WEEKLY READING # 20
ARTICLE 1:
OLD HICKORY

There is something you might have noticed about the first six presidents: they were all from Virginia or Massachusetts. There is something else, too. They were all aristocrats. They had been born into successful, prosperous families. That gave them the time and opportunity to be well-educated. John Adams and his son John Quincy Adams were both Harvard graduates. James Madison went to the College of New Jersey (Princeton). Thomas Jefferson and James Monroe attended the College of William and Mary. Only George Washington was not a college man; still, he was well read...and rich.

Now how do you think you would feel if you were living in 19th-century America in Tennessee and you were poor? Do you think you would have a chance to be president?

After Andrew Jackson was elected the seventh president, you would know you had a chance. If Andy Jackson could be president, then any white male born in the United States could be president.

Jackson was born in 1767 in a log cabin on the border between North and South Carolina. His parents were poor Scotch-Irish farmers. The Scotch-Irish were people who had moved from Scotland to Northern Ireland to the United States. Andrew's dad died just before he was born; his mother had to move with her three sons into her sister’s home. There were 11 children in the house, and you know how kids are. It was a noisy place. Andy soon learned to speak out, and wrestle, and make the older boys respect him. He also learned to read.
Andrew Jackson was shot in the arm during a battle. The army doctor wanted to amputate his arm. Jackson decided to get a second opinion. He went to a Cherokee medicine man, who saved his arm.

Jackson believed in a strong executive branch and was supposed to be an admirer of Napoleon. “I feel like Napoleon, I thirst for glory!” he is saying. “Down with the Senate!” Do you think he really said that?

In those days, many farmers could not read. So most towns had public readers—people who read the newspapers aloud so everyone would know the news of the colonies.

There’s a story that when Andrew Jackson was a boy he was a public reader “selected as often as any grown man.” According to the tale, in 1776, when Jackson was nine, he read aloud a declaration that had been written in Philadelphia. It said, We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and it also said that these united colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent states.

Jackson scholar Robert Remini says the often-told story is apocryphal (uh POK ruh full), which means it’s fiction, made up. The truth is, Jackson was a bright boy, a reader, and excited to be part of these transforming times.

Four years after that Declaration was read, Andrew (at 13) joined the South Carolina militia. He was captured and ordered to clean a British officer’s boots. Andrew refused. The angry officer came at him with a sword. Jackson carried the scars for the rest of his life.
Andrew's older brother was killed fighting in that Revolutionary War. Andrew and another brother were taken to a military prison, where they got smallpox. His second brother died. Then his mother died. At 14 Andrew Jackson was an orphan. "I felt utterly alone," he said.

He learned to take care of himself. He had to. He was a fighter with an explosive temper who liked to have a roaring good time. Sometimes he drank and gambled. But he learned from his mistakes. People were attracted to him. He was smart and honest and fun to be around. But what should he do with his life? He tried being a schoolteacher, but that didn't work out. Then he studied law and became a lawyer. That got him started in politics. When he was 21 he was appointed attorney general for the region that would soon become Tennessee. By the time he was 30 he owned two large plantations near Nashville.

Andrew Jackson was a man of action, a born leader who was always doing things and going places and changing the world he lived in. He served in Congress; he was a judge, a general, and a military hero. "He came into national party politics like a cyclone from off the western prairies," wrote a professor named Woodrow Wilson (who would become president himself). Jackson formed a new political party: the Democratic Party.

But when Harvard University gave an honorary degree to Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams was so horrified—he was a Harvard graduate and thought his school was disgracing itself—that he refused to attend the ceremony. JQA called Jackson "a barbarian and savage who can scarcely spell his own name." That "barbarian and savage" became an astonishingly popular president.

He was tall and lean and stood straight as the barrel of a rifle. His eyes were blue, bright blue. His thick hair was the color of sand, although it turned silver long before he became president. His soldiers called him "Old Hickory," because they said he was strong as a hickory tree. In his portrait you can see a kind face. It was also a sad face. His wife, Rachel, whom he loved dearly, died just before his inauguration.

What an inauguration it was! The people—ordinary people—had elected one of their own to be president. They wanted to be there to see him take office. They wanted to celebrate with him.

And so they did. Some came from 500 miles away. It seemed to people in Washington as if everyone in the West had come to town for the big day. And they all wanted to get into the White House—at the same time. They poured in through the doors in their buckskin clothes and muddy boots, and they climbed on the satin chairs and broke glasses and spilled orange punch and pushed and shoved.
Andrew Jackson bought 20 spitoons for the East Room of the White House for $12.50 each. Some people thought that a great waste of government money; others said it would save the White House carpets.

Voting in a new republic wasn't by secret ballot. You spoke out your choice, or raised your hand, and everyone knew your vote.

Each other. President Jackson had to go out a back door to get away from the mob. Finally someone thought to bring buckets of punch onto the lawn and that got the crowd out of the President's House.

Some people remembered President Washington's receptions, where men wore gloves and silver buckles and talked softly. Those were the good old days; how comfortable they seemed. This modern world of Andrew Jackson and his friends would be the end of the United States, some said. That old Federalist, Chief Justice John Marshall, swore in President Jackson. It was said that Marshall would just as soon have sworn in the devil.

Mobs would take over; life would be awful—so the aristocratic leaders thought. But it didn't happen. Andrew Jackson did change the presidency—it was never the same again. Most people think he made it stronger. It helped that he had good manners, natural manners. People who thought they would be angry at him ended up being charmed.

For many of the earlier presidents, democracy had meant government for the people. During the Jacksonian Era, democracy meant government by the people. "Let the people rule," was his motto. And, ever since Andrew Jackson's time, we have.

"I accept the office given me by the free and unbiased suffrage, of a virtuous people, with the feelings of the highest gratitude," said the new president, Andrew Jackson.
The following are excerpts from those involved with the removal of the Cherokee Indians from the state of Georgia.

**Appeal of Cherokee nation to United States Congress, 1834**

"Cupidity (greed) has fastened its eye upon our lands and our homes and is seeking by force and by every variety of oppression and wrong to expel us from our lands and our homes and to tear from us all that has become endeared to us. In our distress we have appealed to the judiciary of the United States, where our rights have been solemnly established. [Worcester vs Georgia] We have appealed to the Executive of the United States [Andrew Jackson] to protect those rights according to the obligation of treaties and the injunctions of the laws. But this appeal to the Executive has been made in vain.”

**Major William M. Davis, 1837**
**Sent to Cherokee country to expedite removal**

“That paper called a treaty [Treaty of New Echota] is no treaty at all because it is not sanctioned by the great body of the Cherokees and was made without their participation or assent …. The Cherokees are a peaceable, harmless people, but you may drive them to desperation, and this treaty cannot be carried into effect except by the strong arm of force.”

**John Mason, Jr., 1837**
**Sent to Cherokee Country by US government**

“Opposition to the treaty is unanimous and irreconcilable. They say it cannot bind them because they did not make it; that it was made by a few unauthorized individuals; that the nation is not part to it.”

**Brigadier General Winfield Scott, May 1838**

“The President of the United States [Martin Van Buren] sent me with a powerful army to cause you, in obedience to the treaty of 1835, to join the part of your people who are already established in prosperity on the other side of the Mississippi …. The emigration must be commenced in haste …. The full moon of May is already on the wane, and before another shall have passed away every Cherokee man, woman and child … must be in motion to join their brethren in the West….My troops already occupy many positions … and thousands and
thousands are approaching from every quarter to render resistance and escape alike hopeless…Will you then by resistance compel us to resort to arms? Or will you by flight seek to hide yourselves in mountains and forests and thus oblige us to hunt you down? Remember that in pursuit it may be impossible to avoid conflicts. The blood of the white man or the blood of the red man may be spilt, and if spilt, however accidentally, it may be impossible for the discreet and humane among you, or among us, to prevent a general war and carnage.

James Mooney, Ethnologist
From interviews with survivors of the Trail of Tears

“Families at dinner were startled by the sudden gleam of bayonets in the doorway and rose up to be driven with blows and oaths along the weary miles of trail that led to the stockades. Men were seized in their fields or going along the road, women were taken from their spinning wheels and children from their play. In many cases, on turning for one last look as they crossed a ridge, they saw their homes in flames, fired by the lawless rabble that followed on the heels of the soldiers to loot and pillage. So keen were these outlaws on the scent that in some instances they were driving off the cattle and other stock of the Indians almost before the soldiers had fairly started their owners in the other direction.”

Georgia militiaman who participated in the “roundup” of the Cherokee Indians

“I fought through the Civil War and have seen men shot to pieces and slaughtered by thousands, but the Cherokee removal was the cruelest work I ever knew.”

An observer of the departure of the first group to make the long overland journey
October 1, 1838

“At noon all was in readiness for moving. The teams were stretched out in a line along the road through a heavy forest, groups of persons formed about each wagon. The day was bright and beautiful, but a gloomy thoughtfulness was depicted in the lineaments of every face. In all the bustle of preparation there was a silence and stillness of the voice that betrayed the sadness of the hearts. At length the word was given to move on. Going Snake, an aged and respected chief whose head eighty summers had whitened, mounted on his favorite pony and led the way in silence, followed by a number of younger men on horseback. At this very moment a low sound of distant thunder fell upon my ear … a voice of divine indignation for the wrong of my poor and unhappy countrymen, driven by brutal power from all they loved and cherished in the land of their fathers to gratify the cravings of avarice. The sun was unclouded --- no rain fell --- the thunder rolled away and seemed hushed in the distance.”