

Which Peoples' President? : Andrew Jackson's Populist Legacy

Our yearly take on the controversy-filled legacies of former presidents brings us to the infamous 'Old Hickory', Andrew Jackson. Curatorial research associate Dylan Rawles visits Zoe and Easton to unravel an often overlooked aspect of Jackson's legacy; Populism, along with its rise in the United States. Jackson prided himself as the "People's president", which made him the "voice of the people" who stood against the "untrustworthy higher-ups." This mentality would grow and expand far beyond his death, taking on many elaborate shapes and identities. Populism's role in U.S. politics both past and present, factors that enable such movements to take shape, the voices left out of the conversation, and the nearly impossible task of nailing down just who "the people" are and what they want- we explore it all today. As always, thank you for stopping by!

36 Questions for Civic Love: <https://www.nphm.org/civiclove>

Transcription:

Dylan Rawles 0:00

Today's podcast episode is rated PG 13. Because there's some adult material talked about.

Easton Phillips 0:11

Okay, welcome everyone to another episode of 'This is Problematic'- Conner Prairie's one and only podcast. I'm Easton. (And I'm Zoe). And we're so glad to have y'all back. Joining us once more as we take another dive through some problematic history. And today, we're doing a little throwback, taking another shot at a- I'm not gonna say a bad president, but the problematic aspects of a president.

Zoe Morgan 0:33

So, if you've ever been to Conner Prairie, you know, we are not your typical museum. One of our tentpole experiences, which actually happens to be celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2024 is our 1836 Living History village of Prairietown. Yeah, it's exciting. Well, Prairietown gives us an opportunity to interpret everyday people going through everyday life in the context of historic clothes, historic objects, and in historic buildings. It's through this lens of everyday life that guests can hopefully connect and compare it through the experience we all generally share. It also allows us to interpret a wide span of themes civics, commerce, leisure, gender race, where we get our food. In a way most people today interact with them in their day to day through conversations and actions,

living it instead of static museum displays. Well, today we are diving deeper into one of those topics and flipping the script slightly to talk about a prominent figure from the 1830s and how he altered his approach and perception to engage with everyday people. That man being US President Andrew Jackson, who is widely credited with being the first populist president.

Easton Phillips 1:42

Andrew Jackson. So for this conversation, we'd once again like to welcome back another member of the curatorial department. The Great One goes by many nicknames, Mr. White River himself, Dylan Rawles. Welcome back, sir.

Dylan Rawles 1:57

Thanks for having me. Looking forward to it.

Easton Phillips 1:59

We missed you since, you know, since 'Peace out big boy'. So for those of you who don't know what we're talking about last year, Dylan joined us, as did Ryan, and when we talked about the impact and legacy of lesser known president, John Tyler. So go check that episode out when you get the chance. So this year, we're going to talk about Andrew Jackson, since there's so much more that we could cover about his administration. We're limiting ourselves to his use of populism to get elected, and during his presidency, and later on, in this episode, we'll be discussing populism in a more modern context. So we'd like to start with a definition here, just so we're all working with the same common language for this conversation. Dylan, would you mind giving us just a brief definition of what populism is and then what it means to be a populist president?

Dylan Rawles 2:46

Yeah, populism is hard to define. Because there's not one, everyone disagrees on what it means. And there's debate on whether it's even a useful strategy to use to label people and to look at people. But at its base level, most people agree that populism is 'the ordinary people versus the elite'- 'the ruling elite', whether that be in the private sector, whether that be in government, wherever it is, it's the people versus an entrenched, elite, to be a populist president that goes back to the 'labels are hard', because every president is going to say that they are they are working and speaking for the people, right, because they're getting elected. So it's it's in matters of degree how they're populist or not. For me, I think it's the Presidents that are really harping on the 'little guy' versus the 'the big guy', the ones who really focus on the ways that government is not working for the people, I think, I think those would fall under a populist president.

Easton Phillips 3:44

The David and Goliath of society.

Zoe Morgan 3:46

Well, and populist being labeled a populist. It's a pejorative term now, mostly. And can you explain that a little bit more as to why? Because it seems like being a champion for the people or for the common good would be a good thing, right? So why would it be a bad thing to be labeled that

Dylan Rawles 4:00

So populism very rarely works by itself. So often, it's paired with other isms, you know, fascism, totalitarianism, socialism, all those things. So for most people, if you're labeled a populist, you know that that's code for a rabble rouser, you know, challenging the status quo wanting to shake the system. So yeah, it didn't always used to be a negative connotation when it was the term was coined. In the 1890s. In America, it was very positive. It was, you know, we're in the midst of the Gilded Age, and you got robber barons, and you know, people just living in very extravagant houses, while other people are starving to death. And so especially in the West to the Midwest, so you got your farmers and your laborers and things and they all band together, because they figured that working collectively is going to they're going to get more out of it. And then if they're individually challenging people, so this group banded together and they were working to challenge that- the corruption and the excess that they saw, but then over time, it just got turned into a negative connotation.

Easton Phillips 5:07

So quick question, would Andrew Jackson actually have used the term "populist" to define himself during his era?

Dylan Rawles 5:13

No, Andrew Jackson would not have called himself a populist because the term doesn't really come around until later in the 19th century. So we go back and we label Jackson a populist, because some of the, the rhetoric he was using is very similar to what the Populist Party is using in the 1890s.

Zoe Morgan 5:30

Okay, so before getting too far into Andrew Jackson's presidency, what were some factors going on in American politics that could have led to a populist movement.

Dylan Rawles 5:39

Change. I think anytime you have great moments of change and upheaval, I think that is the key moment to get a populist movement going. And America is in the midst of one of those changes, right? So James Monroe's administration, roughly about 1816 to 1824, is labeled the era of good feelings. Because you essentially have one political party, you have the Democratic Republicans,

previously, under the first party system, you had the Federalists versus the Republicans, you know, you have Adams versus Jefferson, things like that. But by the time Monroe gets elected after the War of 1812, the Federalist have ceased being relevant, because they oppose the war. And anytime a party opposes a war that most of America supports, you're going to lose support. So they become a 'non-issue' outside of like New England and some of New York. So on the surface, it is a very unified moment. Everyone is seemingly getting along politically, now that is going to mask what's really happening. The fact that politicians are still very deeply divided. They're still in factions, and some of the issues there come over internal improvements. Alright, well, we would call infrastructure today, it comes over who's paying for that infrastructure, the bank, whether we should have a Federal National Bank, and all these things, and so these are the factions that are going to- the issues that are going to divide the parties. Besides politics. There is a financial panic looking at like modern-modern, what we would call depressions today, right, the Great Depression, the 2008 recession. This is a, arguably the first national financial panic before those panics were regional. So not everyone felt the pinch. But also they were usually explained by a natural phenomenon like a disaster, hurricane or something or a war. You could pinpoint what it is, but the panic of 1819. It's National, but also it's more ethereal. No one knows why it's happening. Right? There's no war happening. There's not a natural disaster. So the Bank of the United States that had been chartered three years before, got the blame, especially by certain politicians. Now, we know that it's caused because the London banks had stopped extending credit. Because cotton prices had started to plummet, right, there was a surplus of cotton. So that drove the price down. It's all connected. And we know that now. But for an average person who doesn't have this idea, this knowledge of the financial system, this global international system, it's the bank, right? It's these evil corporate entities, it's these 'fat cats' in the banks that are profiting off my suffering. So that's, that's a big one. This distress would carry over for decades. And it was a central plank in Jackson's policy agenda.

Easton Phillips 8:24

What was it then about the 1820s and 1830s, compared to previous elections that made a populist movement even possible?

Dylan Rawles 8:33

Who is participating in politics is beginning to change. We're seeing a shift. One of the big things about this 18-teens/1820s America is it is a place on the move. One Englishman who's over here traveling, he wrote that "The old America is breaking up and moving westward." So in 1800, the census records there's about 300,000 people west of the Appalachian Mountains. 20 years later, there's over 2 million. So I mean, there's a large number of people moving and this is including white settlers. This is including African Americans, both free and enslaved, not everyone's gonna get the right to vote no, not everyone's gonna get to participate in the politics, but they are still moving out there. And that is affecting your representation and how many congressmen you're going to get. And

so as these newer states are filling up, they are introducing suffrage requirements that are not as stringent as the old states are. So there used to be land requirements or tax requirements, you had to pay X amount of tax or have X amount of land before you could vote. A lot of these newer states are- if you're over the age of 21, white and male, you can vote regardless. So Jackson first runs for president in 1824. And at that point, only six states did not allow for the popular vote. So 18 out of 24 states allowed for a popular vote of electors, so you just have a large growth in democracy. And of course, it's not a complete democracy, right? Because we know that African Americans largely can't vote in most states. There's a few they can and then women are- nowhere are able to vote. It's just a large growth in the population who's voting. And so if you had a candidate who can appeal to those new voters, right, they're probably going to get elected. Yeah, we have this idea that Jacksonian Democracy starts with Andrew Jackson. And he, I would argue, takes advantage of the democracy growth that had already happened. All right, we already see, like I said, six states, only six states don't allow for the popular vote. So instead of being the harbinger of that democracy, I think Andrew Jackson was just able to take advantage of it. (Music Break)

Zoe Morgan 10:32

Okay, Dylan, so let's talk about the election of 1824. (I would love to) What was happening, what was Jackson doing to try and get elected.

Dylan Rawles 10:39

So the election of 1824 is interesting. Even if you don't like politics, it's fascinating story. And I think the important thing to remember about Andrew Jackson, is he saw conspiracy theories everywhere. If you were not blatantly for him, you were against him. And he knew how to hold a grudge. (Knowing chuckles) So like I said, you're coming out of this era of good feelings. Monroe has got two terms, and he's done. And there is a jockeying for the White House. So you're going to have four candidates that are running, you got Andrew Jackson, right, who had just recently been elected by the Tennessee to serve as a Senator, you have John Quincy Adams, who was Secretary of State under Monroe, he had been a Russian diplomat, you had William Crawford, who was Secretary of the Treasury from Georgia, and you had Henry Clay from Kentucky who was serving as the Speaker of the House, all four of them are going to run, you talk about a hot mess. (Laughs) By the end of it, Andrew Jackson is going to win the popular vote, he's going to win 40 something percent of the popular vote, and he's going to win the most electoral votes, he's going to win 99- not a majority and to become president United States, you have to have a majority. And I think at this time, it was about 130. He did not have that. So what happens is, according to the 12th Amendment, the election is going to go to the house, and each state delegation is going to get one vote. So that's where your political expertise and your political wheeling and dealing really comes into play. I think it highlights Jackson's popularity with the people and the questions the political establishment had about him, right, because he's kind of this dark horse candidate. He's a military hero- hadn't really participated

a lot in politics. And so when it goes to the house, the top three candidates are up for election. So that was Andrew Jackson, obviously, John Quincy Adams came second in both popular vote and electoral vote. And then William Crawford. Henry Clay, who was the Speaker of the House is not up for election, which is bad for him because he had a lot of power. He had a lot of political power and a lot of political sway. So if he was up for election, he probably could have swung it to where he could have got the votes. But he's not running. So instead of now he's play instead of being king, he's going to be a king maker. And so all three of the candidates start jockeying for votes. Henry Clay has three states that he can deliver, he won three states. And he can essentially give those three states to anybody he wants. So they're all wining and dining em trying to, you know, be all great. But this is where we see that Jackson, though popular with the people, is not popular in the establishment. Whereas John Quincy Adams has a long history in politics. He knows how to get it done. Henry Clay and Andrew Jackson are like oil and water. They do not have the same vision for America. Henry Clay, he's very much later he'll he'll introduce the American system where the federal government should be helping to pay for internal improvements they should be paying for all these federal programs that will strengthen the nation in his eyes. Andrew Jackson is very much an old school Jeffersonian we're less government the better, right, the states need to take a lot of a lot of control. Whereas Adams is very much similar to clay and that he sees a future where the federal government has a role in in improving the United States, right? He wants a National University. He wants telescopes established so that they can participate in the sciences. And so clay and Adams, they meet one night and talk things over. And it was introduced in the press by a guy from Pennsylvania that Henry Clay was going to give his votes to Adams, Adams was going to become president, and Henry Clay was going to be made secretary of state.

Zoe Morgan 14:20

Why is Secretary of State such an important position at this time?

Dylan Rawles 14:24

It was seen by many to be the stepping stone to the presidency. There's no evidence that that's what they talked about in this meeting. Henry Clay actually challenged the guy who introduced that who published that or he found out who was challenged him to a duel. And see it's like well, this is a straight up lie, and they finally have the votes. And John Quincy Adams is made president despite losing the popular vote and having less electoral votes, because Henry Clay gives him the three states he had the one of them was Kentucky, which the Kentucky legislature wrote Henry Clay and said we want you to vote for Jackson. Clay says, 'nah I'm good. I'm good.' I'm actually going to vote for Adams. And so that also made quite a hubbub because here's Henry Clay, actively ignoring the people, right? The people elected the state legislature in here's Henry Clay saying, 'Actually, I know better. I'm giving my votes to Adams.' So John Quincy Adams wins. That's a thing, but no one's really

crying 'foul' yet. And then, for some reason, the optics are terrible. John Quincy Adams named Henry Clay secretary of State, and thus the corrupt bargain is born.

Easton Phillips 15:29

Hmm. Yeah, I'm starting to see how that's gonna turn the- So it's not really all that odd then to see like how, in modern days, winning the popular vote doesn't necessarily mean that you win the whole thing.

Dylan Rawles 15:42

Right? Yeah. I don't think that just Jackson losing in the house would have caused such a stir. If Adams then didn't turn around and immediately name Henry Clay, Secretary of State. Jackson writing about it to a friend writes that "the Judas of the West has received his 30 pieces of silver." (Ooh) Oh, so he was hot. And for Democrats, right? Because they had- they started calling themselves Democrats. That was an example of the elite protecting their own and circumventing the public wish. So that was basically- the election of 1828 started at the election of John Quincy Adams in 1824. Because they would keep going.

Easton Phillips 16:22

So I can kind of see how Andrew Jackson is getting this, you know, this kind of populism vibe of like, "look at how the Bougie people screw us over."

Dylan Rawles 16:31

Right? Yeah, like "most people wanted me to be president. And here we are, we get to the house. And Adams is able to take the wheels of government and use them to his advantage." And then later, Jackson is going to find out that there are rumors that some of the bank branch managers had funneled money into the Adams campaign and tried to help get Adams elected, right, because Adams is seen as more favorable to the bank. And that's going to further enrage Democrats in Jackson, because he's like, oh, so not only are the congressmen corrupt, and the people in federal positions, but also the bank is working against me and working not only against him, but against the will of the people. And you can you can debate whether or not Jackson truly believed about his ideals about speaking for the people. But it seems that he really did think that there was a conspiracy to stifle the the white male population. Let's let's be clear, right, that Jackson, when he's talking about the people is not talking about all people. Right? Right. He's an enslaver. He has no qualms with killing Native Americans. You know, he thinks that they are inferior to him, and that they need cared for as if they are children. He really truly, I think, believed that he was speaking for this large white male population and seeing all these things arrayed against him really got in his craw. (Dad laugh)

Easton Phillips 17:57

One of the things he's- Oh, go ahead.

Dylan Rawles 17:59

I do want to say about the election of 1828. (Yeah). When you talk about mudslinging. I mean, they are slinging it. And so Jackson had married Rachel Jackson, but there was questions of the timing because she had been previously married. Oh, come to find out she probably was still married when her Jackson got married. Therefore, she's a bigamist and Jackson's a bigamist and the Adams pro Adams campaign ran with it. They said look at the bigamist How are you going to how was a strong Christian nation going to elect a bigamist to be president United States? There was also some question he had some militiamen executed for desertion during- I can't remember his war raging- over this Florida campaign. But they started printing these coffin handbills. And they were in black with black caskets on it- or coffins and with their names and the story of how basically Jackson like was a cannibal and like they were eating the flesh of these militia. It was terrible. (Oh my gosh) But they're all based on fact. Right? He really did have men executed for desertion. The Jackson campaign though they took a few more liberties. So like I said, Adams served as Minister plenipotentiary to Russia. They said that Adams was serving as a pimp to the Russians Czar finding American women to be sent over there for the Russian Czar to (have access to).

Zoe Morgan 19:16

Oh my goodness!

Easton Phillips 19:17

I also was kind of curious, like, so his-

Dylan Rawles 19:19

Zoe's face is priceless.

Zoe Morgan 19:21

For those of you that can't see my face, my jaw's on the floor.

Easton Phillips 19:24

One thing that I'm also thinking about is that Andrew Jackson is notorious for all the duels he got in.

Dylan Rawles 19:29

Jackson's from Tennessee. And in that period, you're you're at the tail end of it this this age of honor. "If my honor is threatened. I only have my honor. Right. Honor is my capital to do anything, right. It's my credit score." (Laughs) And so if someone's threatening it, you're going to challenge them to save your honor. And the mudslinging that's happening in the election is relevant because Rachel Jackson

dies after the election, but before he goes to the White House, I think it was a heart issue that we actually think killed her. But Jackson blamed Henry Clay. He blamed the election he blamed everyone who was slinging mud said it was too much for her and she died. And so he never forgave any of them. And he took it personally. And he's been in duels. So he's already he's, he's got bullets in him. His own personal health is failing. He's in so much pain. He's nursing these grudges, because if anyone can hold a grudge, it's Andrew Jackson, they he thinks they killed his beloved Rachel. And he thinks there's this huge conspiracy against him. Right, right, the bank and the Congress and clay in the in the it's just the psychology of Andrew Jackson. It's fascinating.

Okay so, taking all of that into consideration. Can we dive a little bit into some of Jackson's policies and how they relate to the idea of populism and support of the common man? Like what was his platform?

Well, it's pretty vague. They left it open. The Democrats knew that if they wanted to get elected in '28 that they needed a broad coalition, right? Today, we'd call that a 'big tent party'. So they were pretty vague about everything because they didn't want to tick anybody off. And they wanted everyone to think they were for them. So one of the biggest issues in 1828 is the tariff, tariffs are essentially you bring a good end you pay a duty. And the 1828 Tariff was controversial because the south believed they were getting the short end of the stick- they thought it was it favored northern industry, and it did. They're very blatant. The politicians are that it's a protectionist tariff, and that they are protecting American industry. Well, the South thought that they were essentially paying to protect the north, and they weren't getting anything out of it. And 'if I'm not getting anything out of this government, then I don't want in it.' And so you're going to see the beginning of nullification. And this idea that people are throwing around disunion, that if if we are being treated unfairly, then we're going to 'take our toys and go home', especially South Carolina, because it's always South Carolina.

Easton Phillips 21:57

It's always South Carolina, a leaf could fall off a tree and South Carolina is like, "I'm, seceding." (Secession). Sorry. (You're not wrong) No offense to anyone listening to South Carolina. We love y'all.

Dylan Rawles 22:09

So you would think that a politician running for office is going to take a firm stance either way on the tariffs, because that's what's on everybody's mind. Jackson doesn't- to pro-tariff congressman, he's like, 'Yeah, I'm in favor of a judicious tariff'- "judicious", is what he says. That gives you a lot of wiggle room later. And to anti-tariff men, he is saying that, 'yes, this tariff is too high, it needs to be adjusted'. So he's very middle of the road- doesn't want to annoy anybody. So instead, they ran on this theme of reform, that this government is corrupt, the powers that are ruling the banks are corrupt, we are going to reform it. And that's what he gets elected on, he overwhelmingly wins the

vote, he becomes president. And immediately he's going to begin his reform. And it's going to be controversial.

Easton Phillips 22:59

I also want to take some- these are some quotes from from Jackson, I got this from an article from the Tennessee historical quarterly, that will be cited as well, when I put when we publish this thing. So listen to what Jackson said in his farewell address. He says, "never for a moment believe the great body of the citizens of any state or states can deliberately intend to do wrong." He also says that the President is the, "direct representative of the American people". So when we're talking about populism, this whole thing of like, well-the people can do no wrong. And really, the President is just supposed to be, you know, he's just one of the guys you know, and how populism, really- it kind of falls into these two camps, right? The stylistic or the substantial. A lot of historians think that Jackson falls more into the stylistic areas. So stylistic means like, it's only really- it only exists for the ends of attracting support. You know, it's more of persuasion than an actual ideology, because he really wasn't doing anything. And maybe you disagree with this. But like, if it seems like he wasn't really doing anything necessarily revolutionary, he was just reinforcing and repeating cliches in his era and just made them resonate very powerfully with all the crises that were going on. I was just wondering what you thought about this whole issue of the rhetoric of like, Is he truly a populist, or was he just using that, like, "I can just run with this?"

Dylan Rawles 24:29

I think Jackson is definitely more of a stylistic rhetorical populist, thinking about his specific policies and the things that he does once he is in the White House. I think things have tinges of populism. But also I think, a lot of that was stuff that he personally believed anyway, and so he was kind of just using populism as a- I don't want to say a cloak to get what he wanted done, but as a tool to get support for his policies. Yeah, and none of his policies are very long lasting. Like, I'd argue that probably the only policy of his that we are still dealing with today is Indian removal. Right? Because you have people that were displaced and people are now torn away from their ancestral homeland and stuck on reservations and things like that.

Easton Phillips 25:14

But even with that, that was also happening before Jackson, right?

Dylan Rawles 25:17

Right. Jackson wasn't even the originator of that, right. They've been forcing West the Native Americans for centuries before Jackson came along. I mean, you could argue that Jackson is the first one who started using the might of the federal government to meet those ends. Because I think

before a lot of it was states and indirectly the government, but this is the first time I think the government is saying 'you're moving, whether you want to or not.'

Easton Phillips 25:41

Hence why one of Jackson's biggest things that he's always associated with is the Trail of Tears.

Dylan Rawles 25:46

We always think of Jackson when we think of Indian removal, but like, like you said, he's not the first one to do it. We don't think about the governors, the state politicians, the Indian agents, all these people who wanted it to happen, it usually gets put in Andrew Jackson's lap, but don't get me wrong, he wanted it to happen. But so did so many people that I think get left off the hook. If we condense Indian removal to Andrew Jackson, the Indiana governor is calling forth a militia to force the Potawatomi out of here in 1840 or 1838.

Zoe Morgan 26:15

Okay, so Dylan, can you tell us who was left out of Jackson's movement then.

Dylan Rawles 26:20

Jackson's movement is very much focused on white males. It is the era of 'white male democracy'. So that's going to leave out women of all race, and Native Americans, African Americans, even some foreign groups are all getting left out of Jackson's idea of who the people are. Now, that's not to say that they are merely victims and they are being taken advantage of, right. They're still finding ways to exert power, they're still finding ways to have their voices heard. Native Americans are sending delegations to Congress, trying to plead their case, the five Civilized Tribes had tried to assimilate and take up white culture and an effort to appease the federal government. That doesn't work and the federal government still kicks them off their land. African Americans are hosting conventions, right? The colored convention movement, starting in Ohio after a race riot in 1829. A group in Philadelphia meets and says we need to band together and start thinking about what we can do for ourselves, how can we protect ourselves? And so they're going to meet for decades up through the Civil War and even after. Women: they're taking part in moral movements. So- temperance abolition, things like that. They're sending petitions to Congress, they're collecting signatures on petitions, they're hosting fairs, raising money for for these moral societies, and just their voice is being heard that way, either directly by sending petitions, but also just by having conversations with family and loved ones and other women, that is a way for them to exert their political voice.

Zoe Morgan 27:54

Can you touch on a little bit more like how Jackson's populism is still impacting us today and other ways?

Dylan Rawles 28:00

I think Jackson's legacy- populist legacy- is more on the rhetoric, the way he was framing things, right. So when he vetoes the bank charter, in 1832, he has this line where he says: "The rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes, to make the rich richer, and the potent, more powerful. The humble members of society, the farmers, mechanics and laborers, who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves have a right to complain of the injustice of their government." I mean, this is rhetoric. And these are, these are things that people are still using today. Right? That is language that is going to be used again, by the original populist move in the 1890s. It's going to be used by William Jennings Bryan, Huey Long, FDR, you know, Bernie Sanders, these are all things, this is all the same rhetoric, it is the people versus the corrupt elite who are taking advantage of the system and leaving people behind. Jackson doesn't originate any of that he was not this great political thinker. Right, right. To him, he was the embodiment of these these people that he's talking about. But these are all ideas that came up during Jefferson's presidency in the 18- early 1800s against the Federalists, who were seen as elitist and almost monarchical, right? There were accusations the Federalists favored a monarchy because they were so afraid of the people, right? They were worried that a true democracy, the people could not handle having that much power, and it would fall to ruin, right? Because there's, they're looking at what's happening in France, in the 1790s, and the French Revolution, and they're like, that is what that is a reign of terror that we do not want to see here. And so the Federalists and later Whigs, partially- they're going to favor a government of the elite, right, the educated now, people might be able to work their way up to that, but until then, they are going to be ruled by their "betters", essentially, whereas John accident his movement says that, like he says in his farewell address "the people know no wrong and they can do it, they can do their job." I think another legacy, besides the rhetoric is, Jackson kind of gives birth to the spoil system, which today is not so much of a problem, right, because it's kind of been curtailed a little bit. But it was a huge problem in the late 1800s, where rotation is this idea that people don't need to work in government for long- you do not have to be a longtime government employee to be able to do the job, an average citizen should be able to do the job. And they should, because Jackson believed that if someone stayed in a position of power too long, even if it's just an appointee, even if it's like an appointee at a land office, if they're there too long, they are going to lose touch of what the people are doing what the people want, they are going to be more likely to turn an eye to corruption. And they're going to start thinking how they can benefit themselves. And so Jackson, one of his first proposals in his first annual message to Congress, is that Federal Appointees should have a four year term limit. And that these positions need to be made in a way that anybody can do them that you don't need a certain amount of education or a certain skill level, that Joe Schmo off the street should be able to do it. Now, there's no evidence that Jackson intended to use this to pack his party members into government. But other people did. One congressman said that basically "to the victors go the spoils", and that's where you get the term the

spoil system. Because he's saying, hey, we won fair and square, it's our job to put these positions- and putting members of your party into government is not new, right? nothing new under the sun. Jefferson did it. In 1801, he started putting Republicans into office and getting rid of Adams' appointees, but Jefferson had done it in 1801. So we're, we're almost 30 years removed from that. So it was kind of peculiar to people, because they don't remember that- they don't think about that.

In terms of number Jackson is going to replace one in 10 Federal Appointees, which is less than Jefferson does, but it's the scope that Jackson does it in. The civil officers that the President appoints himself saw a replacement rate of 50%. So I mean, it is a massive turnover. He appointed over 40 sitting congressmen to positions, but it's questionably constitutional, because can you take members from the legislature and move them over to a federal post without any approval from Congress? Right. So like, if you're going to be named a minister, you need congressional approval, right? Congress has to approve it. But if you're just taking them, and putting them in other posts, that's a little problematic, questionable, a little questionable there. One of the reasons is when Jackson- he never viewed Adams as legitimate. When he got into office, he started an audit of the Treasury- come to find out the Treasury auditor under Adams had stolen \$7,000, which in 1820, is a lot of money. So that's another reason that Jackson is so anxious to get this rotation going because he sees the corruption that is inherent in federal government. Now, we won't talk about how some of his appointees also started stealing money and how the man he named collector of the Port of New York stole over a million dollars. We won't necessarily go into that, but I just (Jolly laughter)

Zoe Morgan 31:59
Not corrupt at all.....

Dylan Rawles 33:21
One guy stole more than all of Adam's appointees did. And Van Buren, you know, the vice president- well he was Secretary of State and he was vice president- he even told Jackson, he goes, "this dude's a crook, do not appoint him." Jackson, he goes, "Nah, he'll be fine." Jackson was a terrible judge of character. He's like, this guy's great, and then come to find out the stole a million dollars.

Zoe Morgan 33:48
Okay, so we talked a little bit about how populism is still impacting us today. So in your honest opinion, do you think populism is something that we should fear?

Dylan Rawles 33:56
I mean, if it's by- I mean, I don't think there's anything inherently bad about speaking for the people and wanting them to get a fair shake at things. But the problem is, so many times, populism doesn't serve as a policy agenda. So you have to pair it with something else. And I think historically, what

we've paired it with is like, dictatorship, right? "I speak for the people. I know what the people need. No one's going to stand in my way to hell with any form of democracy anymore, because it's all corrupt. So I'm just going to bypass it all." So I think, by itself, no. But the way it's been used historically, yes. It probably is something to be worried about. I mean, because I don't know enough about like European politics, but in a populism is a large, complicated issue in both Europe and South America. And there populism is gonna be different than ours. But historically, there's, I believe, is has been tied with dictatorships and regimes that were less than good.

Zoe Morgan 34:57

So do you think that any one person can truly be the voice of the people?

Dylan Rawles 35:01

No, no, no. because there's no, there's no monolithic people. I think at best, you can try to speak for the groups of people, while acknowledging that there are so many different interest groups that you have to work with. But I think this myth of "the people" is is more damaging, I think, then, than anything, especially when you're trying to govern, because you can't speak for everybody, you can't govern for everybody, someone inevitably is going to get left out of something you cannot have it all ways.

Zoe Morgan 35:37

Do you think that there's a way in which we can give like, I guess, different groups of people, platforms without there being like one spokesperson, you know, to, like, express, like what their needs are.

Dylan Rawles 35:47

I mean, I guess technically, that's what Congress is supposed to do. Right? You're supposed to be able to elect a congressman that relates to you. But then we've kept the same number of congressmen since like, 1920-something, even though our population has skyrocketed. It makes me think of John C. Calhoun. And his idea, he was very fearful of majoritarianism, that just because the majority thinks that's true, doesn't mean that we should do it. Right. Now, his view is being a southern slaver who thought that everyone was trying to take his slaves. But he had this idea of a concurrent majority, that for any legislation to pass, you needed to get approval from everybody. Now, he didn't outline what that process looked like. It's more of a theory. But like, the different interest groups all need to sign off on this legislation before it gets passed. So no one is getting hurt. I never thought I'd ever use that in a conversation. But here we are. It's hard- political theory is hard. I mean, it is- there's no good way to do it. Right? You can sit here and theorize when it comes to it. You're trying to keep everyone happy and trying to make a fair system? Can you ever reach true equality?

Zoe Morgan 36:55

That's a whole other episode.

Easton Phillips 36:58

Next, next episode, we'll tackle that one.

Zoe Morgan 37:00

Another hour of conversation.

Easton Phillips 37:03

One more thing, there has been some critique to using populism to define some movements, since it can obscure the specific ideology. Is there a purpose in defining a group or movement as populous?

Dylan Rawles 37:16

I think, if you're going to use populism as a frame of reference, or a theoretical framework to look at something, I think you have to expand who the people are. Right? Because not everybody is included, right? Talking about Andrew Jackson, African Americans, Native Americans, none of them are included. So I think, who they're including and the people, I think, is useful. So using populism, that way, I'm saying who's included? Who's not and why, why are we not including certain groups? Or why are we including others. So I think it can be useful that way. But I do admit that it is hard, because it just gets used. So loosely.

Zoe Morgan 38:00

Populism isn't inherently bad, there are like good elements to it, right? Wanting the common good. And being champions for the people. There are also bad elements to it. And so there are a few things that we can do to, I think, be more aware of those things. That way, we don't kind of fall into some of those traps. So the populist style creates an "us versus them" that is not often accurate of representation. And so it can often be more divisive than anything. So I think, definitely be aware of other perspectives and be aware of the harm that's caused, whether that's intentionally or unintentionally. And it happens for a reason. So we want to be aware of some of the factors that lead to populist movements and solve them together. And again, some of those factors that lead to the populist movements we talked about earlier in this episode, especially again, with Andrew Jackson, and most of them right leaders of populist movements often prey on the fears and anxieties sometimes of the people when claiming to be a champion for them. So again, we kind of talked about how there really can't be just one person representing the people. And so how can we come together collectively, to express these concerns in a constructive way that leads to change for the betterment of everyone in our society, instead of maybe placing that on one person or placing our

trust in just one person to do that? Also, when we're reacting to populist movements, we want to avoid limiting forms of democracy, I think it's very easy again, when we're on, you know, an opposing side to say like, well, these people should just either like stop talking, or we don't want to hear their opinion or whatever it is, but we are restricting their freedom of thought information or expression, and the ability to criticize a populist leader, we have that right, and that freedom, so we want to make sure that we're not limiting that as well. And there if you're not really sure where to start to help you learn and understand these different perspectives, there are actually a few resources that our education team here at Conner Prairie uses to help develop an empathy and understanding and so one of those and it's one of my personal favorites- is the national public housing museums 36 questions for civic love, which we will actually link in the show notes. And so the 36 questions for civic love. Again, it's a series of questions that help us fall in civic love with each other. What is civic love? Might you ask? Well, it's one's love for society expressed through a commitment to the common good. It's a belief in the idea that we're all better off when we are all better off. So again, it kind of sounds like the good parts of populism- kind of I populism developed, right? And so some of these questions are a little bit more lighthearted. Such as like, what's your favorite kitchen smell? Or have you ever done a choreographed dance? And do you remember any of those dance moves? So again, kind of, you know, like, what is it that we have in common are just learning a little bit more about each other? And starting at this, you know, kind of more, I wouldn't say basic level, but just kind of like, again, light hearted. But then there are some questions that are a little bit more challenging, such as under what circumstances would you call the police on a neighbor? Or tell me more about a time when you felt isolated, or alone? And each question is intentionally designed to help us listen to one another and understand for ourselves with a common good really is, instead of what we think that idea might be, and how we can help each other achieve that. And then another resource that we use is: Educating for American democracy. They have a thematic roadmap, which we actually utilize in one of our field trips here at Conner Prairie, that focuses on civics. And so the roadmap is a guidance and an inquiry framework that states that local school districts and educators can use to transform the teaching of history and civics to meet the needs of a diverse 21st century K through 12 student body. And so they have these different content themes. I believe that there are seven of them, that you can focus on. Again, this could be with students, it's primarily used in like museum education and in classrooms, but again, you- anyone can use them- Easton, we can use them. And we should (I definitely should). Yeah, so the content themes, a few of them, like civic participation, we the people, our changing landscapes, some of the questions included in that thematic roadmap that are very relevant to this conversation today. But one of them: how can the history of how Americans have come together and made decisions in groups and form our civic participation today? And what values, virtues, and principles can knit together we the people of the United States of America? Yeah, so all of these questions just help support the development of skills that are necessary for healthy civic participation. And I highly recommend that you check them out.

Easton Phillips 42:40

Well said.

Zoe Morgan 42:42

Thank you.

Easton Phillips 42:43

I know last time we did a little bit more of the biography of John Tyler whereas this episode, we focus more on populism for Andrew Jackson. But we are going to continue with our one time tradition. Now two time tradition of giving a president a rating of one white house on fire to 100 white houses on fire. So last time, Hannah and I both gave John Tyler 100 white houses on fire, which is the worst you can give. Ryan was a little bit nicer. He did 88, Dylan said 90. So now I want to ask all of you, I know we didn't get into every single nook and cranny of Andrew Jackson's life. This episode was lot sadder than I thought it was gonna be but um, you know. I want to ask you all in your own personal opinion how many white houses on fire do you think Andrew Jackson has earned?

Dylan Rawles 43:30

I think a solid 75. 75.

Easton Phillips 43:34

Can you elaborate?

Dylan Rawles 43:35

Well, there's other things about Jackson we didn't talk about right like, Tyler dies a traitor. Andrew Jackson threatens to send the army to enforce the tariff and basically threatens to whip South Carolina's butt if they try to secede, so I think that's worth something.

Zoe Morgan 43:53

Okay, I'm giving him a 90 (90).

Easton Phillips 43:56

Yeah, there's like 10 that keeps him from being the worst of the worst.

Zoe Morgan 44:00

I mostly feel bad about, was it Rachel Jackson, his wife? Yeah, that I feel sad for him. That makes me feel sad for him. I never thought that I would say that about Andrew Jackson ever but yeah, those civic love questions, man.

Easton Phillips 44:16
They get they get you.

Zoe Morgan 44:17
Developing empathy for Andrew Jackson.

Easton Phillips 44:19
I am too an empath. You know, I do feel bad for Andrew Jackson, you're not doing your best work when you're, you know, in grief. 95. And that's me being nice.

Zoe Morgan 44:30
This conversation was about the people versus the elite and the problems of defining the people in a historical context. And today, I want to bring it back around to Prairietown. Prairietown is an attempt at a different way of thinking about the people through seeing people in their everyday lives and their everyday problems. Through this. It's our hope to take "the people" from an abstract concept to a real more complicated understanding of the past.

Easton Phillips 44:55
Well thank you all for taking another dive with us through some problematic history and talking about Andrew Jackson, and you know, yeah Andrew Jackson and populism what a- what a slew of emotions I was not prepared to be feeling about him. So now we're gonna let y'all know that if you guys want to write in, we always- the comment sections are open on all our social media. And you can find this wherever you get your podcasts. So we're on Spotify, we're on Apple podcasts and we are on the Conner Prairie website.

Zoe Morgan 45:24
And you can also follow us on social media on Instagram @ thisisproblematicpodcastcp or on X (twitter) @ problematicpod2

Easton Phillips 45:33
Until next time- y'all stay safe out there. High Five! (Impact)

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>

Our sources:

UC Santa Barbara. "Veto Message [of the Reauthorization of the Bank of the United States]." The American Presidency Project. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/veto-message-the-re-authorization-bank-the-united-states>.

Remini, Robert V. *Andrew Jackson and the Course of American Freedom, 1822-1832*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.

Watson, Harry L. "Andrew Jackson's Populism." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (FALL 2017).
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/2654029>

Wilentz, Sean. *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005.

Further Reading/Viewing:

Image of one of the "coffin hand bills" and a description from the Library of congress

<https://www.loc.gov/item/2008661734/>