter Mobilization, and the Emergence of the Second American Party System: A Reappraisal of Jacksonian Voting Behavior," in William J. Cooper, Jr., Michael F. Holt, and John McCardell, eds., *A Master's Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald* (Baton Rouge, 1985), 16-58.

Washington Community, but its essential argument stands.[69] It repeats in a new way the long held view that "The Era of Good Feelings" was one of factions, but hardly parties. The designation the "Family Party" given one Pennsylvania faction fairly well sums up the situation. There was little connection between political activity at the various levels of the system. Erratic local influences dominated. Two studies suggest that this situation existed well into Jackson's second term.[70] Young's quite simple discussion of Speakership contests shows that Congress was not sufficiently organized to put forth two party candidates until 1835. Thomas Alexander's meticulous analysis of roll calls in the House also supports this conclusion.[71]

Another careful student of Congress, Joel Silbey, has suggested that Americans of the late 1830s and 1840s knelt at "The Shrine of Party" and were motivated by a "Partisan Imperative."[72] Historians seem to agree that from the mid-1830s on, the "party in the legislature" was in tune with the "party in the electorate."[73] Unfortunately, there are not many studies of state legislatures. What little we know parallels the congressional studies. At about the time of the Panic of 1837 something happened. Personal allegiance had always mattered

[69] James S. Young, *The Washington Community, 1800-1828* (New York, 1966). Critical assessments are by Allan G. Bogue and Mark Paul Malaire, "Of Mess and Men: The Boardinghouse and Congressional Voting, 1821-1842," *American Journal of Political Science* 19 (May, 1975): 207-30; Noble Cunningham, *The Presidency of Thomas Jefferson* (Columbia, 1979); Robert M. Johnstone, Jr., *Jefferson and the Presidency: Leadership in the Young Republic* (Ithaca, 1978).

[70] David J. Russo, "The Major Political Issues of the Jacksonian Period and the Development of Party Loyalty in Congress, 1830-1840," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 62 (May, 1972); Alvin Willard Lynn, "Party Formation and the Operations in the House of Representatives, 1824-1837," Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1973.

[71] Thomas B. Alexander, *Sectional Stress and Party Strength: A Study of Roll-Call Voting Patterns in the United States House of Representatives* (Nashville, 1967). See also Johanna Nichol Shields, *The Line of Duty: Maverick Congressmen and the Development of American Political Culture, 1836-1860* (Westport, 1985).

[72] Joel Silbey, *The Shrine of Party: Congressional Voting Behavior, 1841-1852* (Pittsburgh, 1967), and idem, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics Before the Civil War* (New York, 1985).

[73] Herbert Ershkowitz and William G. Shade, "Consensus or Conflict? Political Behavior in the State Legislatures During the Jacksonian Era," *Journal of American History* 58 (December, 1971): 591-621; Peter Levine, *Behavior of the State Legislative Parties in the Jacksonian Era: New Jersey, 1829-1844* (Rutherford, 1977); and Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1978).

in contested elections, but after that date on several issues partisanship structured those legislatures which have been studied. This can most clearly be seen on economic matters, but it spilled over into other areas.

Had Schlesinger known this, he would have connected such behavior with the economic basis of the voters' decisions to support either the Whigs or the Democrats. Gene Wise brilliantly contrasted Schlesinger's quite simple notion of causation with Benson's much more subtle and complex approach.[74] For Benson parties had both issue-oriented platforms (different from those Schlesinger asserted) and a less tangible orientation that symbolically touched the psychic worlds of voters. Voting behavior for Schlesinger reflected one's economic condition. Benson depicted a multidimensional cultural world that defined each voter's social values. In the late 1960s and early 1970s several scholars extended Benson's insights. Throughout the North, particularly in Pennsylvania, the pattern seemed to hold.[75] Knowing the church in which a man worshipped and the accent with which he spoke proved to be a better key to how he voted than his occupation or bank account.

Although he tempered it in many ways, Schlesinger basically said that the Democrats represented the yeoman farmers and common laborers and that the Whigs were supported by the planters in the South and the businessmen of the North. In the 1960s Ronald P. Formisano, the best of Benson's students, emphasized that he and others attempted to apply "the *logic* of multivariate analysis" and consider ethnicity and religion as well as class.[76] Out of these studies came a picture framed in the parameters of kin and kind. People did not vote Whig because they sat their behinds down in a Presbyterian

[74] Gene Wise, "Political 'Realty' in Recent American Scholarship: Progressives versus Symbolists," *American Quarterly* 19 (Summer, 1967): 303-28.

[75] Aside from Benson, Holt, and Formisano see: William G. Shade, "Pennsylvania Politics in the Jacksonian Period: A Case Study, Northampton County, 1824-1844," *Pennsylvania History* 39 (July, 1972): 313-33; Stephen C. Fox, "Politicians, Issues, and Voter Preference in Jacksonian Ohio: A Critique of an Interpretation," *Ohio History* 86 (Summer, 1977): 155-70. The studies of Cole and Ershkowitz cited above present data that can be interpreted along these lines as well.

[76] Ronald P. Formisano, "Analyzing American Voting, 1830-1860: Methods," *Historical Methods Newsletter* 2 (March, 1969): 1-12.

pew. It involved the communal relationships and the shared perspectives of life. According to Silbey, "Out of a network of primary-group relationships—family, social, religious, nationality, class, and residential—individuals develop a set of values, beliefs, and interests that they often seek to advance or protect in the political arena."[77] As they filed in and out of countless small towns spread across the breadth of the young republic, they carried this personal baggage with them. German and Irish Catholics perferred the Democrats who allowed leeway for their lifestyles. Whigs wanted to mind everyone's business and make over the world in their own image. Those historians who have studied the northern states seemed to be able to explain this by building on Benson's suggestions.

Alas, what of the South? Comprising only forty percent of the total population and less than a third of the white population in 1840, the section dominated the Senate and produced a majority of both the Presidents and Justices of the Supreme Court. Slaveholders controlled the seats of power. There was, however, less foreign migration to the South and less religious diversity. All of this meant that Benson's analysis of New York might not be applicable in Alabama. Schlesinger had basically relied on Arthur Cole's ancient study of the Southern Whigs.[78] Somewhere near every bale of cotton was a Whig slaveholder and his "Nigger." A Virginia politician of a later era remembered that in his youth the Whigs were "the party of the low grounds on the big rivers . . . of old colonial mansions," men who "knew each other by the instincts of gentlemen."[79]

At the same time that historians were challenging Schlesinger's labor thesis, others, mostly from the South, were tinkering with his views on that region. Charles Sellers, the most important, was bothered by the eastern orientation of both Schlesinger and Meyers. Before publishing his biography of Polk, he wrote an article insisting that the Southern Whigs were not the state rights extremists exemplified by Calhoun but rather advocates of the "urban commercial and banking interests" who, like their northern counterparts, "supported

[77] Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, 5.

[78] Arthur C. Cole, *The Whig Party in the South* (Washington, 1914); Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Southern Whigs, 1834-1854," *Turner Essays in American History* (New York, 1910).

[79] John Herbert Claiborne, *Seventy-five Years in Old Virginia* (New York, 1904), 131.

the nationalist's policies of Henry Clay."[80] This position, with special reference to Mississippi, was developed by one of his students, James Roger Sharp, in his study of state banking policy after 1837.[81]

In the late 1970s a series of books recast traditional views of the politics of the region. William J. Cooper, Jr., while admitting a few aberrations, insisted that both parties were dominated by "The Politics of Slavery" and its seemingly bizarre connection in the minds of white Southerners with republican liberty.[82] The other books on the subject tended to build on the work of Alexander, his students, and Grady McWhiney who challenged the idea that the Whigs were a "class party" in Alabama or anywhere else in the South.[83] They found economic differences between the partisan loyalists—but not quite those Schlesinger emphasized. These involved an orientation toward economic activity rather than a matter of land and slaves.[84] They generally agreed that there were differences between the non-slaveholding white farmers and the planters, but that the crucial relation affecting party differences involved something like an urban-rural, or better, a local-cosmopolitan continuum. The Whigs and Democrats attracted people who looked at the world in different ways.

Harry Watson, in a study of a single North Carolina county, showed that the symbolic Jackson was important and in elections national issues mattered while local elites ran the store.[85] This does not mean that Schlesinger was right all along. In Worcester County, Massachusetts; Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania; and Greene County, Illinois, political life during these years was not greatly different from Baltimore County, Maryland; Prince Edward County, Virginia; or

[80] Charles G. Sellers, Jr., "Who Were the Southern Whigs?" *American Historical Review* 59 (January, 1954): 335-45.

[81] Sharp, *Jacksonians Versus the Banks*, 89-109.

[82] William J. Cooper, Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge, 1978); idem, *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York, 1983). The southern adherence to republican values is emphasized in J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978).

[83] Thomas B. Alexander et al., "The Basis of Alabama's Ante-Bellum Two Party System," *Alabama Review* 19 (October, 1966): 243-76; Grady McWhiney, "Were the Whigs a Class Party in Alabama?" *Journal of Southern History* 23 (November, 1957): 510-22.

[84] Paul Bergeron, *Antebellum Politics in Tennessee* (Lexington, 1982); Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge, 1983).

[85] Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict* (Baton Rouge, 1981).

Cumberland County, North Carolina.[86] Market relationships mattered, but these most often rested with a more important set of communal and familial ties that dictated who would be a Democrat or a Whig.

In 1840 people lived in the local, personal, face-to-face world that we have lost. Think of four- or five-hour debates before a sea of people, with the contestants like "Long John" Wentworth and "Honest Abe" Lincoln betting between themselves on how many nursing mothers they might count! In both the North and the South Whigs put forth a program of personal and economic development while the Democrats built their church on the rock of individual liberty. Each persuaded sizable numbers of white males to support them and organized institutions that mobilized the faithful—sometimes early and often—ushering in what Richard L. McCormick has termed "The Party Period of American History."[87] In 1840 practically everyone eligible to vote in Pennsylvania went to the polls!

It is difficult to judge just where scholarship on this period is leading in the 1980s. Years ago, in one of the best books we have on the 1820s, Philip Klein described Pennsylvania politics as "a game without rules." Congressmen protected the state's interests in Washington, state legislators tended their own turf on internal improvements and banks while local politicians argued about such matters as the placement of the town clock in Easton. In the nineteenth century Oliver Wolcott wrote that New York politics was "a labyrinth of wheels within wheels and it is understood only by the managers." By the end of the 1830s the managers managed to put together a set of rules. They transcended the face-to-face response of Jackson

[86] Ibid.; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York, 1983); John M. Rozett, "The Social Basis of Party Conflict in the Age of Jackson: Individual Voting Behavior in Greene County, Illinois, 1838-1848," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974; Whitman Ridgway, *Community Leadership in Maryland, 1790-1840: A Comparative Analysis of Power in Society* (Chapel Hill, 1979); William A. Gudelunas, Jr., and William G. Shade, *Before the Molly Maguires: The Emergence of the Ethno-Religious Factor in the Politics of the Lower Anthracite Region, 1844-1872* (New York, 1976); Paul Bourke and Donald DeBats, "Identifiable Voting in Nineteenth Century America: Toward a Camparison of Britain and the United States Before the Secret Ballot," *Perspectives in American History* 11 (1977): 259-88.

[87] Richard L. McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *Journal of American History* 66 (April, 1979): 279-98.

and he probably would not have liked what was happening if he had understood it. When Van Buren tentatively asked for help, Jackson replied, "Are your friends deserting you? Mine never desert me." He had disrupted his cabinet over a woman who he insisted against all evidence was as pure as Caesar's wife. Before it became organized, politics was very personal.

Although Pennsylvania politics during these years reflected most of the trends referred to above, there is as yet no synthesis of the recent literature on the state. In an attempt to summarize the present state of political history of these years, one should look at three recently published books. One is the revision of a dissertation by a highly regarded young scholar; another is a second book by one whose first book played an important role in the entire controversy; and finally, the third is a more general study by a well-known and slightly older hand who has recently snuck into the camp. It is ironic given their differences that these books—and sometimes their authors—complement each other while laying clear the unresolved tensions in the literature. Elements of culture, society and politics united in *The Age of Jackson* can never again be understood in the same relationship.

Chants Democratic by Sean Wilentz is perhaps the best of a genre created by labor historians studying the development of the American working class within the tradition of the English historian E. P. Thompson.[88] In addition, Wilentz mixes in the "Republican synthesis" that has emerged from the works of Bernard Bailyn and J. G. A. Pocock.[89] It is an attempt to capture the flag of the American political tradition from Louis Hartz. Although Wilentz resists simple economic determinism, his focus on the role of labor and workingmen's parties gives off more than hints of Schlesinger. Wilentz makes it clear, however, that neither element was easily absorbed into or even welcomed by the Jacksonian fold. Wilentz focuses upon the development of a working class in a metropolitan setting and his concern for party politics and voting behavior is minimal. He would view politics in a broader scope. In the process he calls into question

[88] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

[89] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967); J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975).

not only Schlesinger but also those critics who defined the problems as Schlesinger did. As the working class defines itself, it becomes political.

Ronald P. Formisano's *The Transformation of Political Culture* does many of the same things in often a far more audacious way. Wilentz had vaguely accused Formisano of not caring about class in his first book. Here Formisano ties together social and economic change by drawing upon the best of a European tradition of political sociology. Following Edward Shils, he adopts the concepts of center and periphery to describe the dynamic relations between the cluster of social positions and attitudes that distinguished partisan allegiance at various times. Formisano's focus is on party development and its relation to social change. The latter half of the book is essentially a study in how the mainstream co-opts populist movements. As one would suspect from his earlier work, Formisano depicts the complex ways in which religion, community, and class generated belief systems. He draws, in uncommon detail, the shift from a deferential society to a democratic one. However, after pages of "dense description," he lingers over the real question: How democratic was the new political scheme of the mid-nineteenth century? Although a critic of Progressive history's simplicities, he ends with a Progressive lament:

> One might begin [the search for the nature of American democracy] at least as early as the post-ocean covenant of community of intent composed aboard the *Arabella*: how can a people be as a "city upon a hill," a beacon light of example, unless it guides itself not by the standard of other nations, congratulates itself not on failures and imperfections of distant civilizations, and justifies itself not by the oppression brought by whatever despotisms happen to exist elsewhere, but faithfully adheres to ideals it has saved and carried from generation to generation, especially at those self defining moments of crisis where a Winthrop, a Jefferson, or a Lincoln, or men and women whose names are not known to us, uttered a people's best and most deeply cherished hopes?[90]

Both Wilentz and Formisano have written intensely personal books trying to speak to our time; in that way, they resemble both Schlesinger

[90] Formisano, *The Transformation*, 343.

and Beard. Robert Wiebe has contributed, in his singular way, a synthesis of early American history similar to what he had done in *The Search for Order*.[91] *The Opening of American Society* combines all those qualities and weaknesses of his earlier work.[92] Wilentz focuses on New York City, Formisano on Massachusetts, but Wiebe sweeps across the landscape of America from the Revolution to the Civil War. Some of his arguments resemble both Wilentz and Formisano. "The Revolutionary Republic" evolved into a "Democratic Society." Wiebe also departs from his younger colleagues in his emphasis on the importance of the "Jacksonian Revolution." He sees Jackson's presidency as the watershed between two eras. Wilentz and Formisano mention the Old Hero in passing. At the same time, Wiebe rejects a clear class distinction between the parties. He pictures a society rife with dichotomies that seem not to overlap. It was a two-class society of landholders and landless. Politics was divided between the voters and the office-holding elites. The latter manipulated the former by playing on social and ethnic prejudices and ran the government in response to the economic interests they served.

Each of these excellent books highlights the achievement of Lee Benson. The authors are hardly camp followers, but they show the importance of many of the themes in *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy* totally ignored by its critics who have almost universally focused upon the two startling chapters on the political responses of ethnocultural and religious groups. They should have considered Benson's tongue-in-cheek subtitle, *Some Aspects of the Transformation of American Society from the Aristocratic Liberal Republic of the Late Eighteenth-Century to the Populistic Egalitarian Democracy of the Mid-Nineteenth Century, with Special Reference to New York State*. Twenty-five years ago, he laid out the scaffolding of these three recent studies. One finds Wilentz's workingmen and Formisano's populists within these pages. Although Benson was unwilling to give Jackson credit for anything, he saw the crucial shift coming at the same time as Wiebe. He ascribed it, however, to the transformation of market

[91] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, 1967).

[92] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (New York, 1984).

relationships that George Rogers Taylor had termed "The Transportation Revolution."[93]

Benson forced historians to see party development as a process in which activists forged institutions to meet the adversity of a changing human condition. Schlesinger, Jr., had acknowledged this, but he believed in an ethnocentric way that parties were as American as violence and apple pie.[94] He ignored the anti-party tradition and perpetuated the false impression that no realistic alternative to the Jacksonians existed. Perhaps because of his own radical opposition to liberal pieties Benson took the Whigs seriously. Daniel Walker Howe has produced an interesting study of what has been called the "Whig Persuasion."[95] He also took the Whigs seriously. They had closely competed with the Democrats during these years and had the bad luck of two presidents dying in office. Given the voter turnout and the heterogeneity of their support, they had the right to call themselves the "Democratic Whigs." Howe argued that they were conservative on cultural and moral issues but that their economic policy envisioned the realities of nineteenth-century American economic development. His is a subtle analysis of groups and individuals scattered across the nation and clearly informed by the "Republican Synthesis." But it is a gloss on Benson's insights. Rumor has it that Richard Hofstadter had to tell Benson how iconoclastic he was. If the post World War II generation hastily snapped back at Schlesinger, the post Vietnam generation is discovering Benson. Benson asked not only who voted for whom, but how the system worked. That is, after all, what we want to know.

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[93] George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815-1860* (New York, 1951).

[94] Arthur M. Schlesinger repeats this position in his essay "Ideas and Economic Development," in Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., and Morton White, eds., *Paths of American Thought* (Boston, 1963) and the introduction to *History of U. S. Political Parties* (New York, 1973).

[95] Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago, 1979). See also: Glyndon G. Van Deusen, "Some Aspects of Whig Thought and Theory in the Jacksonian Period," *American Historical Review* 63 (January, 1958): 305-22; Elliot R. Barkan, "The Emergence of a Whig Persuasion: Conservatism, Democratism, and the New York State Whigs," *New York History* 52 (October, 1971): 367-95; and Daniel Walker Howe, "European Sources of Political Ideas in Jeffersonian America," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December, 1982): 28-44.