

Did the Election of 1828 Represent a Democratic Revolt of the People?

POSTSCRIPT

The two essays in this issue discuss the presidential election of 1828 from different approaches. The portion of Remini's essay that is reprinted here is an example of good, solid narrative history sprinted with interpretations. Although a full-fledged, two-party system was not yet in effect in all parts of the country, Remini demonstrates that a well-organized coalition of supporters for Andrew Jackson existed in Congress and in a number of states in various sections of the country. Often holding different ideological perspectives, these politicians united around one common goal: the election of Andrew Jackson to the presidency. Remini's description of the staged rallies, the name-calling, the fudging of the issues, and the importance of organization over ideology sounds not unlike recent presidential campaigns.

McCormick, a veteran analyzer of nineteenth-century politics, views the 1828 election through the lens of quantitative history. He uses statistics to break down a number of generalizations about the significance of Jackson's election. McCormick discounts the removal of property qualifications for voting, the influence of the western states and the charisma of Jackson as the major reasons why twice as many voters turned out for the 1828 presidential race than they did four years earlier. He argues that in spite of such statistics a higher percentage of voters had turned out for earlier gubernatorial and legislative elections in most states than for the 1828 presidential election. In McCormick's view, the key election was 1840, not 1828, because by this time, the two parties—Whigs and Democrats—were equally balanced in all sections of the country, and voters turn out in larger numbers when they perceive a closely contested presidential race.

McCormick's article raises a number of questions. Is he comparing apples and oranges, as Remini seems to imply? Using McCormick's data, is it possible for other historians to reach different conclusions? How does one explain a 50 percent increase in voter turnout between 1824 and 1828?

For more information, see Richard P. McCormick, "Political Development and the Second Party System," as well as the other essays in William Nesbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham, eds., *The American Party System; Stages of Political Development* (New York, 1967).