Chapter 10 Video Script

**[[Big Idea**: What were the main features of the Democratic Revolution, and what role did Andrew Jackson play in its outcome?]]

Can a single individual change the course of history? This question lurks constantly throughout

Chapter 10, in part because of the focus on politics. Political leaders—whether monarchs, dictators, or elected officials—have history-changing potential because they usually control powerful institutions. However, before the eight year presidency of Andrew Jackson (from 1829 to 1837), American chief executives lacked such power.

What changed? Jackson expanded presidential power only after campaign manager Martin Van Buren had revolutionized American politics. Van Buren, the “little magician,” transformed the political world in the 1820s by forging a strong and disciplined political party, first in New York and then in the nation. He rewarded party officials with patronage jobs and won over voters by adopting policies popular with ordinary citizens. Old-style politics, dominated by high-born notables, gave way to the rough and tumble world of professional politicians, organized parties, and a democratic electorate.

Andrew Jackson rode this democratic wave to the presidency. Then he expanded the traditional powers of the office. Jackson installed patronage appointees in place of well-trained officials. He used party discipline to push a controversial Indian Removal Bill through Congress. He threatened South Carolina with military force if it interfered with tariff collection. He vetoed bills subsidizing public transportation and renewing the charter of the Second Bank of the United States. And his followers rewrote state constitutions to expand the franchise, provide for the election of judges, end subsidies to private businesses, and require balanced budgets.

His opponents labelled Jackson as “King Andrew, the First,” accusing him of claiming monarch-like powers. “We are in the midst of a revolution, hitherto bloodless, but rapidly descending towards . . . the concentration of all power in the hands of one man,” Senator Henry Clay warned.

For his part Jackson saw himself as the “voice of the people.” “That the majority should govern was a fundamental maxim in all free governments,” Van Buren said. Working together, the “little magician” and “Old Hickory”—the first leaders with nicknames, befitting a democratic age—changed the nature of American politics and presidential powers.