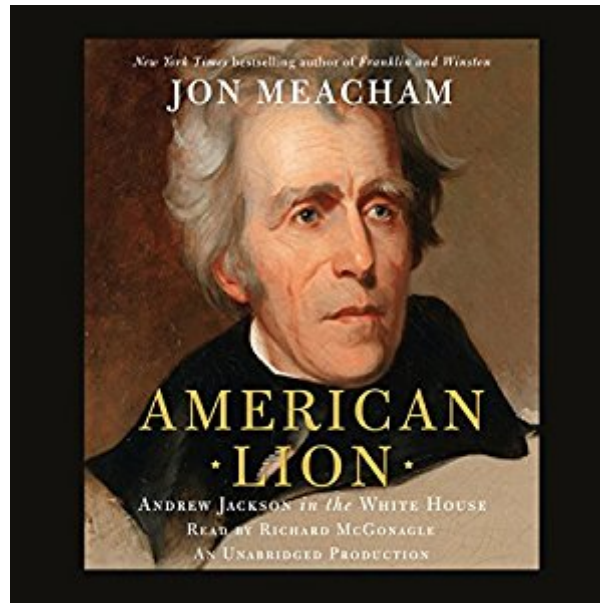


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# American Lion: Andrew Jackson In The White House



## Synopsis

Pulitzer Prize, Biography/Autobiography, 2009 Andrew Jackson, his intimate circle of friends, and his tumultuous times are at the heart of this remarkable book about the man who rose from nothing to create the modern presidency. Beloved and hated, venerated and reviled, Andrew Jackson was an orphan who fought his way to the pinnacle of power, bending the nation to his will in the cause of democracy. Jackson's election in 1828 ushered in a new and lasting era in which the people, not distant elites, were the guiding force in American politics. Democracy made its stand in the Jackson years, and he gave voice to the hopes and the fears of a restless, changing nation facing challenging times at home and threats abroad. One of our most significant yet dimly recalled presidents, Jackson was a battle-hardened warrior, the founder of the Democratic Party, and the architect of the presidency as we know it. His story is one of violence, sex, courage, and tragedy. With his powerful persona, his evident bravery, and his mystical connection to the people, Jackson moved the White House from the periphery of government to the center of national action, articulating a vision of change that challenged entrenched interests to heed the popular will or face his formidable wrath. The greatest of the presidents who have followed Jackson in the White House have found inspiration in his example, and virtue in his vision. Jackson was the most contradictory of men. The architect of the removal of Indians from their native lands, he was warmly sentimental and risked everything to give more power to ordinary citizens. He was, in short, a lot like his country: alternately kind and vicious, brilliant and blind; and a man who fought a lifelong war to keep the republic safe, no matter what it took. Jon Meacham, in *American Lion*, has delivered the definitive human portrait of a pivotal president who forever changed the American presidency and America itself.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

As he says, Meacham has "attempted to paint a biographical portrait of Jackson and of many... who lived and worked with him in his tumultuous years in power." The book concentrates almost entirely on the presidential years, with only enough on Jackson's earlier career to give the reader some idea of the man's personality, of how he rose to prominence and of his political views. Meacham provides an equally short coda on Jackson's post-presidential years until his death (1845). The book is not a "life and times" but is centered on Jackson's experiences in his political battles. The politics are Meacham's chief concern because he believes that Jackson's presidency transformed American political culture. Jackson was the first president who was not from the pre-Revolutionary elite and was the first to be voted into office by a newly expanded electorate. Meacham views Jackson as the first to see the president as representing the entirety of the people and as the equal of Congress, entitled to shape policy and legislation without the traditional deference to Congressional views. Jackson thought that the people shared his beliefs and that he was fighting for their interests in everything he did. This vision sustained Jackson as he relentlessly expanded the powers of the president. Meacham believes that Jackson was a master politician who happily allowed opponents to think that he was entirely a creature of emotion and passion while coolly outmaneuvering them politically.

Andrew Jackson is one of those presidents who stands out in our history but for many people, we're not exactly sure why. Jon Meacham, in his excellent new book "American Lion", tells us why. Not only do we get a clearer picture of the contributions of our seventh president but Meacham goes very much inside Jackson, the man, and it's a fascinating portrait. Most of us remember Andrew Jackson as a hero of the Battle of New Orleans, at the close of the war of 1812. But Jackson as president really changed the course of the executive. He was the first of what we might call today an "imperial president" (or at least his critics of the day would have called him that...or worse) but Jackson rejected the notion that Congress had the more powerful lock on government. The great issues of the 1820s and 1830s all found their way to Jackson's office. His main idea that "nation first" was everything served him well in his executive battles. Jackson fought for the elimination of the Bank of the United States and slew the mighty dragon running it, Nicholas Biddle. Nullification, a

notion that states had the right to ignore federal laws if they saw fit, was championed by South Carolina's John C. Calhoun, at once Jackson's first vice-president and later a senator from that state. Indian removal was paramount in Jackson's mind and while he succeeded to a degree, it wasn't without much bloodshed, leaving a stain on his presidency. But the most fascinating part of the Jackson presidency was the impending strife of secession and the issue of slavery. We tend not to think about those two issues arising until a decade or more after Jackson left the White House, but they were primary concerns a generation before war broke out.

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