

In Class Preview of the Chapter:

14.1 Introduction

The presidential campaign of 1828 was one of the dirtiest in American history. The election pitted John Quincy Adams, the nation's sixth president, against Andrew Jackson, the popular hero of the Battle of New Orleans.

During the campaign, both sides hurled reckless accusations at each other, a practice called mudslinging. Adams was called a "Sabbath-breaker" for traveling on Sunday. He was falsely accused of being an alcoholic. He was accused of using "public money" to purchase "gambling furniture" for the White House. In reality, he had used his own money to purchase a billiard table. Strangely, his opponents missed the one truth that might have shocked most Americans of the day. The very formal and proper Adams had a habit of swimming naked in the Potomac River.

The president's supporters lashed back. They called Jackson a crude and ignorant man who was not fit to be president. They also raked up old scandals about his wife, Rachel. She was accused of marrying Jackson while she was still knowingly wed to her first husband (not true). One newspaper even charged Jackson's mother with immoral behavior (not true). Jackson was called "Old Hickory" by his troops because he was as tough as "the hardest wood in creation." But when he read these lies, he broke down and cried.

When the votes were counted, Jackson was clearly the people's choice. But he was not the choice of the rich and well-born people who were used to running the country—the planters, merchants, bankers, and lawyers. "Nobody knows what he will do," wrote Senator Daniel Webster gloomily. "My fear is stronger than my hope."

Jackson proved to be a controversial president. In this chapter, you will discover how he was viewed by several groups of Americans, including not only the rich and well-born, but also the common people, Native Americans, and supporters of states' rights.