

January 2013

# Moral biography of Andrew Jackson

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## Recommended Citation

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BRIAN TRAXLER AND DUANE M. COVRIG

# MORAL BIOGRAPHY OF ANDREW JACKSON

## Introduction

Last year's United States elections heated up debate on morality (or lack thereof) in politics and candidates. The airwaves were humming with talk about the good or evil that "politicians" bring to society, and at times it seemed as if the morality of candidates was called into question the very moment they made a gutsy decision to run for political office, a thankless job with tremendous pressure. The news reporters and bloggers scrutinized candidates' statements and actions, trying to predict how each would deal with important public decisions.

The presidential candidates were the most scrutinized. Media and voters examined how each talked about cherished American values, or how each responded to questions about a controversial issue or articulated their vision to "improve America." We all recognized that much was at stake, because presidents shoulder very tenuous decisions: how to deal with rouge nations developing nuclear weapons, the Arab Spring, the push for same-sex marriages, national debt, taxes, health care, economic bailouts for poor or rich, and the treatment of our personal liberties.

Politics, especially presidential elections, brings out a focus on values, ethics and spirituality like few other events. According to Gary Scott Smith (2012), talk about politics quickly leads to talk about ethics and spirituality, especially when the focus is the U.S. president. In his book *Faith and the Presidency*, which chronicles our moral and spiritual scrutiny of these leaders, Smith points out that "Americans want their

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chief executive to have a strong religious faith. They want to know that the president prays, seeks God's guidance, and believes God is in control of the universe." Smith suggests that "the main thing to look at is the candidate's character, which of course is often connected to his world-view and faith commitments" (p. 2).

While elections can bring increased moral dialogue and get us thinking about the spirituality and morality of our public leadership, elections can also turn nasty. They can create a blame train of accusations and counter accusations. These become a verbal circus; public debates that require dialogue, judgment and thinking easily regress to vitriolic rhetoric. The ebb and flow of ideas can start well but swirl into irritation, anger and fear. Out of that vortex grow bizarre conspiracy theories, and individuals and groups often end up trapped with extreme paranoia. They turn that darkness and evil into hate.

This is where Christian leadership can make a difference. Those trained in ethical thinking and moral leadership, and those who understand the need to engage in due process, can help tame political hype into opportunities for moral growth. They can engage the moral momentum of elections by helping themselves and their followers avoid two extremes. The first extreme is the vitriolic "sloganism" and blaming that traps most. The other is the apathetic extreme in which people absent themselves from public dialogue and debate out of sleepy disengagement or fear to express feelings that stand up to the hate mongering or to the status quo. Extreme passivity and extreme aggressiveness both work against moral dialogue and discourse.

Christian leadership avoids these two extremes by guiding individuals into careful ethical analysis and moral judgment. This starts by helping individuals to name, define, and explain the values, virtues, or ideals they want their public leaders to have or manifest. This allows them to imagine and even test the practical outworking of values in political decisions; it also helps them to envision the leadership and political culture they wish to see in their country. Next, those values can serve as a moral rubric by which political decisions are made and by which political actions of leaders are examined. To be both a good Christian and a good citizen is to be a good follower in general by being engaged, thoughtful, winsome and articulate in asking tough questions about how these values are being played out or violated by their leaders' actions, thinking or attitudes.

The task that Christian leadership can call us to is well explained by Terry Cooper (2006) in his book *Making Judgments Without Being*

*Judgmental: Nurturing a Clear Mind and a Generous Heart.* He argues that fostering personal and public judgment and the dialogue around that judgment, without letting it degrade into judgmentalism, is the basis of moral growth. It requires a steady hand on the steering wheel of our own thoughts, emotions and public speech. It takes a careful analysis of fact and beliefs and the exploration of varied opinions. It takes dialogue and questioning. As we learn to do judgment better, we can help others do their own judgment in a better way. Judgmentalism, on the other hand, is more lazy and nasty. It comes easily and requires only that people stay ill-informed, locked in preconceived ideas, and only interested in hearing from those who think like them. Judgmentalism avoids due process and thoughtful investigation. Cooper (2006) contrasts judgment with judgmentalism:

Healthy judgment evaluates evidence carefully; is unafraid to decide; recognizes its own limitations; is willing to change its mind; refuses to distrust another's motives unless there is clear evidence for this suspicion; holds its convictions with charity and tolerance for others. . . . These features are typically lacking in judgmentalism. (pp. 27, 28)

So, when elections heat up, and hyperbole, paranoia, hate and fear threaten to waste a good opportunity for moral dialogue, Christian leadership can help all of us engage the basics of good judgment: truth seeking and sharing, goodwill, the hard work of listening and analyzing, and careful investigation. The alternatives to this hard work, according to Cooper (2006), are not good:

If we do embrace a judge-nothing philosophy, however, the end result is ethical neutrality and moral indifference. . . . Some behaviors need very much to be judged. They are damaging to people and harmful to life. They deteriorate the well-being of the world. They are destructive and in some cases evil. (p. 27)

One of the leading authorities on followership, Ira Chaleff (2009), argues that the moral activity of evaluation is what leaders most need from followers and that this aspect of careful scrutiny not only makes for better groups and societies but also better leaders. Leaders should expect good followers to follow in a manner that is engaging as well as sympathetic. To morally evaluate a leader, whether in a home, work, church or country, can also improve the group's focus on its purpose. Evaluations that slip into judgmentalism typically do not systematically use a moral rubric or keep clear about purpose. Good judgment does.

We acknowledge that evaluation is a dangerous task that followers must enter with a sober self-assessment. Followers run the risk of

becoming unrealistic, forgetting that their leaders often face unimaginable demands that followers know little about. If followers are too unrealistic in their expectations and analysis, they can raise unreasonable demands and create severe evaluations of the moral work of leaders. Furthermore, followers always face the penchant to criticize a leader so they can be excused from the hard work of following. They can resist the purposes of the group as well as or more than leaders. The work of following is not easy; the common response is to complain or criticize leaders as a way of diminishing their moral claims on the follower. This can have very deadly consequences, even the rejection of the very leaders God has ordained to call the group to better moral and spiritual outcomes. Following well is a delicate task of both submission and articulate challenging and questioning, all in a desire for the purpose of the group to be fulfilled. This dance of the follower and the leader is not only a hallmark for good community but it is also the hallmark of good homes and schools and good moral growth in governments and nations.

This relational moral dynamic is made easier when there is a common moral purpose articulated and shared by follower and leader. In the case of Christians, that shared purpose can be a shared Person. Paul put it well: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1, NIV). Christian leaders and followers both have a purpose in Christ. Even in secular places, we follow well when we work with leaders toward a common moral goal or reference point. Having a moral frame of reference is crucial. Such a critique is neither unbiblical nor un-Christian, but exactly what we owe leaders. This is evident in the repeated commentary of Jewish writers and prophets in the Old Testament about the good, the bad and the ugly of their kings (see 2 Kings 12:2; 18:3-7; 20:16-20; 23:36-37). This willingness to follow as well as critique is especially true in a democracy. Evaluating leaders is natural, normal and needed but must be guided by careful judgment that is honest, redemptive and framed in humility to a stated moral purpose.

We do not extend this challenge to critique leaders, without demonstrating some possible ways to do moral leadership critique. In the remainder of this paper we morally critique a U.S. president. We take on this task as both citizens and Christians with a deep sense of humility, knowing that most U.S. presidents have probably accomplished far more good in their lives than most of us will ever have an opportunity to do.

Because we cannot dialogue with the reader about the president we will critique, we avoid any current or living president. In fact, to play it safe we go way back and critique our seventh president—Andrew

Jackson. Jackson was the first non-Virginian to lead the United States and is often rated as one of the top 15 or so presidents (See Wikipedia on the historical rankings of presidents of the United States). He was considered successful in many regards but is also known for some brutality and unethical behaviors.

We typically challenge followers and leaders to morally evaluate four aspects of leadership.

1. Itemize and critique the values a leader brings to an issue. How does she frame the issue? What attitudes and ideas does she articulate related to the issues?
2. List and critique the options she articulates and eventually selects.
3. Examine the means or actions she engages in to carry out her selected option.
4. Examine the outcomes of her choices.

These four approaches are best when examining issues or events. When looking at a larger direction of leadership, examining values often involves examining virtues a leader cultivates in his decisions. Here we group choices made by President Jackson to take a more precarious role as moral evaluators by looking at the moral character Jackson manifested. This is only possible, we believe, after many examples of leadership choices. It is also a more dangerous work as we do not know all the many decisions of his life. Furthermore, we do not state or suggest any ultimate divine analysis of Jackson. Here, we act only as frail humans trying to learn from one leader how to be better leaders ourselves.

We use Craig Johnson's (2012) suggested list of moral character qualities for our evaluation. These qualities, which help leaders fuel their moral leadership, are courage, integrity, humility, reverence, optimism, compassion, justice and prudence. We believe repeated presidential actions and speeches eventually show where Jackson's qualities were strong and where they were weak. His mixed experience mirrors most of all his failures to live up to the ideal. However, stating the ideal qualities we expect in moral leadership keeps those values alive and creates a culture that seeks to emulate good moral leadership.

## **Andrew Jackson**

Jackson defied the expectations at his time as one who was fitted to be a president of the United States of America. When he was elected, the Virginia dynasty of U.S. presidents was broken. Unlike his predecessors, Jackson was born into a poor frontier family outside of the Virginia area and became a dependent of relatives in South Carolina. His father died

shortly before his birth; by age 14, his two brothers and mother also perished, leaving him orphaned and alone in the world. The previous six presidents had come from privileged homes, and could claim to be founding fathers or the son of one. Jackson broke this presidential mold.

The historian John Spencer Bassett (as cited in Bugg, 1962) described Jackson:

His enemies hated him and rarely saw his good qualities; his friends loved him and reluctantly admitted his failings; and in a sense each was right. Some of the good things he did are excellent and some of the bad things are wretched. His puzzling personality defies clear analysis, but we must admit that he was a remarkable man. He lacked much through the want of an education, and he acquired much through apparent accident, but it was only his strong character which turned deficiency and opportunity alike to his purpose and made his will the strongest influence in his country in his time. (p. 23)

## Courage

Johnson (2012) describes courage as “overcoming fear in order to do the right thing.” He finds that courageous leaders “acknowledge the dangers they face and their anxieties. Nonetheless, they move forward despite the risks and costs” (p. 81). Most recognized that Jackson possessed courage. As a 14-year-old boy involved in the Revolutionary War, Jackson was captured by the English Red Coats. When ordered by a British officer to polish his boots, Jackson refused and said, “Sir, I am a prisoner of war, and claim to be treated as such.” In response, the officer swung his sword at Jackson, who was able to block the blow but was cut on his hand and skull (Meacham, 2008, p. 12).

Later, while riding circuit as a judge of the Tennessee Superior Court, Jackson encountered a case where a man, Russell Bean, refused to appear in court. Bean was indicted for “cutting off the ears of his infant child in a drunken frolic.” Jackson accompanied the sheriff, who was afraid to bring Bean in. Approaching Bean, a large man armed with a brace of pistols, Jackson advanced and said “Now, surrender, you infernal villain, this very instant or I’ll blow you through.” Bean was unnerved and dropped his guns.

Jackson once told his wife Rachel, “When danger rears its head, I can never shrink from it” (pp. 26-27). Jackson’s courage, however, was not always directed to noble ends, as seen in his duel with Charles Dickinson and his brawl with the Bentons in Nashville. Both incidences nearly cost him his life, were completely unnecessary, and seem to have been prompted by pride and anger.

## **Integrity**

Johnson (2012) describes integrity as “wholeness or completeness.” He says that leaders possess this trait when they are “true to themselves, reflecting consistency between what they say publicly and how they think and act privately” (p. 85). On the whole, Jackson appears to have struggled with integrity. While he showed loyalty to his own principles, he failed to show consistency in many of his actions, especially in regards to the need to obey orders. Jackson was severe with his own military discipline of others, but not always as demanding with himself. While fighting the Creek War, Jackson tried and executed a 17-year-old boy who had left his post by order of the officer of the watch, only to be ordered back by another officer. The boy became impertinent and when they went to arrest him, he resisted. For this resistance, he was executed as an example to all would-be mutineers (Brands, 2005, pp. 213-214). Contrast this rigidity to Jackson’s own actions during the First Seminole War. President Monroe instructed Jackson to check the raids on Georgia settlements by Seminole Indians and fugitive slaves who were taking refuge in Spanish Florida. Monroe gave Jackson orders to refrain from invading Spanish territory except in hot pursuit of the enemy. In 1818 Jackson far exceeded these instructions by invading Florida, destroying Seminole villages, capturing Pensacola, and overthrowing the Spanish government. He then executed two British citizens whom he accused of aiding the enemy (DeGregorio, 2004, p. 110). Jackson knew that the U.S. government desired Florida and felt justified to ignore the orders of the Commander-in-Chief and set out on his own course.

A practice that Jackson instituted in his first term as president that speaks to his lack of integrity was that of rewarding people with government positions. It became known as the Spoils System, a practice of giving positions to those who helped him get elected. Many of Jackson’s appointments were not qualified to fulfill their responsibilities. Thus the door was opened for corruption and incompetence. It would be more than five decades later, in 1883, that the Pendleton Act would create the Civil Service Commission, which provided for federal appointment on a merit system rather than a reward system (Morris, 1961).

## **Humility**

Johnson (2012) explains that humility is made up of three components. First is self-awareness, in which humble leaders “objectively assess her or his strengths and limitations.” Second, humble leaders are “open to new ideas and knowledge.” Third is a responsiveness to tran-



scendence. “Humble leaders acknowledge that there is a power greater than the self. This prevents them from developing an inflated view of their importance while increasing their appreciation for the worth and contributions of others.” Humble leaders put “the needs of followers first while acting as role models” (p. 88).

Jackson often failed in the humility test. He was publicly prideful, doggedly set on doing things his own way, and he certainly had an elevated view of his own abilities. By Jackson’s pride, he put himself and others at risk and nearly cost him his life on several occasions. In Knoxville, in 1803, Jackson was arguing with Tennessee governor John Sevier when Sevier made reference to Jackson “taking a trip to Natchez with another man’s wife.” Jackson was particularly sensitive about the honor of his wife Rachel, who had been previously married and was technically not yet divorced when she married Jackson. Shots were fired in a crowded street, one man was grazed, but no one was hurt.

Though no one died in his altercation with Sevier, Jackson could kill, and did, apparently with purely selfish reasons. In 1806, an argument over a horse race led to a duel with Charles Dickinson. Dickinson fired first, wounding Jackson, who then fired, killing Dickinson. Jackson carried Dickinson’s bullet in his body until his death (Meacham, 2008, pp. 25-26).

In 1807, Andrew Jackson was taken to court by Samuel Jackson, who alleged that Jackson attempted to murder him. Then, in 1813 he became involved in an argument with Thomas Hart Benton, a future United States senator, and promised to whip him the next time their paths crossed. When they met one morning in Nashville, a fight ensued that left Jackson seriously wounded from a gunshot to the arm. Jackson nearly lost his arm and carried the slug for over 20 years (Meacham, 2008, pp. 29-30). In these two stories we do not see a humble person willing to defer to others, but one who had an exaggerated view of his own importance.

All these responses to others show a lack of humility. Even when Jackson sought to do good to others, it seemed to be with an air of superiority. This went beyond the paternalism that tempts confident leaders. It was almost a view of elevated status. It was Jackson’s belief “that the people (or at least white male people) were sovereign and that intermediary forces were too apt to serve their own interests rather than the public’s. Jackson’s solution? Jackson” (Meacham, 2008, p. 76). Jackson saw himself as the solution, the protector, and the savior of the common man—evidence of very limited humility.

## Reverence

Johnson (2012) accepts Paul Woodruff's definition of reverence as "the capacity to feel a sense of awe, respect, and even shame when appropriate." Ethical leaders show reverence when "they are not concerned about power struggles or about winners or losers but with reaching common goals." They "rely on persuasion rather than force" (p. 89). Jackson's love for a good fight and his frequent involvement in power struggles, suggests that he struggled to live with a reverence for others. In the first years of his presidency he tried to force his cabinet members and their wives to accept into their social circle a woman by the name of Margaret O'Neill Eaton, the new wife of his Secretary of War. Mrs. Eaton was a talkative young widower who had quickly married Senator Eaton. That quickness led to claims of an affair. Jackson forced the cabinet to befriend her. He used this incident against many of the cabinet and rearranged much of his cabinet in what was referred to as the Petticoat Affair. This showed his desire to win, which exceeded his willingness to adapt to the wishes of others.

Later, he entered into a power struggle with the Second Bank of the United States. Believing that the Bank, which held federal deposits, was not working in the interest of the people, he determined to see it closed. He refused to listen to compromises that suggested reforms to the Bank; instead, he vetoed the Bank's re-charter and put the federal deposits in state banks. In the end, state banks extended easy credit and issued paper money freely, causing speculation and inflation that precipitated the panic of 1837 (DeGregorio, 2004).

## Optimism

Johnson (2012) observes that "optimists expect positive outcomes in the future even if they are currently experiencing disappointments and difficulties," and that they are "more likely to persist in the face of adversity" (pp. 83-84). Optimism was probably Jackson's strongest moral quality and helped him to move beyond unpromising circumstances to accomplish extraordinary results. Jackson's optimism came in the form of a "can do" attitude and a deep persistence. When he set his mind to a particular thing, he had little doubt that he could make it happen. This quality was manifest throughout his life. As a young lawyer riding circuit, Jackson and a small party were being pursued by hostile Indians. After escaping near disaster in an attempt to cross a swollen river, Jackson told his friend John Overton, "we have no time to lose—follow me and I'll save you yet." They did elude the Indians and arrived

home safely. Jackson's boldness and resilience attracted others to his side. Meacham (2008) observed that "in doubtful moments people need someone who can reassure them amid danger. Jackson was such a man. . . ." (p. 25).

On the eve of the Battle of New Orleans, Jackson, riding on horseback, approached a balcony that was overlooking Bourbon Street. Seeing the women there in tears, Jackson "expressed his regret at our alarm," recalls Mrs. Gould, then "insisted that we were in no danger, that the American arms would be victorious and the British whipped back to their vessels. . . . His confident manner and expressions dissipated for a time our distress" (Meacham, 2008, p. 32). That was optimism in the face of severe circumstances.

Jackson rose above his circumstances, that of a poor orphaned boy, to become a part of the landed gentry of Tennessee. With little formal education, he became a lawyer and a statesman. With no formal military training he became a skilled general. These events took place not by accident, but because Jackson persisted in the face of difficulties, believing that he would succeed. Jackson had an uncanny sense of what the people wanted and he was optimistic that the people knew best. "He was a firm believer in . . . the eventual right judgment and justice of the people," said Thomas Hart Benton. "I have seen him at the most desperate part of his fortunes, and never saw him waver in the belief that all would come right in the end" (cited in Meacham, 2008, pp. 38-39). Optimism was a powerful moral quality in Jackson.

## Compassion

Johnson (2012) describes compassion as "an orientation that puts others ahead of the self. Those with compassion value others regardless of whether they get anything in return from them" (p. 89). As with many aspects of Jackson, his compassion was mixed. He was capable of compassion, but it was mostly directed toward his friends and select U.S. citizens. In the cold winter of 1812-13, Jackson had gathered 2,071 volunteers and marched them toward New Orleans. After 500 miles of marching, the federal military authorities ordered him to disband and return to Nashville. One hundred and fifty men were sick, but they had only 11 wagons. When the doctor asked what they were to do, Jackson said, "To do, sir? You are to leave not a man on the ground." When the doctor explained that the wagons would carry no more than half the sick, Jackson replied, "Then let some of the troops dismount, and the officers must give up their horses to the sick. Not a man, sir, must be left

behind” (Meacham, 2008, p. 29). Jackson handed over his own horse and walked back to Nashville. That was a show of sacrificial compassion.

Six months later we see his lack of compassion. Creek Indians attacked Fort Mims and slaughtered men, women and children. Jackson was called to deliver reprisal. He had no mercy on the enemy and left women and children dead in his wake as well. David Crockett recalls, “We shot them like dogs.” A lieutenant of Jackson’s, Richard Keith Call, recalls that “some of the cabins had taken fire, and half consumed human bodies were seen amidst the smoking ruins . . . In other instances dogs had torn and feasted on the mangled bodies of their masters. Heart-sick I turned from the revolting scene” (Meacham, 2008, p. 31). Jackson himself remarked that “the carnage was dreadful” (Brands, 2005, p. 218).

Meacham (2008) observes that Jackson “could be both unspeakably violent toward Indians and decidedly generous” (p. 95). For example, when his Indian allies were attacked by Georgian militiamen, Jackson was furious and denounced their actions. In 1813, while at war with the Creek Indian Nation, Jackson’s interpreter found a small Indian boy on the battlefield. Jackson adopted him on the spot and sent him to Rachel at the Hermitage where he lived (pp. 34-35). However, Jackson’s policies toward the Indians, which led to the forfeiture of millions of acres of land and the death of thousands of Indians, speak volumes about his compassion—or lack thereof. To further illustrate Jackson’s lack of compassion, simply refer to the execution of mutineers mentioned in the discussion of integrity.

## Justice

Johnson (2012) sees justice as having two components: a “sense of obligation to the common good” and “treating others as equally and fairly as possible.” The ethical leader who acts justly will sense a “moral obligation to consider the needs and interests of the entire group and to take the needs of the larger community into account.” They will “set personal biases aside when making choices, judging others objectively and treating them accordingly” (p. 90).

Jackson saw himself as defender and protector of the interest of the American people. In that regard, his strong sense of justice was for the common good of his country’s citizens. As president, he argued that he was working for the common good—in the interest of the people. And for the most part, Jackson acted on that belief and value. But sadly, in dis-

pensing justice and establishing policy, he could be prejudiced and partisan. Jackson's actions toward Indians show the dark side of his justice. Despite moments of compassion, his relationship with the Indians was at times unjust and cruel. It appears that Jackson saw the Indians as an obstacle to the peace and well-being of the citizens of the U.S., specifically the white population. He believed that the Indians and the whites could not live together peaceably and was unwilling to consider any other option than the removal of the Indians to lands west of the Mississippi River. Meacham (2008) explains:

Jackson believed in removal with all his heart, and by refusing to entertain any other scenario, he was as ferocious in inflicting harm on a people as he often was in defending the rights of those he thought of as the people. (p. 54)

To those who argued for Indian rights, he justified his course by arguing that "removal was not merely legally justified but morally necessary, and that he was responding not to the greed of land speculators and would-be settlers but to a moral imperative to save the Indians from extinction" (Wallace, 1993, p. 65). History seems to show that this was at best ignorance and at worst a lie on the part of Jackson.

Although Jackson's language concerning the Indian question could be compassionate in tone, his policy and actions reveal a different story. Jackson was willing to ignore the concerns and opinions of others to reach his goal of Indian removal. In Congress, strong pleas were made for the rights of the Indian. Congressman Henry R. Storrs of New York made this plea:

The eye of other nations is now fixed upon us. Our friends are looking with fearful anxiety to our conduct in this matter. Our enemies, too, are watching our steps. . . . It will do more to destroy the confidence of the world in free government than all their armies could accomplish. . . . It will weaken our institutions at home, and infect the heart of our social system. It will teach our people to hold the honor of their Government lightly, and loosen the moral feeling of the country. (Meacham, 2008, pp. 144-145)

The vote for the Indian Removal Act of 1830 was not particularly close in the Senate, but in the House it was a different story. After much back and forth, Jackson won by a narrow margin of 102 to 98. Certainly Jackson did not have a mandate from the people for his Indian policy.

When the Supreme Court, under the leadership of John Marshall, sided with the Cherokee in *Worcester v. Georgia*, finding that the Federal Government had jurisdiction over Indians and their territories within a state, Georgia ignored the decision and Jackson supported them in their

defiance of the highest court in the land. Jackson allowed the states to pass laws that were oppressive to the Indians and refused to enforce the Supreme Court's decision, even though this was his duty according to the Constitution of the United States. Even though Congress made immigration to the West voluntary, Jackson made it difficult for Indians to choose otherwise. He required Indians to abide by state laws which became increasingly oppressive to the Indians and deprived them of their just rights. Bribery and coercion were frequently used to persuade many tribes to give up their land. Eventually, the Cherokee, a tribe that had assimilated well into the white man's society, was forced to leave their homeland. Of the 16,000 Cherokee who were force marched in what would be known as the Trail of Tears, 4,000 would die along the way.

Theodore Frelinghuysen, a senator for New Jersey, asked, "Do the obligations of justice change with the color of the skin? Is it one of the prerogatives of the white man, that he may disregard the dictates of moral principles, when an Indian shall be concerned? No" (quoted in Meacham, 2008, p. 96). Tragically, Jackson would influence more people to answer differently. Meacham (2008) summed it up this way:

Indian removal was possible because enough white Americans had a stake in it, or sympathized with it, and thus the institutions of the country allowed it to go forward. . . . There is nothing redemptive about Jackson's Indian policy, no moment, as with Lincoln and slavery, where the moderates on a morally urgent question did the right and brave thing. Not all great presidents were always good, and neither individuals nor nations are without evil. (pp. 96, 97)

## **Prudence**

We conclude with prudence in our moral evaluation because it is the crucial virtue in the orchestration of other virtues and values; it is critical to successful moral leadership. Moral leaders who foster prudence do their own careful evaluation and judgment of the moral impact of their actions and by such self-regulation often improve their moral influence on others. "Prudence is the ability to discern or select the best course of action in a given situation" and involves "determining when and how the other qualities should be used" (Johnson, 2012, p. 83). It is engaging in careful judgment in the present so that followers are inspired to do their own careful moral work. Our analysis above suggests that Jackson erred more on the side of risky and often rash actions than carefully thought-through responses. He seemed at times impetuous in his decisions, not understanding some of the social and govern-

mental implications of his actions. At other times, as in his work to keep the Union together, we see a tough pragmatism that suggested a “street level” prudence that may have given the President’s Office a “frontier” prudence not yet manifested in the White House by Virginia-raised presidents before him.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Was Andrew Jackson a moral leader? When using Johnson’s (2012) list of eight moral virtues as a reference point, we believe Jackson fared more poorly in moral leadership than his historical ranking as a successful president would suggest. Jackson typically ranks in the top tier of U.S. presidents. However, given his willingness to kill unarmed individuals or to kill over minor issues, we call into question his prudence and therefore his overall ability to guide well as a moral leader. However, he was moral in many ways. He was courageous and optimistic and at times showed deep compassion. So despite the fact that he seemed self-willed and devoid of deep humility, and showed questionable reverence for others and limited justice to all, there were moral qualities in many of his actions.

This whole process of moral evaluation of leadership is a sobering task for followers and historians because it forces self-analysis as well. How can I be optimistic and courageous like Jackson? How can I avoid making rash decisions that kill innocent people? How can I practice better compassion and justice?

We hope our analysis demonstrates the truth that leaders can cast both light and shadow, and that, in a national president, that light and shadow can last for decades. Jackson’s leadership inspired confidence and probably inspired more rural and income-challenged individuals toward public leadership. He increased the power of the presidency and gave the people a larger influence in their government. But there were shadows in his corruption that persisted for years, ones that only President Lincoln was able to begin to dispel with light and moral hope.

We believe what was most lost in Jackson’s moral leadership was a clear view of a republic that extended constitutional rights not only to the majority but increasingly to the minorities. As Meacham (2008) put it, “the stakes of the battle” with Jackson soon became evident. “It was Jackson and his interpretation of the will of the people versus those congressmen, senators, bank presidents, nullifiers, judges, federal officials, religious activists, and Indians who differed from him” (p. 121). Such moral self-righteousness could thwart fuller understandings of morality.

While Jackson will always be seen as a transformational leader who kept the Union going, enlarged the scope of presidential power, and defended the common man, he will also be remembered for the moral impulsivity and rash behavior exhibited in his pistol duels and in his injustice to Indians.

To engage in thoughtful critique is to raise our own moral expectations of leaders and our own expectations of ourselves. Christian leaders who run from the moral banter caused by elections miss an opportunity to invite a more thorough critique of moral ideals they want to see in their leaders and also, by discussion, in their community and in themselves.

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