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Political Science

The Birth of Modern Politics: Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams and the Election of 1828

Lynn Hudson Parsons
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For better or for worse, the 1828 presidential election remains the model for all campaigns that followed. The election pitted incumbent John Quincy Adams against Andrew Jackson, whose followers claimed he was denied the presidency in 1824. During that election, Adams was said to have struck a "corrupt bargain" with Henry Clay, by promising to appoint him Secretary of State in return for Clays support. Jacksons supporters were determined that the "hero of New Orleans" would not be denied in 1828. The result was a bitterly fought election that featured such modern contrivances as carefully orchestrated newspaper attacks, fundraising, opinion polls, dirty tricks, and the growing recognition that elections could not be won without political parties to do the grunt work.

The author of this engaging and accessible account is history professor emeritus at SUNY College of Brockport. He previously wrote *John Quincy Adams* and the co-edited *The Home-Front War: World War II and American Society*. *The Birth of Modern Politics* describes much more than the 1828 election; it discusses the characters and events of early nineteenth-century politics that set the stage for the presidential fight. Adams promoted a wide-ranging program of internal improvements that required taxation and a strong federal government. Jackson appealed to the majority of voters who remained suspicious of a British-like controlling government and believed a presidential administration had only the authority to protect individual liberties. Eventually, these different interpretations became the foundations for the Republican and Democratic parties for the rest of the nineteenth century.

The Jacksonians were more adept at playing the new politics of 1828: they portrayed Jackson as a man of the people and accused Adams of being an elitist New Englander, a charge that Adams did little to refute. Jackson trounced Adams in the electoral vote, 178 to 83, although the popular vote was somewhat closer, 56 percent to 44 percent. Following the election, John

Quincy Adams was elected to the House of Representatives, where he remained until his death in 1848. He led the bloc that opposed slavery extension in the West. Jackson, “Old Hickory,” died in 1845. Unlike John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, two political enemies who became friends during their later years, John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson never reconciled: the politics of the 1828 election prevented it.

This worthy addition to the excellent Pivotal Moments in American History series will appeal to general readers in public libraries and to historians who might want to consider it for courses.

Karl Helicher