

AP History Document Based Question

Jacksonian Democrats viewed themselves as the guardians of the United States Constitution, political democracy, individual liberty, and equality of economic opportunity.

Using the documents and your knowledge of U S History from 1820-1840, to what extent do you agree with the Jacksonians' view of themselves?

Document A

“There are, perhaps, few men who can for any great length of time enjoy office and power without being more or less under the influence of feelings unfavorable to the faithful discharge of their public duties. Their integrity may be proof against improper considerations immediately addressed to themselves, but they are apt to acquire a habit of looking with indifference upon the public interests, and of tolerating conduct from which an unpracticed man would revolt. . . . Office is considered as a species of property, and government rather as a means of promoting individual interests than as an instrument created solely for the service of the people. Corruption in some, and in others a perversion of correct feelings and principles, divert government from its legitimate ends and make it an engine for the support of the few at the expense of the many.

The duties of all public officers are, or at least admit of being made, so plain and simple that men of intelligence may readily qualify themselves for their performance. And I cannot but believe that more is lost by the long continuance of men in office than is generally to be gained by their experience. I submit, therefore, to your consideration whether the efficiency of the government would not be promoted, and official industry and integrity better secured, by a general extension of the law which limits appointments to four years.....In a country where offices are created solely for the benefit of the people, no one man has any more intrinsic right to official station than another.”

Andrew Jackson, 1829.

Document B

“To the House of Representatives: Gentlemen: I have maturely considered the bill proposing to authorize "a subscription of stock in the Maysville, Washington, Paris, and Lexington Turnpike Road Company," and now return the same to the House of Representatives, in which it originated, with my objections to its passage. . . . Under this view the question is to the manner in which the Federal Government can or ought to embark in the construction of roads and canals, and the extent to which it may impose burthens on the people for these purposesif it is expected that the people of this country, reckless of their constitutional obligations, will prefer their local interest to the principles of the Union, such expectations will in the end be disappointed; or if it be not so, then indeed has the world but little to hope from the example of free government. . . .expediency be made a rule of construction in interpreting the Constitution....This is the more necessary in order that they may be equitable among the several States, promote harmony between different sections of the Union and their representatives, preserve other parts of the Constitution from being undermined by the exercise of doubtful powers or the too great extension of those which are not so, and protect the whole subject against the deleterious influence of combinations to carry by concert measures which, considered by themselves, might meet but little countenance.”

Maysville Road Veto, May 27, 1830.

Document C

“So partial are the effects of the [tariff] system, that its burdens are exclusively on one side and its benefits on the other. It imposes on the agricultural interest of the South, including the Southwest, and that portion of the country particularly engaged in commerce and navigation, the burden not only of sustaining the system itself, but that also of the Government. In stating the case thus strongly, it is not the intention of the committee to exaggerate. If exaggeration were not unworthy of the gravity of the subject, the reality is such as to make it unnecessary....”

Southern Carolina Exposition, 1828

Document D

Whereas the Congress of the United States, by various acts, purporting to be acts laying duties and imposts on foreign imports, but, in reality, intended for the protection of domestic manufactures and the giving of bounties to classes and individuals engaged in particular employments at the expense and to the injury and oppression of other classes and individuals, and by wholly exempting from taxation certain foreign commodities, such as are not produced or manufactured in the United States, to afford a pretext for imposing higher and excessive duties on articles similar to those intended to be protected, hath exceeded its just powers under the Constitution, which confers on it no authority to afford such protection and hath violated the true meaning and intent of the Constitution, which provides for equality in imposing the burdens of taxation upon the several States and portions of the Confederacy: *And, whereas* the said Congress, exceeding its just power to impose taxes and collect revenue for the purpose of effecting and accomplishing the specific objects and purposes which the Constitution of the United States authorizes it to effect and accomplish, hath raised and collected unnecessary revenue for objects unauthorized by the Constitution.

We, therefore, the people of the State of South Carolina, in convention assembled, do declare and ordain ... [That these acts] ... are unauthorized by the Constitution of the United States and violate the true meaning and intent thereof, and are null, void, and no law, nor binding upon this State, its officers, or citizens; and all promises, contracts, and obligations, made or entered into, or to be made or entered into, with purpose to secure the duties imposed by the said acts, and all judicial proceedings which shall be hereafter had in affirmance thereof, are and shall be held utterly null and void.

South Carolina Ordinance of Nullification, 1832

Document E

“For what would you exchange your share in the advantages and honor of the Union? For the dream of a separate independence, a dream interrupted by bloody conflicts with your neighbors and a vile dependence on a foreign power. If your leaders could succeed in establishing a separation, what would be your situation? Are you united at home? Are you free from the apprehension of civil discord, with all its fearful consequences? But the dictates of a high duty oblige me solemnly to announce that you cannot succeed. The laws of the United States must be executed. I have no discretionary power on the subject; my duty is emphatically pronounced in the Constitution. Those who told you that you might peaceably prevent their execution deceived you; they could not have been deceived themselves. They know that a forcible opposition could alone prevent the execution of the laws, and they know that such opposition must be repelled. Their object is disunion.

But be not deceived by names. Disunion by armed force is treason. Are you really ready to incur its guilt?..... The consequence must be fearful for you, distressing to your fellow citizens here and to the friends of good government throughout the world.”

Andrew Jackson 1832

Document F

To the Senate:

“The bill “to modify and continue” the act entitled “An act to incorporate the subscribers to the Bank of the United States” was presented to me on the 4th July instant. Having considered it with that solemn regard to the principles of the Constitution which the day was calculated to inspire, and come to the conclusion that it ought not to become a law, I herewith return it to the Senate, in which it originated, with my objections.

A bank of the United States is in many respects convenient for the Government and useful to the people. Entertaining this opinion, and deeply impressed with the belief that some of the powers and privileges possessed by the existing bank are unauthorized by the Constitution, subversive of the rights of the States, and dangerous to the liberties of the people, I felt it my duty at an early period of my Administration to call the attention of Congress to the practicability of organizing an institution combining all its advantages and obviating these objections. I sincerely regret that in the act before me I can perceive none of those modifications of the bank charter which are necessary, in my opinion, to make it compatible with justice, with sound policy, or with the Constitution of our country.”

Jackson’s Bank Veto, 1832.

Document G

As a means of effecting this end, I suggest for your consideration the propriety of setting apart an ample district west of the Mississippi, and without [outside] the limits of any state or territory now formed, to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes as long as they shall occupy it, each tribe having a distinct control over the portion designated for its use. There they may be secured in the enjoyment of governments of their own choice, subject to no other control from the United States than such as may be necessary to preserve peace on the frontier and between the several tribes. . . . This emigration should be voluntary, for it would be as cruel as unjust to compel the aborigines to abandon the graves of their fathers and seek a home in a distant land.”

Andrew Jackson, 1829

Document H

"Sir, I deprecate and deplore this tone of thought and feeling. I deem far otherwise of the union of the states, and so did the framers of the constitution themselves. What they said I believe; fully and sincerely believe, that the union of the states is essential to the prosperity and safety of the states. I am a unionist, and in this sense, a national republican. I would strengthen the ties that hold us together. Far, indeed, in my wishes, very far distant be the day, when our associated and fraternal stripes shall be severed asunder, and when that happy constellation under which we have risen to so much renown, shall be broken up and be seen sinking star after star, into obscurity and night!....

Should our Union fall into pieces, which these doctrines may cause to happen, I fear to see "States dissevered, discordant, belligerent; ... a land rent with civil feuds, or drenched, ... in fraternal blood!" Let us not have "Liberty first and Union afterwards", but "Liberty and Union, now and for ever, one and inseparable!"

Daniel Webster January 26, 1830.

Document I

"In consequence of complaints which have been made of frauds speculations, and monopolies, in the purchase of the public lands, and the aid which is said to be given to effect these objects by excessive bank credits, and dangerous if not partial facilities, through bank drafts and bank deposits, and the general evil influence likely, to result to the public interests, and especially the safety of the great amount of money in the Treasury, and the sound condition of the currency of the country, from the further exchange of the national domain in this manner, and chiefly for bank credits and paper money, the President of the United States has given directions, and you are hereby instructed, after the 15th day of August next, to receive in payment of the public lands nothing except what is directed by the existing laws, viz.: gold and silver...."

Specie Circular of 1836.

Document J



Rats leave the falling house

Document K

