



The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era

Lawrence Frederick Kohl



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In the fifty years following the Revolution, America's population nearly quadrupled, its boundaries expanded, industrialization took root in the Northeast, new modes of transportation flourished, state banks proliferated and offered easy credit to eager entrepreneurs, and Americans found themselves in the midst of an accelerating age of individualism, equality, and self-reliance. To the Jacksonian generation, it seemed as if their world had changed practically overnight. *The Politics of Individualism* looks at the political manifestations of these staggering social transformations.

During the 1830s and 1840s, Americans were consumed by politics and party loyalties were fierce. Here, Kohl draws on the political rhetoric found in speeches, newspapers, periodicals, and pamphlets to place the Democrats and the Whigs in a solid social and psychological context. He contends that the political division between these two parties reflected the division between Americans unsettled by the new individualistic social order and those whose character allowed them to strive more confidently within it. Democrats, says Kohl, were more "tradition-directed," bound to others in more personal ways; Whigs, on the other hand, were more "inner-directed" and embraced the impersonal, self-interested relationships of a market society. By examining this fascinating dialogue of parties, Kohl brings us bright new insight into the politics and people of Jacksonian America.



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