



American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House

Jon Meacham

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Andrew Jackson, his intimate circle of friends, and his tumultuous times are at the heart of this remarkable book about the man who rose from nothing to create the modern presidency. Beloved and hated, venerated and reviled, Andrew Jackson was an orphan who fought his way to the pinnacle of power, bending the nation to his will in the cause of democracy. Jackson's election in 1828 ushered in a new and lasting era in which the people, not distant elites, were the guiding force in American politics. Democracy made its stand in the Jackson years, and he gave voice to the hopes and the fears of a restless, changing nation facing challenging times at home and threats abroad. To tell the saga of Jackson's presidency, acclaimed author Jon Meacham goes inside the Jackson White House. Drawing on newly discovered family letters and papers, he details the human drama—the family, the women, and the inner circle of advisers—that shaped Jackson's private world through years of storm and victory.

One of our most significant yet dimly recalled presidents, Jackson was a battle-hardened warrior, the founder of the Democratic Party, and the architect of the presidency as we know it. His story is one of violence, sex, courage, and tragedy. With his powerful persona, his evident bravery, and his mystical connection to the people, Jackson moved the White House from the periphery of government to the center of national action, articulating a vision of change that challenged entrenched interests to heed the popular will—or face his formidable wrath. The greatest of the presidents who have followed Jackson in the White House—from Lincoln to Theodore Roosevelt to FDR to Truman—have found inspiration in his example, and virtue in his vision.

Jackson was the most contradictory of men. The architect of the removal of Indians from their native lands, he was warmly sentimental and risked everything to give more power to ordinary citizens. He was, in short, a lot like his country: alternately kind and vicious, brilliant and blind; and a man who fought a lifelong war to keep the republic safe—no matter what it took.

Jon Meacham in *American Lion* has delivered the definitive human portrait of a pivotal president who forever changed the American presidency—and America itself.

Exclusive Amazon.com Q&A with Jon Meacham and H.W. Brands

On the eve of the historic 2008 presidential election, we were fortunate to chat with historians Jon Meacham and H.W. Brands (author of *Traitor to His Class: The Privileged Life and Radical Presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt*) on the similarities of their presidential subjects and how the legacies of FDR and Jackson continue to shape the political world we see today.

Amazon.com: One of Andrew Jackson's childhood friends once remarked that when they wrestled, "I could throw him three times out of four, but he never stayed thrown." How emblematic is this of Jackson's career?

Meacham: Utterly emblematic. Jackson was resilient, tough, and wily, rising from nothing to become the dominant political figure of the age. He was crushed by his loss in 1824, when, despite carrying the popular vote, he was defeated in the House of Representatives. But, tellingly, he began his campaign for 1828 almost immediately, on the way home to Tennessee. And he won the next time.

Amazon.com: What would Jackson think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt?

Meacham: I think they would have gotten along famously. It is difficult to imagine men from more starkly different backgrounds—to take just one example, Jackson lost his mother early, and FDR was long shaped by his mother—but they both viewed the presidency the same way: they both believed they should be in it, wielding power on behalf of the masses against entrenched interests.

Amazon.com: How important was Jackson's legacy to FDR's Presidency?

Brands: Jackson was FDR's favorite president, and Jackson's presidency was the one Roosevelt initially modeled his own after. FDR saw Jackson as the champion of the ordinary people of America; he saw himself the same way. He compared Jackson's battle with the Bank of the United States to his own battle with entrenched economic interests. And just as Jackson had reveled in the enmity of the rich, so did Roosevelt.

Amazon.com: Although both were regarded as champions of the people, their backgrounds were drastically different. FDR hailed from a wealthy and politically-connected family, while Jackson was an orphaned son of immigrants. How did each manage to endear themselves to the voters of their day?

Meacham: Jackson was in many ways the first great popular candidate. He had "Hickory Clubs," and there were torchlit parades and barbecues—lots and lots of barbecues. Jackson helped mastermind the means of campaigning that would become commonplace. He also intuitively understood the power of image, and kept a portrait painter, Ralph Earl, near to hand in the White House.

Brands: FDR combined noblesse oblige with felt concern for the plight of the poor. His polio had something to do with this—it introduced him to personal suffering, and it also introduced him, in Georgia, where he went for rehabilitation, to poor farmers unlike any he had spent time with before. He came to know them and to feel the problems they faced. He took people in trouble seriously and communicated that seriousness to them.

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