WHEN Andrew Jackson swept western Pennsylvania in the presidential election of 1824, analysts were left with a problem. How to explain the affection of the electorate for a man whose political views were all but unknown?

In that year one dour western Pennsylvanian observed that none of Jackson’s many supporters knew anything of his views. Jackson’s stand on one major issue was a “quibble,” he complained; his position on another such that “it would take a Philadelphia lawyer to find it.”

No one in the Jackson camp arose to refute this contention; the point was virtually conceded. But on election day, Jackson took 78 per cent of the western Pennsylvania vote in a four man race. Why?

Most explanations have focused on the strength of General Jackson’s military reputation—and on the vast quantities of publicity given Jackson the military hero by the press. Other factors, such as Jackson’s position as an anti-caucus candidate at a time when the congressional nominating caucus had become widely unpopular, have been emphasized to varying degrees by different analysts, but most have returned their attention to the fact of Jackson’s military reputation.

Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, saw the source of Jackson’s political strength as “solely . . . the recollection of a victory which he gained . . . [in 1815] under the walls of New Orleans.”

But common sense tells us that a military reputation is not by itself the same thing as political popularity. The reputation may give the bearer a major advantage over less well known opponents, but it still must be converted into strength at the polls.

This is a conversion that some military heroes have achieved while others have not. Dwight Eisenhower in our own time, for instance, was amazingly successful at it—but John J. Pershing never emerged as a serious presidential candidate, despite a reputation for military heroism.

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1 Washington, Pa., Reporter, June 21, 1824.
2 de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 1, 299.
which, in its purely military aspects, probably equalled Eisenhower's. Douglas MacArthur, to pick another example, emerged from World War II no less a hero than Eisenhower, but, unlike him, he was never to have much real popular political strength.

Why does one old soldier become successful in politics while another does not? More specifically, why was Andrew Jackson so successful as a presidential candidate in western Pennsylvania?

Clearly, it would seem, the answer must have more to do with the quality of a man's military reputation than with its mere dimensions. To understand the western Pennsylvanian's affection for Jackson, we must first understand what sort of hero he thought Jackson to be. Secondly, we must understand some of the personal concerns of this voter—and how he related his idea of Jackson's character to these concerns.

Washington County, where most of the research for this article was done, was in 1824 the largest county in western Pennsylvania. But it was still predominantly rural. Of its 39,000 inhabitants, only 1,687 lived in Washington, the county seat. The county was also distinguished by the presence of the National Road, which passed through the town of Washington on its way from Cumberland, Maryland, to Wheeling, in what is now West Virginia.

While Washington County may not necessarily have been a "typical" western county, it shared an enthusiasm for Jackson with the rest of the region. In 1824 Jackson took 65 per cent of the Washington County vote—and while this was his lowest percentage in any western county, the figure is still substantial. Jackson received more than four times the number of votes given the runner-up, Henry Clay.

What was on the mind of the Washington County voter in the decade or so preceding Jackson's victory in 1824? While it is, of course, difficult to say exactly, it is clear that residents of the county were far from satisfied with the existing political and economic situations. To paraphrase James A. Kehl, western Pennsylvania at this time was an area of ill feeling in the era of good feeling.4

During the War of 1812 considerable manufacturing had grown up in western Pennsylvania under the protection of wartime tariffs and embargoes. But in the peace that followed it became subject to damaging competition from abroad, especially Britain, where it was

3 Bureau of Census, 1820 Census.
felt that goods could be profitably sold at a loss in America, in order to drive out American products which might otherwise come to dominate this market.5

The peace, complained the Pittsburgh Gazette, had “affected our Western establishments with a deadly Palsy,” while capital was rushing from the area “in floods.”6 Manufactures in Pittsburgh fell off from $2,617,833 in 1815 to a meager $832,000 in 1819, and Washington, Pennsylvania, which according to Morris Birkbeck was a “pretty thriving town” of 2,500 inhabitants in 1817, was reduced to 1,687 by 1820, as the depression forced people back to the farms.7

Reaction to the post-war hard times took a number of forms in western Pennsylvania. People determined to “buy American” and sometimes to buy as little as possible from any source, in view of the general scarcity of sound money.8

The banking system in particular came in for heavy criticism during this period. According to the report of a state legislative committee in 1820, the banks were seen as “a curse to the people and perfect beasts of prey . . . At no time since the revolution has greater distress been felt than at the present moment. We consider the banking system . . . the principal cause.”9

If people thought the banks largely responsible for the hard times, they could see plenty of evidence to support this view. Banks in western Pennsylvania at this time could be divided into two categories. The Pittsburgh branch of the Second Bank of the United States—whose main office was in Philadelphia—comprised the first. The second group included the scores of local establishments which did the rest of the area’s banking. With neither the Pittsburgh branch bank nor with the local banks was there general satisfaction.

The local banks were chartered either by the state, or—in a few cases—by no one at all. Especially in hard times their soundness was less than complete. On one occasion the paper money issued by such a bank fell into such general disrepute that the bank’s president himself allegedly refused to accept it at his own general store.10

Simple suspension of specie payments by these local banks was a far more common experience. And the result was that the paper

5 Hansard, Parliamentary Debates from the Year 1803 to the Present (1816), XXXIII, 1099.
6 Pittsburgh Gazette, September 11, 1818.
7 Morris Birkbeck, Notes on a Journey in America, 54, 45; also 1820 Census.
8 See the Reporter, March 18, 1822.
9 Washington, Pa., Examiner, February 21, 1820.
10 Reporter, August 2, 1819.
they issued would steadily decline in value after its first appearance. Newspapers regularly published the latest corrected tables showing the current value of various local banknotes. Without these tables it is doubtful that the average citizen could have kept track of the many varieties of paper in use in the area.

The Bank of Washington, Pennsylvania, appears to have been fairly sound in comparison with most other local banks in western Pennsylvania, but even in its case, public mistrust of the institution was such that William Sample, editor of the Washington *Reporter*, felt able to embarrass his political opponents by pointing out their ties with the bank. "Will you be ruled by *bank men*?" he asked his readers in 1819, claiming that in several counties the voters had already decided not to vote for anyone "in any way interested in banks nor for any other who will not pledge himself to endeavour thus to have the laws amended that the banks will become a blessing instead of a curse to the people." 11

Along with hard times and soft money came what was seen as an "almost universal spirit of speculation." As farmers or businessmen failed, it was thought that the "sordid and capricious are acquiring the sacrificed property of the liberal and industrious." So much property was exposed to sale under execution that "buyers cannot be had . . . . Overtrading and the facility of getting credit [from the local banks] have chiefly produced these effects." 12

But if western Pennsylvania lamented the consequences of easy credit and inflated currency, it was none too happy with the steps taken by the Second Bank of the United States to correct these conditions. Manufacturers already hard pressed by the foreign competition permitted by low peacetime tariffs complained bitterly of the restrictions the Second Bank imposed on credit. The Pittsburgh *Gazette* of 11 September 1818 remarked that the Pittsburgh branch of this bank now stood disclosed "in all the deformity . . . hitherto confined to country banks. This panacea which was confidently calculated to expel . . . the rag medium which the suspension of specie payments [by the local banks] had engendered, resigns its claims to superiority and submits to be ranked with the unsuccessful nostrums of political empiricks."

In addition to putting the squeeze on business, it was thought that the Second Bank of the United States was deliberately making

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11 *Reporter*, September 19, 1819.
12 *Examiner*, February 21, 1820.
things hard for the local banks with which it competed. One of the many articles on the Bank reprinted in the Washington, Pennsylvania, *Reporter*, from *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore) made just this point. What specie the branches of the Second Bank had, the article asserted, was not gotten from the "mother bank" in Philadelphia, but "has chiefly been obtained by pressing the local banks . . . in a very severe and unprincipled manner." ¹³

This charge, however, was simply a part of a larger complaint, namely that the policies of the branches of the Second Bank were far better attuned to the interests of the main bank in Philadelphia than to any local interests. It was thought, too, that the branch banks were protecting their own position during hard times at the expense of both local bankers and local businessmen.

Thus, when the Secretary of the Treasury decided in 1819 to transfer some government accounts from an Ohio branch bank to local banks in the area, the *Western Herald* (Steubenville, Ohio) greeted the decision as good news. One of the local banks to be benefited, it pointed out, "has identified itself with the best interests of the country by the aid it has given our manufacturing establishments . . . . Through it the country is about to receive the most important relief." ¹⁴

Clearly, the implication was that the Second Bank of the United States did not care for these "best interests."

Western Pennsylvania at this time, then, was caught between two evils—a local banking system which flooded the area with "rag currency," or worthless paper, and the Second Bank, which offered a cure which looked worse than the original disease. In refusing to recognize the paper of the less stable local banks, it was charged, the branches of the Second Bank were making life intolerable for those who had no choice but to deal in bad paper—in view of the scarcity of specie. ¹⁵

It has been suggested that the silence of Jackson's Pennsylvania supporters on the issue of the Second Bank in 1824 was due to the fact that while Jackson's violent antipathy toward the Bank already existed, Pennsylvania's position was also strong—in the Bank's favor. ¹⁶

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¹³ *Reporter*, August 24, 1818.
¹⁴ *Reporter*, April 12, 1819.
¹⁵ *Examiner*, July 20, 1818.
The Jackson party was indeed silent on the Second Bank of the United States; not once during the 1824 campaign were Jackson's views on this subject reported in either of Washington, Pennsylvania's, two newspapers. But it is a mistake to think that strong pro-Bank sentiment existed in western Pennsylvania. The Second Bank was no better regarded than the local banks; it was thought to have faults different from theirs—but these were thought to be no less serious.

In 1819, prompted by these considerations, and by Chief Justice John Marshall's recent decision that states could not tax the branch banks, the Pennsylvania legislature even urged the state's congressmen to press for a law which would prevent Congress from incorporating "any Bank or other monied institution outside the District of Columbia." 17

Thus, by 1824, the Bank of the United States was indeed an issue in Pennsylvania, although this issue was not yet seen in the terms in which Andrew Jackson was to define it from the White House.

Rather it was simply part of a larger issue, an aspect of dissatisfaction with existing institutions. And it is against the background of this larger issue, as we shall see later on, that western Pennsylvania's overwhelming preference for Jackson in 1824 must be viewed.

The western Pennsylvanian during this period seems to have been as little satisfied with his political institutions as he was with his banking system. These political institutions were an exceedingly chaotic lot. Indeed one modern writer has gone so far as to term the politics of this area and time "a game without rules." 18

By the end of the War of 1812, in 1815, there was only one effective party in western Pennsylvania, the Republican. Federalism was defunct. If Federalists still existed, as many were sure they did, they did not go under that name. Along with everyone else they were "Republicans."

But if there was only one functioning political party, that party had a number of separate factions. And in Washington County, for example, both of the two leading factions laid claim to the same label. Each was supposedly the one true Democratic Republican party of Washington County—and each tried furiously to deny the other's right to make that statement.

17 Examiner, April 12, 1819.
Even within the factions confusion was endemic. Nominations for local office were made by committees of delegates, who were themselves elected at public meetings. The delegates would meet, make nominations, then turn over party business to a “committee of vigilance,” which would handle affairs until the time came for it to call the next public meeting for the election of delegates.

In practice, the operation of this system was far from satisfactory. “That imperfections have crept into the delegate system,” one committee of vigilance admitted in 1819, “you will find no man possessed with the degree of hardihood to deny.” The main trouble, this committee maintained, was that popular apathy was allowing the delegations to become overrun by those themselves ambitious for office.\(^\text{19}\)

The popular feeling was that the delegations were slipping further and further from popular control. The ease with which the office hunter could manipulate this system was alarming to many. A group of politically ambitious men could form a bastard committee of vigilance, which would advertise briefly in some obscure journal that a popular meeting for the election of delegates was to be held. This meeting would then be convened although the people know little or nothing of all this—two or three cronies in different townships hold these elections and return if possible one of themselves as a delegate. Our delegates meet—we make a great noise about republicanism—... then pompously announce that the delegates chosen by the democratic republicans of the various townships have formed a ticket to be run at the election—and woe be to the man who questions our authority. He cannot be a republican. He must be a most terrible federalist, or something worse.... Well, our candidates caucus again at the seat of government. They in their turn nominate a governor or president, which becomes equally binding on all the people to choose under pain of excommunication from the true political church.\(^\text{20}\)

But the opportunities the delegate system gave to sordid ambition were not its worst fault. The principal defect of the system was that it rested on presumed party unity at a time when this unity did not exist. Though factionalism was prominent in western Pennsylvania politics in the years following the end of the War of 1812, the political institutions made no provision for it.

Delegates were supposed to be elected directly by the people—but by \textit{which} people? Who was to decide whether an election of delegates reflected the true popular will? If there were two or more popular elections of delegates where the theory of the system

\(^{19}\) \textit{Reporter}, July 26, 1819.
assumed one and only one—and there usually were—how was the resulting confusion to be resolved? Who was to judge in such cases?

Quite a number of people felt qualified to pass this judgment. In Washington County, for instance, the editor of neither newspaper was at all reticent about calling the other and his supporters "secret federalists," determined to subvert the one true party. The Examiner and the Reporter regularly took turns at calling each other the tools of "Federal lawyers" (a remarkably frequent phrase) and at "revealing" the news that someone connected with the other paper was trying to become the boss of county politics, without regard for the wishes of "the people."

Generally speaking, the split between the two major factions in Washington County ran along rural-urban lines. The Reporter, the older of the two newspapers by nine years, appears to have reflected more the views of the county's rural majority. The Examiner, founded in 1817, was widely believed to be the spokesman for the Bairds, the Achesons and their friends. These two families played a prominent role in the economic and commercial life of Washington, Pennsylvania. Thomas Baird was the chairman of the board of directors of the Bank of Washington and a director of the Washington Steam Mill. David Acheson was president of the Bank of Washington. George Baird, a merchant, had been appointed sheriff in 1811 and was elected to fill a vacancy in the state assembly in 1816. Thomas Acheson was a director of the steam mill. Other members of the two families—between which there had been some intermarriage—included a state deputy attorney-general and a clerk to the county commissioners.21

"Eminent men and men of talents," scoffed the Reporter in a mock "prospectus" on the eve of its rival's birth, "are always found in clusters and fortunately all these is [sic] combined in our family . . . . Any poor man can have our paper [free] the year round provided he votes our ticket at the election." 22

But even if the Examiner was not under the thumb of the Baird-Acheson combine, it clearly espoused the interests of the urban commercial interests. In both 1820 and 1823—especially in 1823—the candidate the paper backed for governor ran far less well in rural western Pennsylvania than he did in the cities. The editorial policies on local issues also tended to reflect this urban, commercial viewpoint. The Examiner may not have been "Federalist"

21 Kehl, op. cit., 163.
22 Reporter, March 31, 1817.
as the *Reporter* regularly charged, but it was remarkably like what would later be called "Whig."

In the decade 1815-25, however, no Whig label existed. In some western counties the urban interests banded together under the "Independent Republican" banner,²³ but in Washington County only the Democratic Republican label was used. One party name was made to cover a multitude of interests. Party labels which had been valid at the start of the century were now becoming irrelevant, as times changed, and change brought new interests into existence. But the old labels were still the only ones available, and the result was the complete absence of any language which could accurately describe the new realities of political differences.

Men were conscious, of course, that they differed politically among themselves, but each was certain that his own faction was the one true heir to the old Republican tradition. Other factions, it was to be supposed, were made up of heretics whose sole interest was in laying dishonest claim to an old and appealing party label. A respectable degree of candor, it was perhaps thought, would compel them to reveal themselves as "most terrible federalists, or something worse."

The issues upon which political differences were based had, in short, changed—but the language of politics had not. And so it must have seemed to many—regardless of their persuasion—that their opponents were taking advantage of the well known fact that everyone knew what some things meant—including party labels—but that no one could precisely define them.

The result was that men saw in their political opponents not so much honest disagreement as a galling bad faith.

Bad faith was something the western Pennsylvanian thought he saw a lot of. Politics seemed increasingly dominated by slippery heretics and greedy office hunters; and both groups seemed to be taking advantage of a political system which would have operated perfectly well in the hands of the honest, unselfish and virtuous.

The floundering local banks and that insensitive monolith, the Second B.U.S., also seemed to be in the hands of the iniquitous. Banks, it was claimed, had become "like the scorpions among the people of Israel."²⁴ And the implication here is plainly that God's chosen (American) people were being victimized by the greedy and unprincipled.

²³ See Kehl, *op. cit.*, 160-168.
²⁴ *Examiner*, February 21, 1820.
If the western Pennsylvanian thought he saw bad faith and chicanery in the politician and the banker, he was certain he saw it in the lawyer. The Reporter, with the heavy-handed humor characteristic of many of its "anecdotes," told in 1817 of the "strange advice of the lawyer making his will." It seems the man determined to cut off any heir who took up "the priesthood, prostitution, or the legal profession," for these three, he averred, had "brought more trouble to the world than any other." 25

Antipathy toward lawyers in western Pennsylvania probably stemmed from the region's earliest days, when extensive litigation over property had taken place, as those who had bought land in the area before coming west arrived to find it already settled by squatters. The image of the lawyer, then, became in part that of a man who through slick argument and easy manipulation of baffling precedent could deprive someone of land that seemed to him clearly his. And now, during the depression following the War of 1812, this image was doubtless being reinforced, as so many farmers found themselves destitute, their land taken by creditors and "struck off to speculators." 26

Whatever the reason, by 1816 the Reporter found the sentiment against lawyers sufficiently strong to attempt to put it to political use. Thomas Baird in that year became the first of a long series of candidates whose legal backgrounds the Reporter pointed to with scorn as it urged their defeat. On 18 September 1820 that paper observed that "Last winter's debating in congress will satisfy any man, lawyers excepted, that there are too many lawyers already in congress—there are 122. Too much money has already been spent in speechifying. Lawyers are a troublesome set at best."

Even the Examiner, that advocate of urban, commercial interests, reflected the anti-lawyerism of a region populated so largely by relatively unlettered men who made their living through hard, plain and clearly productive work.

The substance of this rather exasperated attitude seems to be summed up in the initial paragraph of a letter printed in the Examiner in 1819: 27

As I have not the advantage of legal acquirements [wrote the correspondent] having never read the twenty thousand folio volumes of common law; nor am I versed in the technical jargon of the profession whereby I might take

25 Reporter, October 27, 1817.
26 See Examiner, February 21, 1820.
27 Examiner, December 6, 1819.
advantage of a quibble to favor my views; I hope therefore to be excused from quoting from the elaborate opinions of My Lord &c, on the subject of corporations some thousand years ago. This I will leave for my learned friend . . . .

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The western Pennsylvanian's conviction that "the people" were being victimized by disingenuous lawyers, speculators, bankers and assorted other opportunists was heavily reinforced by other of his beliefs.

His view of the "common man," for instance, was optimistic in the extreme. Pervading the articles in the press of this period was an ebullient sense that now that the ordinary man had been freed from the artificial restrictions of European despotism and aristocracy, his potential was unlimited. The American farmer might lack something in refinement and sophistication, opined one article in the Reporter, but he has other charms under his roof besides those of attending his hospitality. He can converse with you on almost any subject. The Bible alone does not form his library. He comes in from the heat of the sun, stripped to his shirt, takes down a volume of his Encyclopedia or some book of science, travels, history, law, politics or poetry. When he has rested himself he returns to his fields or yard. There is no law of his country, no regulations, [sic] which he does not understand, no right that he does not know how to go to work to defend, no public question in which he does not feel a lively interest, and as to which he is not able to express his opinion . . . .

Not only was the common citizen supposedly well able to manage his personal concerns—but he could presumably handle those of the whole nation as well if he had to. Not all the talent and wisdom of the country was to be found among the high officials in Washington, D. C., said the Examiner in 1824. "No, their equals in talent and superiors in service are to be found among the people, who if elevated to the same station would be equally distinguished." 29

So if the hard fact of the matter was that "at no time since the revolution has greater distress been felt than at the present moment" 30—if the western part of Pennsylvania was in the throes of a serious depression in the decade after 1815—if the paper a farmer received for his produce turned worthless in his hands—if banks could not supply business the credit it needed without inflating their currency—how were "the people" to be blamed?

 Obviously, though, the fault had to be fixed somewhere, and

28 Reporter, April 8, 1816.
29 Examiner, January 24, 1824.
30 Examiner, February 21, 1820.
the unsatisfactory state of existing political and economic institutions made it easy to find scapegoats. The slick lawyer, the "money interests," the speculator, the self-serving politician—all came to be thought of as desecrators of an otherwise innocent and potentially happy land. They were the snakes in the American Garden of Eden.

This is not to say that there was any general agreement on who, specifically, was to blame for the existence of problems where none had been expected. Doubtless very few lawyers felt themselves "slick," and very few bankers thought themselves anything but public spirited. The blame, then, came to rest on a vaguely defined group of malefactors in some sense not of "the people."

"They," the corrupt and disingenuous, the sophists and the opportunists, were to blame for western Pennsylvania's ills. But no one really agreed on who "they" were. There were probably as many different opinions on this score as there were men in the area. There was no general agreement on just where the dividing line between good and evil lay. But good and evil, nonetheless, were very real terms to the western Pennsylvanian reflecting on the source of his troubles. Things were seen in terms of black and white, although there was some disagreement as to what was which shade. In bad times who has the patience to look for shades of grey?

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But how does Jackson's sweep of western Pennsylvania in 1824 fit into this picture? To find out we must look first at what was known of Jackson in this region in the decade or so preceding this political victory, the decade during which the conditions described above were developing.

Conventional practice has been to focus attention on Jackson's great victory at New Orleans in 1815. Certainly even the least well informed voter knew something of this, and, without doubt, it was this battle which launched Jackson's career as a truly national public figure. But if the newspapers of the decade following the battle are examined, one finds that Jackson was known in western Pennsylvania for many things beside the New Orleans victory itself.

Jackson's prominence in the newspapers receded little, if at all, after the actual battle stories had all been written. Within ten weeks after the last of its accounts of the military action, the Reporter, at the time Washington County's only newspaper, began a long series
on General Jackson. The articles were occasioned by his being hailed into a New Orleans court.\textsuperscript{11}

The charge against Jackson was that he had resisted execution of a writ of \textit{habeas corpus} issued for release of a man imprisoned under the martial law Jackson had declared while the city was under siege. Jackson, the \textit{Reporter}'s correspondent related, was denied the right to introduce evidence pertaining to military necessity, and was thus left without a legal leg to stand on. He was found guilty and fined $1,000. The "climax of ingratitude," the correspondent termed the verdict, alleging that the judge had himself fled the city during the battle.

In another issue, the \textit{Reporter} devoted space to a long discussion of Jackson's written statement to the court at this trial. The newspaper commended him for "vigor and precision of mind" and credited him with "first rate talents and undaunted courage."

"Energy of the sword," the article concluded, "gives energy to the pen . . . . We do not know which is more to admire."\textsuperscript{12}

The coverage given Jackson at this trial is noteworthy because it is typical of the stories written about Jackson in the years between the battle of New Orleans and the 1824 election. The pattern of these stories is consistently the same.

The element of conflict in the typical Jackson story of this period is usually between Jackson on one side and pussyfooting, petty civil authority on the other. In 1818, for example, Jackson was the commander of a force in Georgia charged with the prosecution of a campaign against the Seminoles, who had been terrorizing frontier settlements along the state's southern border.

Due to the delicate position of the American government with regard to Spain, Jackson was under strict orders to keep clear of the Spanish territories of East and West Florida. Nonetheless, acting on his own authority, he led troops across the border to St. Mark and Pensacola, which he captured and held.

In the western Pennsylvania press, the action was justified on the ground of necessity. This was an important element in the typical Jackson news story. Jackson was consistently pictured as a man unafraid to take what steps he was forced to take, to defend the United States—and the American people—against its unholy enemies.

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Reporter}, May 15, 1815, and subsequent issues.
\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Reporter}, June 5, 1815.
If Jackson had failed to cross the border into Florida, the argument ran, the effect could have been only to "invite massacres." 

If Jackson had adhered to the letter of the civil law at New Orleans, "he would not have survived his calumniators." 

In the spring of 1819 a piece appeared in both Washington County newspapers, which carried this sort of argument so far that it is a little hard to believe that the writer was actually serious, although he almost certainly was.

Sir [the writer quotes Jackson] when I proclaimed martial law at New Orleans . . . . I knew it was the only measure that would save the country, and that effected I cared not what became of myself. If my country should have chosen to sacrifice me, for making use of the only means in my power to protect and defend her, I was prepared . . . . My conscience was at rest.

The writer added to this that "I know with me you blush for the common honor of our country to see such nobleness of purpose . . . . He will be borne triumphant in the hearts of his fellow citizens."

The reputation that Jackson was acquiring through the press, then, was that of a man of rigid personal integrity whose acts were guided not by the letter of the written law, but by the spirit of some higher code. It was a reputation for cutting through the mazes of due process in fearsome fashion to deny error its false privileges, to punish those who obviously deserved punishment, and to protect those of clear and certain virtue.

It was a reputation that by 1824 should have been well established in western Pennsylvania. It was proclaimed in newspaper accounts of the congressional investigation in 1819 of Jackson's Florida campaign. It was enhanced by reports that Jackson would have executed the Hartford Convention men as traitors. And it was further augmented by the memory of Jackson's executing two British subjects for their part in aiding the Seminoles, despite the fact that one had been sentenced by the court not to death, but to "fifty-nine lashes on the bare back and to be confined at hard labor with ball and chain for twelve calendar months." 

Jackson, moreover, was acquiring this reputation at a time when many in western Pennsylvania must have longed to cut through the

33 Examiner, August 10, 1818.
34 Examiner, January 24, 1824.
35 Reporter, March 8, 1819; Examiner, March 29, 1819.
36 Reporter, July 19, 1824.
37 Examiner, February 15, 1819. Also Augustus C. Buell, History of Andrew Jackson, II, 128.
tangle of legal formalities which seemed to offer protection to the "scorpion" banks, to the "troublesome" lawyers, to the "sordid and capricious . . . [who were] acquiring the sacrificed property of the liberal and industrious."  

Even more than this, it was easy for the western Pennsylvanian to place his faith in Jackson's personal sense of justice. Those whom Jackson stepped beyond the law to punish seemed indeed to be deserving of their fate. The Pittsburgh Mercury, on 10 February 1824, endorsed him because to "defend you he attacked the perfidious Spaniard in his fort; he fought the haughty Briton in the open field."  

Note the adjectives; obviously Jackson was a man who could tell who were the "perfidious" and who the "haughty"—then put them down without regard for time-wasting formalities.

It seems never to have occurred to the average voter that he himself might have had something in common with the demons Jackson regularly broke the rules to exorcise. And why should it have? Everyone knew who the corrupt and disingenuous were—or at least knew without question that he was not among them. Shortly before the 1824 election the Washington Examiner printed the address of a New Orleans pro-Jackson meeting. "Plain Farmer!" it exhorted,

he is one of you. Industrious mechanics! Enterprising, high minded merchants! He encourages industry. Noble seamen! You are his favorites. And who fears his election? Not the brave, not the honest. He makes no distinction among men but that of virtue . . . . No! It is the enemies of his country, the faithless public servant, those who prey on the vitals of the people. Let these and these alone shake like Belshazzar of old, for their time is come.  

Appeals of this sort, it would seem, come very close to capturing the essential appeal of Jackson's candidacy in an area desperately impatient to rid itself of a depression—and largely convinced that its troubles were caused by the actions of exploiters, opportunists and the like. Jackson, it must have been fervently hoped, would use his unerring sense of good and evil to root out and crush without mercy the few evil men who existed at a time when the newly emancipated common citizen—according to the articles of popular faith—was the repository of all virtue, civic and personal.

Richard Hofstadter, in his book, The American Political Tradition, remarks that "one certain accomplishment of Jackson's war
on the [Second Bank of the United States] was to discharge the agressions of citizens who felt injured by economic privilege."  

Jackson's record prior to 1824, it would appear, served a somewhat analogous function—and this would seem to be a major factor in his political success in western Pennsylvania. Jackson was the natural choice of any voter who ever yearned to resolve an incomprehensible situation with a straightforward punch in the mouth, never mind whose. He was the natural choice of all the minor Captain Ahab's that western Pennsylvania held—the men who attributed all the evil they saw to some single cause but for which the world could return to a state of Lockeian harmony under God's natural law.

There was an anxiety in western Pennsylvania to restore, in place of the complicated, often baffling new world produced by the changes of the early 19th century, a world in which the common sense and simple logic of a bygone age could again reign supreme, unhampered by the sophistry, trickery and distortions of the ungodly.

Andrew Jackson, it was thought, was the man to do it. A vote for Jackson, therefore, was a vote for good and a vote against evil. Hence the landslide in 1824.

41 Hofstadter, The American Political Tradition, 59.