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**THE U. S. BANK AND THE TARIFF:
A JACKSONIAN DILEMMA
Dr. John E. Simpson**

A dramatic reformulation of America's old political order in the second decade of the nineteenth century brought to power a new species of ruler—Andrew Jackson of Tennessee. The colorful, crude, pseudo—aristocratic war hero personified many of the nascent republic's virtues, aspirations, and shortcomings. Jackson truly symbolized his age.¹ At the same time his ascendancy with the presidential election of 1828 heralded a unique new political era. Not only did Old Hickory revive and marshal into his column important segments of Thomas Jefferson's old coalition, but he also fathered a heretofore entirely unknown set of power brokers. For the first time political leadership became the purview of non-elitist elements, and government service opened its door to the commoner. Now administrative efficiency, bureaucratic regulations, and rationality crept in to reorder Washington officialdom. Offices once designed for patrician dilettantes were now molded for ordinary men of ability. The passing of this old government ethic drastically differentiated Jacksonian Democracy from aristocratic Jeffersonian Republicanism. America's first modern political party was born.²

Cunning, adroit Senator Martin Van Buren of New York gave birth to Jackson's potent coalition. And a diverse coalition it was. Van Buren had skillfully played upon the fears and ambitions of all geographic sections to catapult Jackson into power.³ One of these, the South, held a preeminent position. All of the slave states with the exceptions of Maryland and Delaware went for Jackson in 1828—their price: Van Buren and his presidential protege had promised to get the tariff lowered and to institute a benign Indian policy (from the perspective of certain land-hungry white Southerners), and agreed to block federally-financed internal improvements.

In part Jackson would keep these campaign pledges, as the Maysville Veto and Georgia's removal of the Indians revealed. But tariff revision disappointed some. The Tariff of 1832, replacing the highly protectionist "Tariff of Abominations" (1828) did not lower the schedules sufficiently to satisfy Dixie extremists. Some, including John C. Calhoun, broke with Jackson. As if to compound the problem, the President's veto of the United States Bank re-charter in 1832 alienated many Southerners. Influential politicians like John M. Berrien, Hugh Lawson White, and John Tyler turned against "King Andrew."⁴ Crisis confronted the Democratic coalition. If it failed to muster its forces in the South, Jackson stood to lose his bid for reelection in 1832.

In Savannah one of the south Atlantic coast's most effective newspapers took up the cudgel for Old Hickory. "The opponents of General Jackson stigmatize his veto message as a 'tissue of sophistries,' a 'flimsy production, the appeal of ignorance

to ignorance,' (we of the *commune vulgus*) who are in favor of General Jackson, 'touch our caps' to the *New York American* for the compliment) 'a shameful state paper, an imbecile production' and etc., etc., and yet they devote columns of their presses to its refutation," the editor of the Savannah *Daily Georgian* wrote. "If this message [his veto address] will hurt General Jackson in demonstrating his hostility to the U.S. Bank, surely he is entitled to more courtesy than he has received, as nothing but sincerity of heart could have influenced him in such a case."⁵ Later the paper pounced on a northern religious periodical for taking issue with Jackson's bank veto: "We regard this as an attempt to enlist religious feeling on the side of party politics. *The Philadelphian* is a paper established to promote religion, to teach the way of salvation to mankind."⁶ Unfortunately, these fulminations tended to fall flat. A metropolitan commercial center like Savannah harbored many moneyed individuals who approved of the United States Bank's sound, conservative policies. To them Jackson's appeal to folk prejudices harked of rank demagoguery. Another issue must be found.

At first the tariff seemed to provide an alternative. The Tariff of 1832, substantially lowering the rates to the level of 1824, was designed to provide some protection to northern industrialists while meeting major anti-protectionist demands of Southerners. The paucity of manufacturing in the cotton states almost guaranteed a favorable response. But events decreed otherwise. Jackson's tariff bill failed to mollify free-traders. Only Henry Clay and his adherents in the South—proto-Whigs—heartily approved, while insisting on somewhat higher duties. Extremist Democrats cried treason. These followers of Calhoun wanted a tariff for revenue only.

Staunch Savannah Jacksonians echoed the *Daily Georgian's* sentiments: "Whatever may be the opinion of Henry Clay in general, no one can deny him to be a most consummate intriguer. He has contrived with admirable skill to identify himself with the manufacturing nabobs of the North and they cling to him with all the devotion and energy which the most powerful of human passions, self interest, can inspire. Upon him and his fortune hang the fate of their illegal game. They know that should he succeed the door of future compromise on the tariff would be shut and they flatter themselves that they would then have the whole South lying at their mercy and existing only by their tolerance. But let them beware lest they should be served like Franklin's little boy with the apples, and lest in grasping at more, that which is in their already full hands may slip from them."⁷

Georgia's confused reaction to the Tariff of 1832, while failing to give much encouragement to Whig presidential candidate Clay, evoked considerable concern in Jackson's camp. The state had gone overwhelmingly for the Tennessean in 1828 and appeared safe for 1832 until Congress, largely under the President's guidance, enacted the tariff bill in July 1832.

During the first three decades of the nineteenth century Georgia possessed no true political parties. Instead the state had long witnessed a bitter internecine struggle between two amorphous and ideologically almost indistinct factions which had identified previously with Jefferson's Republican party and had since generally swung into Jackson's column. Both factions were highly personal in nature, each adhering to an ambitious, charismatic individual who had no philosophic ax to grind. One element gathered around George M. Troup, sometime U. S. Representative, Senator, and Governor. Its most prominent partisans tended to be planters and affluent merchants from Virginia and Maryland. Some had voted Federalist in the early days — all conceived themselves to be socially superior to the masses. A disproportionate number lived in and around Savannah. The other political sect idolized General John Clark, an enigmatic frontiersman who eventually migrated farther south to Florida. Clark supporters represented humbler backwoods folk. Most had filtered into Georgia from the Carolina piedmont via Augusta.⁸

State leaders of both factions traditionally met to caucus and revel each August at the Athens commencement of Franklin College (University of Georgia). In the late summer of 1832 a deadly miasma permeated the political atmosphere. Jackson had just signed the new tariff measure. Many Troupers, led by William H. Crawford, John M. Berrien, and Augustin M. Clayton at the graduation exercises, called upon Georgia to break with the President over the tariff. But Senator John Forsyth and a vocal rump of other Troup men hurried to Jackson's defense. Clarkites tended to do likewise; they believed the roughhewn Chief Executive, one of their own, could do no wrong. These events on the eve of the presidential election boded ill for Georgia Jacksonians. Old Hickory's actions had to be explained to the satisfaction of disgruntled citizens.

Again Savannah's leading Troupers entered the foray. The *Daily Georgian* took a moderate position. Somewhat inconsistently it lauded anti-tariff sentiment while declaring that South Carolina's plan to pronounce the federal law null and void smacked of insanity. "Nullification" was not the answer. Many southern congressmen had voted for the tariff — including Forsyth — because it was "the best of a bad bargain." Others had done so in "a sincere desire to save the Union," the editor stated.⁹

Still the Georgia nullification movement burgeoned. Jackson's tariff policy hurt him with extremist, state rights-oriented Troupers, and his veto of the bank bill irked some moderate to conservative Troup supporters. Forsyth and the *Daily Georgian* were trapped in the middle. As a result of this split the state's political complexion shifted. While most radicals were as yet unwilling to totally renounce Jackson and support Clay for President, they seemed ready to sit out the election. Eventually the factious Troup followers chose two slates of presidential electors. One which included William B. Bulloch of

Savannah was committed to Jackson and Van Buren for Vice-President (Jackson's handpicked successor). The extremists raised their own slate which was halfheartedly pledged to Jackson and P. P. Barbour for Vice-President. As polling time drew nearer Jackson and Van Buren chieftans changed their tactics and redoubled efforts to win the extremists over.

"If Clay and [John] Sergeant are elected we know they will take sides with the missionaries. We believe the Cherokee country will not be settled without the flow of blood," announced the *Daily Georgian*. Savannah's Troup organ had reached the lowest common denominator of public appeal. The banking issue sparked little interest along the coast; the tariff problem was embarrassing. Only the Indian question remained. Few Troupers disagreed with the need to remove the Cherokees from their ancestral north Georgia lands. Jackson would look the other way while the state did as she pleased with the redman.¹⁰

On election day the wisdom of this pragmatic strategy became apparent. In Chatham County the Jackson-Van Buren ticket received 264 votes to a paltry six for the extremist Troup slate. Partisans of the latter element had either "gone fishing" or had switched sides.¹¹ The trend held throughout the state. Nullification Troupers lacked the muscle to alter the outcome. Jackson and Van Buren swept Georgia and the country. But unlike voters elsewhere, Georgians had not (with the exception of Clarkites) concentrated on the standard national issues of banking and the tariff. Instead Indian removal, a purely local question, predominated. White Georgians, regardless of political persuasion, would soon redeem Jackson's pledge through a forcible expulsion of the Cherokees from the state.

FOOTNOTES

1. J. W. Ward, *Andrew Jackson, Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1955).
2. Lynn L. Marshall, "The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," *American Historical Review*, LXXII (January, 1967), 445-468.
3. Richard H. Brown, "The Missouri Crisis, Slavery, and the Politics of Jacksonianism," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, LXV (1966), 55-72.
4. Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *The Jacksonian Era, 1828-1848* (New York, 1959), pp. 70-91.
5. *Savannah Daily Georgian*, July 28, 1832.
6. *Ibid.*; August 4, 1832, *ibid.*
7. July 24, 1832, *ibid.*
8. E. Merton Coulter, *A History of Georgia* (Chapel Hill, 1833), pp. 225-230.
9. *Savannah Daily Georgian*, July 31, 1832.
10. November 7, 1832, *ibid.*
11. *Ibid.* Within a few years the Troup and Clark parties disappeared. Most Troup men went into the newly-formed State Rights party which stressed, naturally, state sovereignty. Most Clarkites then organized the opposing Union party committed to Jacksonian politics. By 1840 these purely local organizations had merged with the national political structure. State Righters generally drifted into the Whig camp while the majority of Union men went into the Democratic party.