and proclaim to the world that we are palsied by the will of our constituents, would it not be to cast away the bounties of Providence and doom ourselves to perpetual inferiority? In the course of the year now drawing to its close we have beheld, under the auspices and at the expense of one State of this Union, a new university unfolding its portals to the sons of science and holding up the torch of human improvement to eyes that seek the light. We have seen under the persevering and enlightened enterprise of another State the waters of our Western lakes mingle with those of the ocean. If undertakings like these have been accomplished in the compass of a few years by the authority of single members of our Confederation, can we, the representative authorities of the whole Union, fall behind our fellow-servants in the exercise of the trust committed to us for the benefit of our common sovereign by the accomplishment of works important to the whole and to which neither the authority nor the resources of any one State can be adequate?

Questions

1. Why does President Adams believe that the federal government should promote the sciences and arts?

2. What does he mean by the remark "Liberty is power"?

62. Andrew Jackson, Veto of the Bank Bill (1832)

Source:* James D. Richardson, ed., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents *(Washington, D.C., 1896–99), vol. 3, pp. 1139–54.

The central political struggle of the Age of Jackson was the president's war on the Bank of the United States. Many Americans, including Jackson, distrusted bankers as "non-producers" who contributed nothing to the nation's wealth but profited from the labor of others. They especially resented the economic power concentrated in the hands of the Second Bank of the United States, a private corporation that conducted the federal government's financial business and regulated currency issued by state banks. The Bank had been given a twenty-year charter by Congress in 1816. Many Democrats, suspicious of concentrated political and economic power, called it the Monster Bank, an illegitimate union of political authority and entrenched economic privilege.

The issue of the Bank's future came to a head in 1832, when the institution's allies persuaded Congress to approve a bill extending it for another twenty years. Jackson vetoed the bill. His veto message is perhaps the central document of what would come to be called "Jacksonian democracy." The proper role of government, Jackson insisted, was to offer "equal protection" to all citizens. In a democracy, it was unacceptable for Congress to create a source of economic power and privilege unaccountable to the people. Jackson presented himself to "humble" Americans as their defender. His effective appeal to popular sentiments helped him win reelection in 1832, ensuring the death of the Bank of the United States.

THE BILL "TO modify and continue" the act entitled "An act to incorporate the subscribers to the Bank of the United States" . . . ought not to become a law. The powers and privileges possessed by the existing bank are unauthorized by the Constitution, subversive of the rights of the States, and dangerous to the liberties of the people. . . . The present corporate body, denominated the president, directors, and company of the Bank of the United States, . . . enjoys an exclusive privilege of banking under the authority of the General Government, a monopoly of its favor and support, and, as a necessary consequence, almost a monopoly of the foreign and domestic exchange. The powers, privileges, and favors bestowed upon it in the original charter, by increasing the value of the stock far above its par value, operated as a gratuity of many millions to the stockholders. . . .

Every monopoly and all exclusive privileges are granted at the expense of the public, which ought to receive a fair equivalent. The many millions which this act proposes to bestow on the stockholders of the existing bank must come directly or indirectly out of the earnings of the American people.... It is not conceivable how the present stockholders can have any claim to the special favor of the Government.... Should [the Bank's] influence become concentered, as it may under the operation of such an act as this, in the hands of a self-elected directory ... will there not be cause to tremble for the purity of our elections? ...

It is maintained by the advocates of the bank that its constitutionality in all its features ought to be considered as settled by precedent and by the decision of the Supreme Court. To this conclusion I can not assent.... The Congress, the Executive, and the Court must each for itself be guided by its own opinion of the Constitution. Each public officer who takes an oath to support the Constitution swears that he will support it as he understands it, and not as it is understood by others.... The opinion of the judges has no more authority over Congress than the opinion of Congress has over the judges, and on that point the President is independent of both....

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth can not be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, 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. There are no necessary evils in government. Its evils exist only in its abuses. If it would confine itself to equal protection, and, as Heaven does its rains, shower its favors alike on the high and the low, the rich and the poor, it would be an unqualified blessing. In the act before me there seems to be a wide and unnecessary departure from these just principles.

Nor is our Government to be maintained or our Union preserved by invasions of the rights and powers of the several States. In thus attempting to make our General Government strong we make it weak. Its true strength consists in leaving individuals and States as much as possible to themselves—in making itself felt, not in its power, but in its beneficence; not in its control, but in its protection; not in binding the States more closely to the center, but leaving each to move unobstructed in its proper orbit.

Experience should teach us wisdom. Most of the difficulties our Government now encounters ... have sprung from an abandonment of the legitimate objects of Government.... Many of our rich men have not been content with equal protection and equal benefits, but have besought us to make them richer by act of Congress. By attempting to gratify their desires we have ... arrayed section against section, interest against interest, and man against man. We [must] at least take a stand against all new grants of monopolies and exclusive privileges, against any prostitution of our Government to the advancement of the few at the expense of the many.

Questions

1. Why does Jackson distinguish between just and unjust "distinctions in society"?

2. What does Jackson see as the legitimate scope of governmental action?