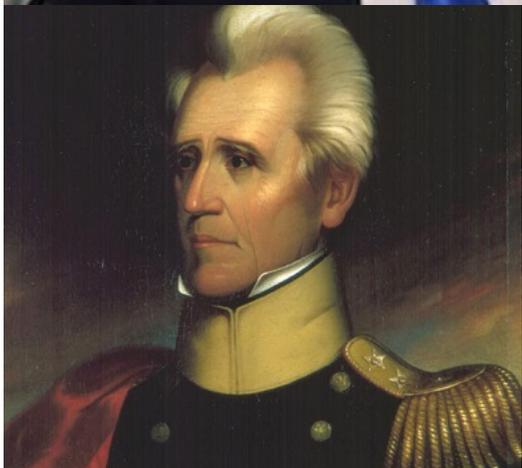


## Back to the future: From Jackson to 'the Donald'

Written by Eric Walberg Эрик Вальберг/ Уолберг □□□□□ □□□□ E-mail Print PDF  
Thursday, 06 September 2018 07:06

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**Who in US presidential history even comes close to Trump? While corporations run America for all intents and purposes, it has been unusual for a hardcore businessman to take the helm. Founders like Washington and Jefferson were plantation owners. Most were lawyers, military (9 generals), political hacks (including lots of governors, senators and VPs), even a university president (Wilson, Yale). But businessman? Who bragged of making and losing and making a fortune?**

**None of the previous 44 presidents are listed as businessmen, though Andrew Jackson (1767–1845, president 1829–1837)**

**cries out as Trump's prototype. Jackson's parents emigrated from northern Ireland, he was orphaned at 14, used his wiles to become a "frontier lawyer", and made a fortune in speculation of lands which by law were Cherokee, but which hungry settlers were stealing at gunpoint. That made him a gentleman plantation owner and businessman. (Think: Trump Towers, casinos)**

**He despised President Washington for the Jay treaty (1795) during the Napoleonic war, which gave preference in (free) trade with Britain (it was, after all, controlling the oceans), and refused to go to his funeral, though he was already a rising star as Tennessee's sole congressman. (Think: Trump's tariff wars and McCain's funeral)**

**He was an enthusiastic imperialist, gaining fame in the war of 1812, when congress finally joined the fray, conveniently after Britain had exhausted itself fighting Napoleon. The US was officially neutral in the Napoleonic wars, careful not to be caught on the losing side (even though Jackson for one was rooting for France). This clever politics secured a nice finale for the US. The British, apart from burning down the White House, gained nothing. Attempts to hold back further settlement westward in the US were unsuccessful, and Canada was hardly a prize, cold and distant, full of French-speaking Catholics.**

**But Jackson put it to good use in self-promotion. Unprompted, he invaded Florida, defeated British and Spanish forces in a short skirmish, taking all of Florida at his own initiative, decamped to New Orleans and defeated the British occupiers in a brilliant but pointless victory, as hostilities had officially ended a month earlier in the Treaty of Ghent. Spanish Florida was returned to Spanish control, but the Louisiana Purchase had already given the US New Orleans. Squatter settlers continued to encroach on Florida, supposed in pursuit of Indian rebels. Jackson came back into action in Indian wars from 1817 on, and Spain finally threw in the towel in 1821.**

**The real losers were the natives on both sides. (Think: Standing Rock) British strategy for decades had been to create a buffer state to block American expansion. The Americans refused to consider a buffer state and the proposal was dropped. Article IX of the treaty included provisions to restore to Natives "...all possessions, rights and privileges which they may have enjoyed, or been entitled to in 1811"—but the provisions were unenforceable. In any case, the British soon lost interest in the idea of creating an Indian buffer state and stopped supporting or encouraging tribes in American territory. I.e., the US won, as it gobbled up the nice bits of the rest of the continent.**

**Jackson milked the prestige of defeating both British and Spanish troops in Florida and New Orleans. Alexis de Tocqueville despised Trump (sorry, Jackson), later writing in Democracy in America that Jackson "was raised to the Presidency, and has been maintained there, solely by the recollection of a victory which he gained, twenty years ago, under the walls of New Orleans."**

## **Jackson vs Trump**

**In describing Jackson, De Tocqueville eerily describes Trump. (I have inserted a few points for colour, though the reader can add his/her own examples for Trump):**

**\*General Jackson is the agent of the state jealousies; he was placed in his lofty station by the passions that are most opposed to the central government. It is by perpetually flattering these passions that he maintains his station and his popularity.**

**\*General Jackson is the slave of the majority: he yields to its wishes, its propensities, and its demands—say, rather, anticipates and forestalls them. ... General Jackson stoops to gain the favor of the majority;**

**(Jackson was famous for his people's inauguration ball, which a cross-section of US business types and their families stormed, climbing through windows and in their drunken debauchery, trashed the place. Think: Trump's embarrassing inauguration)**

**\*but when he feels that his popularity is secure, he overthrows all obstacles in the pursuit of the objects which the community approves or of those which it does not**

**regard with jealousy.**

**(Think: Trump's transgender rulings)**

**\*Supported by a power that his predecessors never had, he tramples on his personal enemies, whenever they cross his path, with a facility without example;**

**\*he takes upon himself the responsibility of measures that no one before him would have ventured to attempt.**

**(Think: North Korea)**

**\*He even treats the national representatives with a disdain approaching to insult; he puts his veto on the laws of Congress and frequently neglects even to reply to that powerful body.**

**A big difference is on vetoes. Trump has yet to act on his many veto threats. Jackson was considered President Nyet, racking up 12 vetoes, more than all 6 presidents before him combined. He was not afraid of anyone, and increased the power of the presidency. Trump, on the other hand, is all bark, and has been unable to use his executive powers to much effect.**

**Jackson's hobby horse was the National Bank. He finally managed to dismantle it, but then squandered the precious ability to create money and regulate banking greed, caught in his disdain of centralized government and ignorance of how a sophisticated capitalist economy worked. Land speculation was rampant, and the Panic of 1837**

**eventually led to a reassertion of banker control of money.\***

**Another big difference is that Trump was a draft dodger, with no military heroics to get him elected. As with other draft dodger presidents (Clinton and George Bush) that can mean warmongering to make up for any whiff of cowardice. Jackson didn't invade other continents, but his empire building in Florida at the behest of Munroe (Think: Monroe Doctrine) and his condoning of the Trail of Tears more than makes up for his lack of interest in foreign wars. Trump's brash moves -- on North Korea and Russia, Iran, the EU, tariff wars on one and all -- are his attempt to show his bravery, and are subverted by his many enemies.**

**From slavery to petticoats**

**The Supreme Court is a subject where both have similar crucial roles. Jackson appointed 6 Supreme Court judges, including the Chief Justice Taney\*\* Solidly pro-slavery Taney would become infamous for the Dred Scott decision (1857) long after Jackson died, denying citizenship to a slave even if born in the US. It held that "a negro, whose ancestors were imported into [the U.S.], and sold as slaves", whether enslaved or free, could never be an American citizen and that the federal government had no power to regulate slavery in the federal territories acquired after the creation of the United States."\*\*\* Taney foolishly thought his ruling would settle the slavery question, but it backfired and became a catalyst for the American Civil War.\*^**

**Now Trump is responsible for setting the tone of the split Supreme Court. If his nominee Kavanaugh triumphs, the court will be solidly conservative for a long time to come. A present-day Taney could overturn liberal legislation; especially worrying is abortion rights. We could be cursing Trump long after he's gone.**

**Then there are Jackson's embarrassments around marital propriety. It turned out the divorce of Jackson's wife Rachel had not been valid, so he had to divorce and remarry her, having thus 'lived in sin'. This whiff of bigamy was titillating in the 1790s, although it**

**was not uncommon on the frontier for relationships to be formed and dissolved unofficially, as long as they were recognized by the community.**

**The "Petticoat affair" was the National Enquirer sensation of his career, concerning Secretary of War Eaton and his wife Peggy Eaton. Rumors were that Peggy, as a barmaid in her father's tavern, had been a prostitute. Allowing an ex-prostitute in the family of a Cabinet member was unthinkable. Secretary of State Martin Van Buren shrewdly took the side of Jackson and Eaton (which parlayed him into the vice presidency and presidency) and the scandal was quelled.**

**In the process, Jackson formed the Kitchen Cabinet, an unofficial group of advisors to the president, where apparently prostitutes' husbands were welcome. Jackson replaced 10% of the government officers he held power over, a high percentage compared to his predecessors. For this, Jackson is credited with what he called "the principle of rotation in office," but others would label it the spoils system.**

**The comparisons with Trump are rife. Jackson was the first crazy populist to storm the White House at a time when all of the features of today's US were in place, including worship of the military, (wage) slavery, racism, religious bigotry, a stacked Supreme Court. The new republic was already imperial (Monroe was Jackson's mentor). Hawaii and the Philippines were a few decades away, but the makings of the US empire were there, and Jackson epitomized them.**

**As president, Jackson sought to advance the rights of the common man against a corrupt aristocracy (though as a nouveau riche planter, he was part of it) and to preserve the Union. Ditto Trump.**

**Jackson's one potentially great legacy could have been to trounce the bankers once and for all, but that needed a statesman, of which, sadly, there are few among the 45 (Lincoln, FDR, JFK). Trump talked about going after "international bankers" during the election, but put all the culprits in place after he gained power. More evidence of his 'all bark, no bite.'**

**So who should rule?**

**Adam Smith would not doubt have been horrified at the thought of Jackson (let alone Trump) as US president, as he distrusted businessmen, despite the 'invisible hand' myth he has been saddled with.\*^^ He condemned "the mean rapacity, the monopolizing spirit of merchants and manufacturers, who neither are, nor ought to be, the rulers of mankind."**

**Smith had written his Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759) as his social theory, but the racey stuff in Wealth of Nations (1776) was all that people were interested in, ignoring his blasts there against merchants, notably, "People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public."**

**He didn't have much use for aristocrats either, who by the 18th century were just as money-grubbing as the merchants. It's not clear who Smith wanted to govern. His 'invisible hand' supposedly acted as a constraint on greed (fight fire with fire), but that doesn't mean much in the reality of merchants and aristocrats fighting over spoils. Presumably he hoped everyone would read his Moral Sentiments and become uncorrupted. Instead we got capitalist democracy, Jackson and, now, Trump.**

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Soon after the declaration of independence, Washington and the authors of the Constitution were determined to keep the likes of Jackson out of leadership,<sup>\*^^^</sup> fearing mob rule, but the US was fated by its popular revolution to become the first populist democracy, as property requirements for voting dropped by the wayside, and 'checks and balances' just didn't do more than produce gridlock.

In the 2018 Presidents and Executive Politics Presidential Greatness survey, Trump came last in the overall greatness rating, along with Buchanan and Harrison, with Jackson in the middle. Trump ranks (with Lincoln and Jackson close seconds) as the most polarizing president.

Jackson is perhaps best remembered for his military exploits, though New Orleans was pointless and the rest shameful, supporting the violation of



treaties culminating in the Trail of Tears and decimating natives. His record as a cruel

**slave owner are ignored.\*^^\***

**He left Taney as a time bomb supporting slavery, contributing to the onset of the civil war. (Think: time to remove his statues?\*^^\*) He bungled and ultimately lost his battle with the bankers. It was Lincoln who overcame Jackson’s real ‘legacy’ by ending slavery and outwitting the bankers, creating the money necessary to finance the war sans banksters. And for his good deeds, was assassinated.**

**America and mob rule are now synonymous. Now, if only Trump had the courage to take on the banks. Though despised in official ratings, and despite Trump’s many scandals and insulting behaviour, he is still likely to gain another term. Jackson did. General Trump is “the slave of the majority: he yields to its wishes, its propensities, and its demands—say, rather, anticipates and forestalls them.”**

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**\*The National Bank Act of 1863 and the Federal Reserve Act of 1913.**

**\*\*Strangely, he was denied his first nomination as a mere supreme court judge.**

**\*\*\*Dred Scott had been taken by his owners to Wisconsin territory, □ where slavery was illegal, and Dred attempted to sue for his freedom. In a 7–2 decision written by Chief Justice Taney, the court denied Scott's request, violating the Equal Protection Clause of the Bill of Rights, requiring each state to provide equal protection under the law to all people, including all non-citizens, within its jurisdiction.**

**\*^It was superseded by the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and by the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, adopted in 1868, which gave African Americans full citizenship.**

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**\*^^It was intended only to point out a narrow logical truth given perfect information, relying only on man’s greed**

**\*^^^The electoral college, ‘checks and balances’, property requirements for voter eligibility**

**\*^^\*Jackson permitted slaves to be whipped to increase productivity. He posted advertisements for fugitive slaves who had escaped from his plantation, offered “ten dollars extra, for every hundred lashes any person will give him, to the amount of three hundred.”)**

**\*^^\*The three copies, by Clark Mills, are at the White House, the Tennessee State Capitol and in the Vieux Carre in New Orleans.**