

The slavery crisis temporarily resolved by the Missouri Compromise also led to the creation of the modern Democratic Party. Martin Van Buren, a New York politician, feared that the problems caused by slavery might lead to a catastrophe, such as a civil war. To prevent this, he devised a national political strategy to elect politicians as leaders of a party whose goal was to maintain power and restrain discussion of slavery. When James Monroe, the last Founding Father to serve as president, left office, the Jeffersonian Republican Party splintered. Van Buren's organization stepped into this political vacuum.

While in New York, Van Buren had created a powerful political machine. Known as the Bucktail Republicans, it was a party based on patronage. Patronage means the power to reward others for their support, either with jobs or money or other benefits. Van Buren perfected this process, also called the spoils system. The Bucktail Republicans owned newspapers, controlled political news, and above all, worked to maintain power. Helping the Bucktail Republicans would eventually result in some sort of reward, such as a better job.

The new national organization Van Buren founded is the modern Democratic Party. Democrats favored suffrage (the right to vote) for all white men as a weapon against privileged classes and as a way to appeal to the masses. Up to that point, only white property-owners could vote. Van Buren wanted election campaigns to debate topics not related to slavery, with the idea that the country would never become torn over that issue, but would stay focused on other concerns. The Democrats appeared to represent the common man; however, Van Buren's party favored the continuation of slavery while banning any discussion of this crucial topic. This contradiction – favoring the common white man but keeping millions of blacks in slavery – eventually led to the rise of Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans in the 1860 election. However, for decades, Southerners and some Northerners could vote for the Democrats, regardless of their differing opinions on slavery.

The growth of government came with limits to liberty. The more the federal government does, the less liberty individuals have. Under Presidents Jackson and Van Buren, the rights of American Indians were taken away. According to law, various American Indians had rights to reside in territories they had negotiated with the American government. Jackson and Van Buren, however, ignored these treaties, ignored a Supreme Court decision, and broke the Constitution by using federal troops on state territory to forcefully remove native peoples.