

“A TAX ON THE MANY, TO ENRICH A FEW”: JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY VS. THE PROTECTIVE TARIFF

BY
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The core concepts underlying Jacksonian Democracy—equal protection of the laws; an aversion to a moneyed aristocracy, exclusive privileges, and monopolies, and a predilection for the common man; majority rule; and the welfare of the community over the individual—have long been defined almost exclusively by the Bank War, which commenced in earnest with the election of Andrew Jackson in 1828. Yet, this same rhetoric proved far more pervasive and consistent when one considers the ardent opposition to the protective system. Opponents of the protective tariff, commencing with the Tariff of 1816 and continuing unabated to the Walker Tariff of 1846, thus contributed directly to the development of Jacksonian Democracy, and, by introducing and continually employing this language, gave to the tariff debates in the United States a unique angle that differed from the debates in Europe.

I. INTRODUCTION

Promotion of free trade and opposition to the protective tariff became a staple of Jackson's Democratic party after Old Hickory's election in 1828, and a disdain for, even an outright detestation of, the adverse socio-economic and class consequences believed to be inherent in the protective system immediately became a leading factor for opposing the tariff. To be sure, numerous and various arguments—economic, political, social, constitutional—arose during the always intense tariff debates in the three decades after 1815, both in defense of and in opposition to the protective tariff. As the tariff issue evolved from the Tariff of 1816 to the Tariff of 1846, some of these arguments waned, others disappeared, some transformed, while others intensified.

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Yet, one of the more, if not the most, prevalent and consistent themes consuming tariff debates emphasized the core components of Jacksonian Democracy: equal protection of the laws; an aversion to a moneyed aristocracy, exclusive privileges, and monopolies, and a predilection for the common man; majority rule; and the welfare of the community over the individual. All were cardinal constituents of majoritarian democracy. But scholars have focused on the Bank War, more than on any other issue of the day, in an effort to locate the meaning of Jacksonian Democracy, and, in doing so, have overlooked the fact that the language characterizing the Bank War also epitomized the more extensive, equally divisive debates over the tariff. As such, the tariff issue stood throughout the antebellum era as a central feature in the larger development of Jacksonian Democracy, and thus this pivotal phenomenon of American history cannot be fully understood without including the great tariff controversy of the first half of the nineteenth century.¹

Late in the Jacksonian era, during the congressional debates resulting in the Walker Tariff of 1846, the prominent Whig politician and protectionist newspaper editor Horace Greeley declared that anti-tariff men were driven more “by jealousy or hatred of wealth than by dislike of protection *per se*.” It was, according to Greeley, “the everlasting class war of a portion of those who HAVE NOT against the mass of those who HAVE.” The constant clamor by opponents of the protective system during the 1840s indeed consistently stressed the alleged injustice and inequality of the tariff; that is, “its favoritism to the Rich at the expense of the Poor.” This factor above all others, Greeley claimed, compelled Congress to alter substantially the existing tariff, enconcing free trade over protection, a policy not overturned until the Civil War. Greeley’s assessment of the American anti-tariff crusade during the late Jacksonian period proved quite perceptive, for his assessment reflected precisely the prevailing position of Jacksonian Democrats on the tariff (1845, pp. 113, 114).

Yet, very early in the Jacksonian era, three decades before Greeley made his perceptive comments, nascent Jackson partisans levied the very same language in the congressional debates resulting in the Tariff of 1816. Congressmen opposing tariff legislation argued that it would create “an aristocratical interest,” result in a “monopoly to a few large manufacturers,” tax the “indispensable articles of life,” and fall with “peculiar and unequal severity on the poorer classes of citizens.” Three decades later, the same argument remained a fundamental appeal of those opposed to protective tariffs. Congressmen again deemed the tariff the “friend of special bounties and privileges,” the “advocate of the most enlarged monopoly,” an “aristocracy at the expense of the hard earnings of the poorer citizens,” a system that taxed the articles of “prime necessity,” and did so solely “for the benefit of the few, a favored class, to the oppression of the great masses of the people.” The evolution

¹For the relationship of the Bank War to the development of Jacksonian Democracy, see Remini (1967, 1981, and 1984). Other scholars who have recently addressed the evolution and meaning of Jacksonian Democracy, focusing more on the Bank War over the tariff debates, include Wilentz (2005), Watson (1990), and Sellers (1991). Sellers even declares that the “Bank War was the acid test of American democracy” (p. 321). One of the best studies of Jacksonian Democracy, Ellis (1987), concentrates solely on the nullification crisis, overlooking the connection of Jacksonian Democracy to the protective tariff *per se*. For Jackson’s intense belief in the inherent corruption of and outright disdain for the Bank of the United States, see the article herein by James Morrison and Avery White.

of Jacksonian Democracy clearly began before Andrew Jackson assumed the presidency, as the fundamental precepts were being firmly laid in the 1816 tariff debates, well before the war against national banking. Beginning with the Tariff of 1816 and culminating with the Tariff of 1846, this particular democratic-oriented language consistently defined the free trade, anti-tariff movement. Consequently, proponents of protection reacted to this rhetoric and developed their own arguments also couched in the familiar terms of Jacksonian Democracy (*Annals of Congress* 1815–16, pp. 1262, 1274, 1275, 1284, 1285; *Congressional Globe* 1843–44, pp. 560, 569, 582; 1845–46, pp. 996, 1006, 1010).

II. LANGUAGE OF JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY

In his 1832 veto of the recharter of the Bank of the United States, President Jackson provided the superlative pronouncement of the fundamental principles of Jacksonian Democracy. Old Hickory declared that the powers and privileges possessed by the national bank ultimately threatened the rights of the people, for the bank represented the unadulterated symbol of exclusive privilege, a monopoly benefitting the rich to the detriment of the common man. The terms “exclusive privilege” and “monopoly” pervade the veto. Jackson denounced the use of legislation to bestow special privileges to the few that were denied to the many. “It is easy to conceive that great evils to our country and its institutions might flow from such a concentration of power in the hands of a few men irresponsible to the people,” he avowed. Jackson recognized that distinctions in society always occurred under any good government, and that equality of talent, education, and wealth could never be produced by human institutions, but in the full enjoyment of his natural advantages, every man was “equally entitled to protection by law.” The president regretted that the “rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes,” and when the laws “undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions” and to “make the rich richer and the potent more powerful,” then the “humble members” of society who had no means to secure like favors to themselves had every right to complain of the injustice. If the government confined itself to equal protection, then it would be an “unqualified blessing” to all Americans, rich and poor. But “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.” So, in the effort to make the national government responsive to the people, “we can 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” (Richardson 1896, vol. 2, pp. 581, 590–591).

In the months following the veto, Jackson’s partisans in Congress, throughout the United States, and via the press inundated the people with this very language, making it the ideological foundation of the Democratic party during the Jacksonian era. Because of his long-standing intense animosity for and utter distrust in the Bank of the United States, Jackson directed this ideology almost exclusively to destroying the “hydra-headed monster.” Yet, he still recognized in his 1832 annual message the concomitant discontent engendered by the tariff. “In some sections of the republic,” he declared, “its influence is deprecated as tending to concentrate wealth into a few

hands, and as creating those germs of dependence and vice which in other countries have characterized the existence of monopolies and proved so destructive of liberty and the general good" (Richardson 1896, vol. 2, p. 599). As Jackson wielded the language of Jacksonian Democracy to eliminate one aristocratic, anti-democratic institution—the Bank of the United States—his partisan disciples persistently used it to abolish another one—the protective system. As a result, the tariff question contributed directly to the idiomatic and ideological development of Jacksonian Democracy.

III. JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY AND OPPONENTS OF THE PROTECTIVE TARIFF

Like Jackson's 1832 veto and the concomitant oratory characterizing the entire Bank War, the tariff debates from 1816 to 1846 echoed the essential ingredients constituting Jacksonian Democracy. Equal protection of the laws was fundamental. Opponents of the protective system maintained that no legislature should ever grant exclusive privileges to a specific interest or group of individuals. To do so contradicted republican principles and undermined popular government. The protective tariff was, argued the disciples of the democratic creed, an artificial and unnatural intervention by the government benefitting the few and injuring the many, and, therefore, patently unjust. To deny equal protection of the laws, and to grant exclusive privileges and establish monopolies by government legislation, created the worst of all forms of governments: a moneyed aristocracy. A moneyed aristocracy, which always gained control of the mechanism of government, promoted the interests of a small, wealthy group of individuals contrary to the needs of the community, fostered selfish, narrow interests detrimental to the public welfare, and epitomized the reign of the few and the disenfranchisement of the many.

The tariff debates, like the war against the national bank, also exposed a distinct class component to Jacksonian Democracy. Anti-tariff men consistently opposed the protective tariff because it laid duties on the necessities of life and not on luxuries, exclusively used by the wealthiest few. The tariff not only hurt the many, it also fell more heavily on the poor and benefitted the rich, and was oppressive as it was unjust. Here, then, stood the pillars of Jacksonian Democracy—the necessity for equal protection of the laws; repugnance for exclusive privileges, monopolies, and a moneyed aristocracy; and abhorrence for government policy and legislation favoring the few and injuring the many, making the rich richer and the poor poorer. These were the core components consistently canted by tariff opponents throughout the Jacksonian era, principles proponents of the tariff perpetually disputed, even to the point of adopting the precepts of Jacksonian Democracy to prove the efficacy and value of the protective system.

During all of the tariff debates from 1816 to 1846, partisan affiliation defined more than any other factor the parameters of Jacksonian Democracy in its fight against protection. From 1816 to 1828, partisans of William H. Crawford and Jackson, and generally Democratic Republicans altogether, constantly reiterated the essential idiomatic elements of Jacksonian Democracy against the tariff. Conversely, partisans of John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay, and National Republicans in general, countered such charges in defense of protection, gradually developing arguments that likewise incorporated

the core components of Jacksonian Democracy. With the solidification of the second American party system during Jackson's presidency, Democrats overwhelmingly employed the now matured and familiar language of Jacksonian Democracy, while Whigs, nearly to a person, defended the protective system. Partisan considerations outweighed any sectional, geographic, or regional economic factors. During the 1820 debates over the Baldwin Bill, for example, Federalists from New England joined Old Republicans from the South and Democratic Republicans from the Mid-Atlantic states to attack the legislation. Each of the congressmen from these regions regularly employed the rhetoric of Jacksonian Democracy, regardless of his region or section, rural or urban (*Annals of Congress* 1819–20, pp. 1955, 1958, 2058, 2000, 2001, 2007, 2086; Cambreleng 1821, pp. 92–94; Taylor 1992, pp. 42, 44, 45, 85, 86, 113, 115, 120).

This fact remained unchanged during the 1846 debates. Democratic congressmen from the North and South, East and West, again made the rhetoric of Jacksonian Democracy their primary tool for terminating protection and adopting a general policy of free trade. All arguments previously employed to defeat the protective tariff—economic, political, constitutional—became secondary considerations. Democrats from the Old Northwest and the Mid-Atlantic joined their compatriots from the South, demanding equal protection of the laws and lambasting protection for perpetuating a moneyed aristocracy and a monopoly for the privileged few, favoring the few to the detriment of the many, making the rich richer and the poor poorer, and taxing the necessities of life rather than luxuries. Behind this constant barrage of the customary rhetoric of Jacksonian Democracy, then, Democrats succeeded in passing the Walker Tariff in 1846, ending the protective system and establishing a policy of free trade for the remainder of the antebellum period (*Congressional Globe* 1845–46, pp. 550, 560, 569, 582, 1006, 1008, 1010, 1012, 1020).

Their constituents followed the same pattern from 1816 to 1846, as memorials from citizens from rural Virginia repeated the same language as those from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. In 1820, for example, the Board of Manufactures of the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of American Manufactures condemned the Baldwin Bill as “unjust and oppressive,” for it “taxes the necessities of life most exorbitantly high, some of them used exclusively by the poor, and admits of low duties, comforts, conveniences, and luxuries, used chiefly and some of them exclusively by the rich.” The wealthy, who derived “far more advantage than the poor from the protection of Government,” ought to be taxed accordingly. The memorialists were persuaded that “the tariff of no nation in the civilized world affords a more striking picture of oppression of the poor—partially to the rich—or violation of the fundamental principles of sound legislation.” Third and fourth on their list were the “injustice of taxing the many for the benefit of the few” and the “dangers of monopoly,” respectively. This particular language of Jacksonian Democracy increased dramatically in both intensity and frequency during subsequent tariff debates (*Annals of Congress* 1819–20, pp. 1314, 1320, 1491, 1492, 1505, 1519, 1678, 2297, 2299, 2324, 2343, 2345, 2346).

The executive branch also participated in the rhetorical crusade against protection. While Old Hickory spewed the venom of Jacksonian Democracy against the national bank, Little Hickory—President James Polk—as vehemently assailed the tariff. No presidential administration during the Age of Jackson so assiduously attended to the task of dismantling the protective system. In his first annual message,

Polk called for modifications in the current tariff passed, criticizing duty levels that “bear most heavily on articles of common necessity and but lightly on articles of luxury.” The current tariff imposed the “greatest burden” on “labor and the poorer classes, who are least able to bear it,” while it protected wealth and exempted “the rich from paying their just proportion of the taxation” needed to support the government. Articles of prime necessity “used by the masses of the people” were subjected to “heavy taxes,” while articles of luxury, “which can be used only by the opulent,” were lightly taxed. Low duties should never be levied on articles of necessity, articles in general use and consumed “by the laborer and poor as well as by the wealthy citizen.” Taxation was a burden, so it should be imposed in a manner that operated equally on all classes of society and in proportion to their ability to bear it. But when government made the taxing power an actual benefit to one class, it necessarily increased the burden on others, and was, therefore, patently unjust. “The Government in theory knows no distinction of persons or classes,” Little Hickory declared, “and should not bestow upon some favors and privileges which all others may not enjoy” (Richardson 1896, vol. 4, pp. 403–406).

After Polk’s message, the Treasury secretary, Robert J. Walker, also reported to Congress, providing the outline for tariff reduction. Although Walker called for duty rates that were “discriminating neither for nor against any class or section,” the maximum revenue duty should be imposed on luxuries, and not levied on articles that “increased burdens upon the necessities of life.” But the current tariff “discriminates in favor of the rich and against the poor, by high duties upon nearly all the necessities of life.” The proposed tariff, however, by imposing maximum revenue duties on luxuries, would mitigate as far as practicable “that discrimination against the poor which results from every tariff.” Walker then touted the basic premises of Jacksonian Democracy as the foundation for a new tariff system: “Legislation for classes is against the doctrine of equal rights, repugnant to the spirit of our free institutions, and . . . may become but another form for privileged orders under the name of protection instead of privilege—indicated here not by rank or title, but by profits and dividend extracted from the many by taxes upon them for the benefit of the few” (Walker 1845, p. 1909).

Politicians were not alone in their use of the language of Jacksonian Democracy to attack the tariff. Journalists pervasively referred to the central tenets of the prevailing democratic ideology as well. During Jackson’s first term, Condy Raguet emerged as a leading free-trade advocate outside the halls of Congress, waging war against the tariff in the columns of his *Banner of the Constitution* (1969). Throughout his essays, Raguet frequently addressed the evils of monopolies and exclusive privileges, and criticized a system of government favoring the rich to the detriment of the poorer classes. Equal protection of the law also became a frequent refrain. Raguet continued his anti-tariff crusade by organizing the 1831 Philadelphia Free Trade Convention. Although convention delegates disagreed over the appropriate *ad valorem* duty and, most of all, the constitutionality of a protective tariff, they were, from the beginning, unanimous on one aspect: that it violated the essential precepts of Jacksonian Democracy. The convention drafted an *Address to the American People*, which referred in multiple instances to the unequal, unjust, and oppressive operation and nature of the current tariff system, “because it imposes burthens on the many for the benefit of the few.” The convention also composed a *Memorial* to Congress,

which condemned the tariff as “unequal and oppressive” with regard to the “several classes of society,” for it levied heavier duties on the necessities of life and not on luxuries, gave the “privileged manufacture” a monopoly, and thus “sacrificed without mercy the poorer classes of Society.” Prominent Massachusetts free trader Henry Lee supplemented the *Memorial* with a masterful and lengthy *Exposition of the Evidence* (1832) which continued the tirade against the protective tariff couched in terms of Jacksonian Democracy. The protective system, then, had certainly felt the brunt of Jacksonian rhetoric on the eve of the Tariff of 1832, a tariff clearly more favorable to the advancing forces of free trade. (See Raguett 1969, pp. 3, 6, 72–73, 96, 97, 107, 117, 118, 126, 166, 253, 262, 293, 296, 326, 391–392, 399, 402, 406, 407–408; *Journal of the Free Trade Convention* 1969, pp. 70–71; Gallatin 1832, pp. 9, 11, 47, 71, 77, 78, 79–80. See also Lee 1832, no. 4, pp. 3, 4, 9, 10; no. 5, pp. 2, 3, 20, 26; no. 6, pp. 18, 20, 22; no. 7, pp. 1, 2, 8, 10, 24.)

During Jackson’s second term, the radical Jacksonian editor William Leggett continued the attack on protection. Through the columns of his various newspapers, Leggett emerged as the new general of the *laissez-faire* ranks of Jacksonian Democracy, and the tariff continued to be a regular target of the familiar refrains of majoritarian democracy. Few men to date had so comprehensively and repeatedly broached all the core components of Jacksonian Democracy than Leggett had in his numerous editorials. He attacked monopoly and exclusive privilege, denounced special legislation benefitting the few over the community, deemed the protective tariff a tax on the many to enrich a moneyed aristocracy, and considered protection a system making the rich richer and the poor poorer. Above all, the tariff violated the equal protection of the laws, his most frequent chorus. Throughout Leggett’s writings, the essential pieces of Jacksonian Democracy, especially as it concerned the war against the American System, had coalesced in perfect harmony. He had, almost literally in some parts and certainly implicitly in others, restated the primary principles explicated in Jackson’s Bank Veto. By the end of Jackson’s presidency, Jacksonian Democracy became synonymous with free trade and equal rights; and, conversely, economic nationalism, as embodied in the American System, became synonymous with protection and exclusive privileges. More importantly for the evolution of Jacksonian Democracy, Leggett wedded democracy itself with “all the main principles of political economy,” deeming “democracy and political economy as twin sisters, pursuing a parallel direction” (Leggett 1984, pp. 12, 24, 32, 36, 38–39, 40, 234, 235, 278, 282, 294, 317, 341).

IV. JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY AND THE PROPONENTS OF THE PROTECTIVE TARIFF

Tariff advocates refused to be overborne by the consistent democratic appeals of the anti-tariff men. In fact, proponents of protection couched their arguments in terms consonant with majoritarian democracy, as they espoused a pro-tariff policy steeped in the very principles of Jacksonian Democracy. The most prevalent countercharge was the labor argument, introduced by historian George Mangold. According to Mangold, protectionists believed the tariff would benefit the laboring classes by providing them employment, raising their wages, increasing their access

to the necessaries and comforts of life, enhancing their quality of life, and allowing them enjoyments once out of their reach. By aiding labor, the protective tariff benefitted the consumer. Protection, argued tariff men, created a home market for this enlarged and expanding labor force, which increased demand for manufactured goods as well as agricultural products, and led to a greater supply of goods and commodities, which, ultimately, lowered the price of everyday items used by the common man. The protective system actually contributed to the precepts of Jacksonian Democracy by benefitting the poorer and middling classes. From 1816 to 1824, Mathew Carey, arguably the most avid advocate of the protective system other than Henry Clay himself, quickly emerged as the leading expositor of the labor argument. He published numerous essays promoting the protective system, arguing that protection would provide employment to the unemployed and idle, raise wages, and increase the quality of life for the average American.

Despite Carey's efforts and the appearance of the labor argument in the 1816 and 1820 debates, the idea failed to gain considerable ground by the Tariff of 1824, as the friends of protection exhibited little sympathy for the workingman. Not until the tariff debates from 1827 through to 1833 would the labor argument gain so much attention by tariff advocates. Delegates to the equally noted New York Convention of the Friends of Domestic Industry, meeting just weeks after the adjournment of their adversaries in Philadelphia, also employed the labor argument to defend democracy's backbone, the poor and middle class, the laborer and the workingman. Clay consistently took this tack during the tariff debates of 1832 and 1833. When Democrats made the rhetoric of Jacksonian Democracy their primary weapon of choice in the 1846 tariff debates, Whigs countered with equal ferocity with the labor argument. Both political parties argued intensely that they had the real welfare of the common man at heart (Mangold 1971, pp. 23, 28–29, 64, 66, 67, 69, 88, 92; *Annals of Congress* 1815–16, p. 1652, and 1819–20, p. 1933).

Tariff opponents, already well-armed with the well-oiled mechanism of Jacksonian Democracy, answered the labor argument from its inception. Democratic congressmen countered that the tariff undermined the conditions of the laborer and ultimately destroyed his humanity. Manufacturing dulled the senses of the laborer, made him an imbecile, deprived him of his moral sanity and his natural virtue, and turned him into a stultified slave of the wealthy taskmaster. Neither did protection raise wages. By the 1840s, aided by three decades of the tariff's operation and adequately armed with an array of facts, Democrats in Congress and in the White House consistently countered the labor argument. Manufacturing, and protection by implication, did nothing to ameliorate the condition of the working class; in fact, it worsened their lot tremendously. From 1816 to 1846, therefore, Jacksonian Democrats unleashed a barrage of rhetoric detailing the adverse effects of manufacturing on workers, on democratic society, and republican institutions in general, a counterattack to which those promoting the labor argument failed to rejoin (*Annals of Congress* 1819–20, pp. 1962, 2028, 2031–2033, 2060–2062, 2073).

Protectionists also challenged the claim made by free traders that protection embodied a moneyed aristocracy, an exclusive privilege benefitting the few to the detriment of the many, and enriching the wealthy and impoverishing the poor. Employing language consonant with that of majoritarian democracy, tariff men suggested that protection would not create monopolies, but would actually prevent them

by expanding the number of manufacturing establishments making basic goods and increasing competition, eventually diminishing the price of manufactured articles. The protective tariff was not a monopoly of individuals, but a national monopoly; it was not a grant of exclusive privileges to individuals, but “to the people at large.” Under a system of free trade, on the other hand, “men of but small capital, who are numerous” would be overwhelmed by the influx of foreign manufactures, and only those domestic manufacturing establishments “sustained by the largest capital could withstand the shock,” and the “destruction of competition in many parts of the country” would result in monopolies (*Register of Debates* 1827–28, p. 2059; 1831–32, p. 1552; 1832–33, pp. 1148, 1152–1154, 1211, 1458, 1784).

Tariff advocates introduced a more damning counter-argument during the debates of 1832 and 1833, one resonant with the established vocabulary of Jacksonian Democracy. Protection, not free trade, adamantly asserted the tariff men, embodied majority will, while the most vocal supporters of free trade, South Carolina Nullifiers, obviously represented a distinct minority of the country. Protectionists excoriated Jackson supporters for their seeming surrender to a vocal, ostensibly vindictive, group of nullifiers. Twenty-three congressmen, who spoke on the House floor in opposition to the proposed Tariff of 1833, strongly suggested that the real cause for the change in government policy was Southern discontent, especially in South Carolina, and that congressmen operated solely because of the threat of nullification. Pro-tariff men chided fellow representatives for placating South Carolina; for conceding to and appeasing the demands of a distinct minority of the nation; for allowing this minority, even a single state, to dictate to the people new legislation that they deemed injurious to the majority interests of the country. In short, the minority apparently determined the course of government policy against the will of the majority (*Congressional Globe* 1841–42, p. 100).

While Jacksonians successfully poked holes in the labor argument, they struggled to deflect this particular assertion, one that turned a major pillar of Jacksonian Democracy—majoritarian democracy and the maxim that the majority shall prevail—openly and defiantly against them. The nullification crisis had inserted into the tariff debates the question of majority versus minority, an arguably more potent rebuttal to the anti-tariff forces than the issue of competition versus monopoly. Jacksonian partisans replied in a varied manner. First, they conceded the efficacy of majority rule, but they also cited a more important principle of American government: equal protection of the laws. Laws should always be uniform in their operation and beneficial to the public good, and, consequently, should never impose burdens on any one part or interest. The majority, that is, had an obligation not to burden the minority. Equal protection of the laws, therefore, one of the cardinal tenets of Jacksonian Democracy, must always govern another major principle of democracy: majority rule. Second, anti-tariff men argued that it was not the minority dominating the majority; rather, it was a combination of interests—representing the privileged few—actually controlling the majority, the disadvantaged many. This “alliance between the privileged classes” riveted the protective policy on the American people by deluding and misleading them. (See Leggett 1984, pp. 32, 50, 262; Calhoun 1992, pp. 337–338, 340–343; Dew 1969, pp. 20, 172, 176, 178–180, 219; Lee 1832, no. 7, pp. 1–2; no. 9, p. 19. See also *Register of Debates*, 1831–32, pp. 314, 316, 3435; 1832–33, p. 1130; and *Congressional Globe* 1843–44, pp. 741–742; 1845–46, p. 550.)

V. JACKSONIAN DEMOCRACY, THE PROTECTIVE TARIFF, AND SLAVERY

The tariff debates of the 1830s and 1840s reveal another dynamic, one not at the forefront of the dispute over protection, but perceptible nonetheless. The contest between the few versus the many, the majority versus the minority, gradually evolved into one that focused entirely on another, more ominous dichotomy: free labor versus slave labor. By the end of the Jacksonian era, the great political issues of the period, all economic in nature, had for the most part disappeared. The American System, the central feature of American political debate during the three decades after 1815, had been reduced. The Walker Tariff, the *Independent Treasury Act*, and Polk's persistent vetoing of federally sponsored internal improvements legislation essentially resolved all the seemingly intractable and politically charged economic issues of the Age of Jackson, and in favor of Jacksonian Democracy. Sectionalism and slavery, always a secondary consideration in the tariff debates, thus emerged as the primary political powder keg in the 1850s.

The debate between free and slave labor muddied the waters of Jacksonian Democracy during the 1850s. By the onset of civil war, the familiar principles from the 1820s through the 1840s seemingly turned against the Democratic party, or vice versa. Still, the emerging political parties of the decade preceding secession could not quite grasp the debate, not, at least, as Jacksonian Democracy existed during the struggle against the protective system. Beginning in the heated debates of 1832 and continuing into the 1840s, some protectionists in Congress raised some very pointed questions about the South's real interest in destroying protection. Who really represented majoritarian democracy: the minority slaveowners of the South or majority free labor of the North? Were not the staunchest free traders slaveholders, a minority faction who symbolized an aristocracy, the rule of the few over the many? Southern slaveowners, argued tariff proponents, did not, could not, exemplify Jacksonian Democracy. The nullification crisis only proliferated such assertions in the 1833 tariff debates, pushing sectionalism to new heights.

South Carolina's George McDuffie saw this tack coming as early as 1828, when he attempted to cast the tariff issue not as a contest between slave and free, but one between the few against the many. "I shall probably be asked how it happens that the capitalists of the South, the wealthy cotton planters, are arrayed on the side of the great mass of the people." The interest of cotton "throws us into a natural alliance with the great body of the people in the farming States," and thus the "wealthy cotton planter of the south fights by the side of the small farmer, the mechanic, the merchant, and the laborer, in New York and Pennsylvania." This fit Martin Van Buren's vision of the Jacksonian party, an axis of the plain Republicans of the North and the planters of the South. The "aristocracy of the Southern states," McDuffie confirmed, "has always been found on the same side with the democracy of the Northern states in the political controversies by which the country has been divided. It is a natural alliance." But when these prevailing political controversies dividing the country in the Jacksonian era disappeared, the "natural alliance" of the "aristocracy of the Southern states" with the "democracy of the Northern states" collapsed, pitting the two interests against each other. When the question of slavery extension into the lands seized from Mexico came to the fore of American political debate

in the late 1840s, the subject of free labor versus slave labor preoccupied the nation. The question of democracy versus aristocracy, always a keystone of Jacksonian Democracy, could no longer be separated from slavery (*Register of Debates* 1832–33, pp. 1364, 2403).

Arguably, the Free Soil movement, composed predominantly of northwestern and New York Democrats, inherited the mantle of Jacksonian Democracy. Free Soilers saw the future of the West in strictly Jacksonian terms. They wanted the common man, the middle classes, the farmer and the mechanic, to settle the western regions—these were the true representatives of Jacksonian Democracy, the real manifestation of majoritarian democracy. Free Soilers desired to halt the spread of slavery into the newly acquired lands, for slave labor competed with free white labor and represented the planter class, the aristocracy of the nation, the wealthy few. Free labor implied the spread of democracy and liberty—the bedrock of Jacksonian Democracy—while slave labor signified the advance of aristocracy and power—the antithesis of Jacksonian Democracy.

During the 1850s, Republicans began linking anti-slavery with pro-labor appeals, a phenomenon that some southern Democrats foresaw during the tariff debates of the 1840s. Northern labor leaders also began to see a potential slave-power conspiracy, pitting slave labor in direct competition with Northern free labor, which had steadily grown in number by the eve of the Civil War. McDuffie's natural alliance of southern aristocrats and northern Democrats in opposition to the protective system was indeed unraveling, if not completely gone, by the 1850s. The struggle between Jacksonian Democracy and the protective tariff had, by the 1850s, morphed into the great struggle between free labor and slave labor, which now defined the old struggle between democracy and aristocracy, the privileged few against the many, rich versus poor, the majority over the minority. If viewed in this context, the contest ended in securing the greatest good for the greatest number, in protecting the interests of the many from the power of the few, and in defending the interests of the people against the grasp of monopolists.

In retrospect, Republicans essentially amalgamated Jacksonian Democracy with the labor argument. They declared in their 1860 platform that “sound policy requires” a protective tariff, which “secures to the workingmen liberal wages, to agriculture remunerative prices, to mechanics and manufacturers an adequate reward for their skill, labor, and enterprise, and to the nation commercial prosperity and independence”—the labor argument protectionists had so pervasively used to counter Jacksonian Democrats. Neither of the 1860 Democratic Party platforms mentioned anything about a tariff, focusing overwhelmingly on slavery. Although the South had gained another victory with the Tariff of 1857, which further lowered duty rates from the Walker Tariff, the Panic of 1857 only invigorated a movement to restore the protective policy. With the exit of southern Democrats, Republicans passed the Morrill Tariff in 1861, increasing duty levels and signaling the return of the protective policy. In the end, then, the labor argument seemingly prevailed. McDuffie's southern aristocracy indeed succumbed to northern democracy, and while they had been united in the Age of Jackson against protection, they divided and then fought in the Age of Civil War, and protection eventually gained the day (*Congressional Globe* 1841, p. 101; 1841–42, p. 743; Mangold 1971, pp. 184, 185).

VI. CONCLUSION

In the final analysis, one clear conclusion can be drawn from the tariff debates: the rhetoric of Jacksonian Democracy as applied to the tariff reveals a discernible brand of American political economy, one distinct from that which had developed in Europe. The theories and policies of political economy in England and Europe certainly had an impact on the early American tariff debates, and the protective system was undoubtedly a familiar policy across the Atlantic as it was in America, but the requisite components of Jacksonian Democracy were absent in England and in Europe, and thus the debate over the protective system during the antebellum era assumed a much different character in the United States. The tariff question contributed directly to the development of Jacksonian Democracy and, thus, the tariff issue, more than any other political or economic consideration from the War of 1812 to the war between the States, immensely influenced the evolution of an American political economy.

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