

PRESERVING THE WHITE MAN'S REPUBLIC:
THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF AMERICAN
CONSERVATISM, 1847-1860

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History.

Chapel Hill
2015

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ABSTRACT

Joshua A. Lynn: Preserving the White Man's Republic:
The Democratic Party and the Transformation of American Conservatism, 1847-1860
(Under the direction of Harry L. Watson)

In the late 1840s and 1850s, the American Democratic party redefined itself as “conservative.” Yet Democrats’ preexisting dedication to majoritarian democracy, liberal individualism, and white supremacy had not changed. Democrats believed that “fanatical” reformers, who opposed slavery and advanced the rights of African Americans and women, imperiled the white man’s republic they had crafted in the early 1800s. There were no more abstract notions of freedom to boundlessly unfold; there was only the existing liberty of white men to conserve. Democrats therefore recast democracy, previously a progressive means to expand rights, as a way for local majorities to police racial and gender boundaries. In the process, they reinvigorated American conservatism by placing it on a foundation of majoritarian democracy.

Empowering white men to democratically govern all other Americans, Democrats contended, would preserve their prerogatives. With the policy of “popular sovereignty,” for instance, Democrats left slavery’s expansion to territorial settlers’ democratic decision-making. Democrats also applied democracy and individualism to temperance, religious liberty, and nativism. Democratic conservatism would protect white men against “fanaticism,” an ideology which countenanced governmental imposition of moral norms. Democratic principles united white men from the Slave States and Free States, Catholics and Protestants, conservative former Whigs, and native and foreign-born Americans with the promise of moral autonomy on issues

like slavery. In addition to political principles, Democrats also ascribed to shared cultural prescriptions regarding whiteness, manhood, and domesticity.

As became clear by the late 1850s, however, majoritarian democracy could actually destabilize racial and gender boundaries. Local democracy could undermine the white man's republic, especially when marginalized Americans turned democracy to their own ends. In basing a conservative political order on the instability of democracy, Democrats failed to bulwark white supremacy and slavery, but did place American conservatism on a new, populist trajectory. The tenets of modern conservatism, culminating in the twentieth and twenty-first-century New Right, coalesced during the 1850s debates over white supremacy and slavery. Historicizing the conjunction of conservative thought and democratic practice reveals the point at which majoritarian democracy and "liberal" antistatism and individualism became the "conservative" means for upholding a specific racial and gendered order.

To Darlene and Kevin

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have profited from the mentorship of an unparalleled group of educators, including Ray Glenboski and Jennifer Cox; at Marshall University, Chuck Bailey, Robert Behrman, Timothy Burbery, Lee Erickson, Dan Holbrook, Carlos López, Montserrat Miller, Bill Palmer, Robert Sawrey, Barry Sharpe, Chris White, and especially Donna Spindel and Jamie Warner; at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Vicki Behrens, Fitz Brundage, Jerma Jackson, and Lou Pérez.

The members of my dissertation committee, William L. Barney, Laura F. Edwards, Joseph T. Glatthaar, Michael Lienesch, and Harry L. Watson, guided this project to completion. I hope they see their influence in whatever merit it possesses. Working with Joe Glatthaar has been one of my greatest pleasures at UNC. He taught me how to teach. Whether I went into his office obstinate, panicked, or flummoxed, Harry Watson responded with unfailing good cheer and soft-spoken reassurance. My adviser reaffirmed my work and the study of political history itself, even as he consistently challenged me. James Buchanan is certainly not Andrew Jackson, but Professor Watson allowed me to study him anyway, and I hope I have justified his indulgence. I will be fortunate indeed if the sensitivity with which Professor Watson approaches the past echoes in this dissertation.

For their friendship and collegiality, I thank my fellow students, particularly Christina Carroll, Adam Domby, Shannon Eaves, Jeff Erbig, Joey Fink, Patrick Kent, Jen Kosmin, Liz Lundeen, Ashley Mays, Dwight Mears, Sari Niedzwiecki, Rob Shapard, Zach Smith, Paul

Turner, Tyler Will, Tim Williams, and, of course, the political history Junto of Eric Burke, Robert Colby, Brian Fennessy, and Robert Richard.

I hope that Tom Goldstein and Elizabeth Smith know how much their friendship has enhanced my time at UNC. Rupert Hemingway has been my most stalwart partisan at all stages of my education.

David R. Woodward provided me with an example of an historian which I will always strive to emulate. My model academic is my friend Richard I. Lester, who has been my mentor longer than all the others. Harvey Curtis Fenimore Jr., Henry Lynn, and Jerry Stilp talked to me about history a long time ago, and I have never stopped wanting to talk about it since. Patrick H. Lynn, in addition to all the other ways in which he shaped my life, first turned my attention to the past.

Support from the William L. Clements Library at the University of Michigan, the Virginia Historical Society, the Humane Studies Institute at George Mason University, the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the UNC-CH Center for the Study of the American South, and the UNC-CH Department of History enabled me to conduct research and write this dissertation. The UNC-CH Writing Center is a special place, and I am happy to have had the opportunity to work and learn there.

Words on a page may seem slight recompense for so much love, friendship, collegiality, and mentorship. But, as an historian who relies on such sources, I can think of no more fitting expression of gratitude. Thanks.

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INTRODUCTION: CONSERVING THE HAPPY REPUBLIC

To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely.

—Edmund Burke, 1790¹

In April 1856 the steamer *Arago* deposited valuable cargo in New York City—the next president of the republic. A raucous homecoming greeted James Buchanan. The sixty-five-year-old Democrat had long been a fixture in national politics. The “Old Public Functionary” commenced his career opposing the Madison administration. Attuned to political shifts, he then abandoned his father’s stale Federalism and yoked himself to Andrew Jackson’s populist coalition in the 1820s. Now the sanctimonious old bachelor, perpetual office holder, and crafty partisan wire-puller stood poised to inherit Old Hickory’s mantle. Buchanan waded through buffeting crowds upon disembarking. This fastidious republican declined a public dinner, a Democratic publication moralized, as he “did not wish any display or ostentation” and preferred “to see his fellow-citizens in a familiar manner.” He did, nonetheless, receive “thousands” of well-wishers at City Hall and later appeared on the balcony of the Everett House, marinating in the adulation of “a large crowd of persons who had assembled to serenade him.”

Buchanan reflexively genuflected before the self-governing masses. Just returned to the United States after a stint as minister to the Court of St James’s, he replied to the cheering throng, “I have been for years abroad in a foreign land, and I like the noise of the democracy!” Buchanan stoked the patriotic ego of “the noble citizens of this favored country.” “If you could feel how despotism looks on; how jealous the despotic powers of the world are of our glorious

¹Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (1790; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 68.

institutions,” he purred, “you would cherish the Constitution and Union to your hearts.”

Buchanan’s admiration for his fellow citizens and their political system doubled as admonition.

Having “witnessed arbitrary power” firsthand, Buchanan shared his party’s concern over the dislocations in American politics occurring after he had departed for Great Britain in 1853.

“Arbitrary power” stalked not only Europe, and Americans ought not to be complacent about their exceptional republic. In accepting the Democracy’s nomination for president two months after his reception in New York, Buchanan referenced the “dark spirit of despotism and bigotry” rampant in the United States—an indigenous form of arbitrary power which signaled something awry in the republic.²

The Happy Republic

Americans in the mid-nineteenth century were proud of their progressive republic. Democrats congratulated themselves for America’s exceptionalism and delighted in contrasting their nation’s “happy millions enjoying the blessings of a free government” with the “bloated and festering systems of the Old World.” “Our country, fellow-citizens, under democratic rule, has prospered beyond all former example of human greatness,” beamed a New Yorker, and “our people are now, through the kind interposition of Divine Providence, every where prosperous and happy.” In 1854 Indiana’s Democratic governor praised “our happy republic” and claimed that nowhere else could be found “a political confederation more free, and better adapted, in its practical operations, to raise the whole human family to the highest attainable condition of virtue,

²Buchanan’s reception is described and his remarks are quoted in R. G. Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan. Late Minister to England and Formerly Minister to Russia, Senator and Representative in Congress, and Secretary of State: Including the Most Important of His State Papers* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856), 399-401; Buchanan to John E. Ward et al., Committee, Wheatland (near Lancaster), June 16, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908-11), 10:82; and Philip S. Klein, *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (1962; repr., Newton, CT: American Political Biography Press, 2006), 47-9, 53-6, 60-1, 252-3.

freedom, knowledge, political equality, prosperity and safety.” The American republic, with its “happy institutions,” imparted to the world an example of “a people always in arms against the oppressors of mankind,—a people, bearing aloft the unsullied banner of Religious Liberty, Political Equality, and Human Capacity for Self-Government.”³

Progress, for Democrats, meant the expansion of egalitarian democracy and political rights, and they credited their party for the fact that, by the 1850s, the American state fostered political participation to an unprecedented degree. What many historians rightly deem a sclerotic and exclusionary polity was still the most popular yet realized, one in which all white men were designated equally the nation’s political sovereigns. In addition to mass democracy and republican egalitarianism, Democrats advocated what today would be considered a classically liberal credo regarding the unfringeable rights of white male individuals and the negative beneficence of the limited state. Taken together, majoritarian democracy, republican equality, and liberal antistatism elevated the individual by removing constraints on the free exercise of his power, which, Democrats maintained, fueled progress nationally and worldwide.

Democrats had forged this revolutionary political order by enshrining the equal rights of white men as natural and inviolable. To do so, they first had to help overturn older understandings of society, according to which one’s rights and obligations were defined relative to others on a sliding scale of social hierarchy. A gradation of rights existed in colonial and early republican America, by which various factors, including wealth and status within the household, determined one’s social position and corresponding political rights. The bonds of this deferential

³The National and Jackson Democratic Association, *The Democratic Policy and Its Fruits* (n.p., [1848]), 7; *Speech of General Aaron Ward, of Westchester County, New York, at a Democratic Meeting Held at New Rochelle, March 27, 1858, at Which Richard Lathers, Esq., Presided* (New York: J. W. Bell, Daily News Job Office, 1858), 4; “Governor [Joseph] Wright’s Response,” (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, March 4, 1854; John W. Forney, *Address on Religious Intolerance and Political Proscription, Delivered at Lancaster, PA., on the Evening of the 24th of September* (Washington, 1855), 20, 51.

and organic society began to loosen with the American Revolution, a process Democrats under Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson accelerated. Democrats reversed the equation whereby social standing determined political power, by starting with the premise of equal political rights for *all* white men. Social gradations were left in place for all other Americans, but a base level of political equality, from which more radical Democrats like the Loco-Focos spun out notions of social and economic equality, was firmly established for white men. Thus did Democrats substitute equality and individual rights for an organic model of society that dated back to antiquity.⁴

Although Democrats defined individual rights as “natural,” their rights-bearing individual was not a benign abstraction. He was, instead, narrowly defined as a white man, making Democrats’ happy republic an emphatically white man’s republic. Their exclusionary and historically-contingent conception of the individual also made the republic a fragile one. If, as Democrats contended, individual rights derived from nature, their extension to others would upset the natural order and diminish those rights already belonging to white men. In the late 1840s and 1850s, so-called “fanatical” reformers, especially slavery’s opponents, threatened to push progress too far by politically empowering marginalized Americans. Buchanan’s 1856 campaign biography decreed that “the peace, prosperity, and safety of twenty millions of the happiest, freest, and most advanced white men, with their noble structure of republican government [...] should not be sacrificed—nay, not even jeopardized for the supposed interests of three millions of the African race.” Expanding rights would, Democrats worried, result in the

⁴John Ashworth, “Agrarians” and “Aristocrats”: *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983), 10-5, 21-34; Richard R. Beeman, “Deference, Republicanism, and the Emergence of Popular Politics in Eighteenth-century America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (July 1992): 401-30; David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 1991, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1999); Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 1990, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 49-54; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

recalibration of their own prerogatives, potentially even plunging white men back into a social order in which rights were relative.⁵

Additional tinkering, Democrats cautioned, would only prove detrimental to America's already exceptional republic. Fanatics would degrade white men by trying to perfect the polity, especially through the reckless use of the state to achieve racial and gender equality. "The democratic party has always watched and checked every political movement having the slightest tendency to disturb the constitutional relations of this beautiful but complex system of government," warned one Democrat convinced of consolidated power's blighting effects on his lovely country. The party previously denounced for its radicalism and "loco-focoism" thereby manifested a reflexive conservatism when a new generation of reformers threatened to expand the boundaries of the body politic. By the 1850s, Democrats concluded, there were no more abstract notions of freedom to boundlessly unfold; there was only the existing liberty of white men to consolidate.⁶

Democrats retrenched in the late 1840s and 1850s. They vowed that their happy republic would not "be spoken of in future history as a lesson to teach the impracticability of republican freedom, as an illusion of impracticable enthusiasts that for a brief period made a successful experiment." The party transitioned from a decades-long struggle to unfurl Jefferson and Jackson's happy republic to an ideological defense of it. The 1850s Democracy, a party often maligned as hopelessly hidebound, as viscerally racist and sexist, and as a lackey of the Slave Power, was, notwithstanding, still composed of zealous democrats, even as they became just as

⁵Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, 427.

⁶1. *Letter of Hon. James Shields*. 2. *An Article from the Boston Pilot, Exposing the Falsehoods of the Scott Whigs Respecting General Pierce*. 3. *Extracts from Speeches of General Franklin Pierce before the Constitutional Convention, and before the People, upon the Religious Test*. 4. *Voice of the Catholics of New Hampshire*. 5. *General Scott's Letter to G. W. Reed and Others, of Philadelphia, in 1844* (n.p., [1852]), 2.

ardent about democracy's conservation. In their efforts to preserve their progressive and racially exclusive republic, Democrats turned democracy toward conservative ends and revealed that liberal individualism and majoritarian democracy can be just as much tools for perpetuating an exclusionary political order as they can be the means of advancement for the disempowered.⁷

The Noise of the Democracy: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Culture

After his sojourn among Europe's tyrants, James Buchanan told the boisterous assemblage in New York that he relished the "noise of the democracy." If, like Buchanan, we listen to Democrats and heed their clamor, we can recover their partisan ideology and discern the subtle change in emphasis which registered their conservative turn in the 1850s. Antebellum Americans took political rhetoric seriously. Bemoaning his party's defeat in Pennsylvania's 1847 state elections, a Whig told his Democratic ("Locofoco") friend that he would have run a stronger campaign by paying attention to what his opponents actually said:

I should therefore have went in for fighting the battle on the stump. [...] I would have raked from the oblivion to which Locofocoism would now willingly consign them, every Locofoco speech, every Locofoco Banner, every Locofoco song, delivered, paraded, and sung through Penn^a in 1844, and have blazoned them to the eye & reiterated them in the ears of the honest rank & file until I have stamped upon the forehead of Locofocoism the deep and demining [*sic*] fraud in characters too indelible for even time to obliterate.

I share the approach of raking, blazoning, and reiterating what Democrats said in order to understand how they thought, albeit without the goal of furthering Whiggery's cause.⁸

The dissemination of political rhetoric through print engendered partisan identity and facilitated the flow of political knowledge. Antebellum Americans craved documents and

⁷*An Appeal for the Union. By a Philadelphia Whig* ([Philadelphia], [1856]), 11.

⁸Paul S. Preston to Jackson Woodward, Stockport, October 28, 1847, Preston-Woodward Correspondence, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

pleaded with congressmen for franked government reports and congressional speeches. Democrats saddled with an unfriendly congressman could find themselves politically ignorant. A Pennsylvanian asked a cabinet member for publications, as “we, in this district, are laboring under the disadvantages of having a Black Republican” representative, and, consequently, “are not favored with any Documents.” When a politician distributed texts, he conferred political legitimacy upon fellow partisans. As an Iowa Democrat told Senator Stephen A. Douglas, “I trust that Gen. Cass and you will be so kind as to send the democracy of Iowa occasionally something to revive old feelings and keep us united in brotherly affection.” The circulation of partisan newspapers, speeches, cartoons, pamphlets, and songbooks, moreover, reinforced Jacksonian egalitarianism. At a party dinner, the “Democratic press” was toasted as “the medium through which correct principles are conveyed to the masses of this country. The home of the poor and the parlor of the wealthy are alike indebted to this medium for the popular notions that excite and thrill the nation, and give tone and character to our popular institutions.”⁹

While historians have recently emphasized the conventions of print culture, along with cultural practices more generally, as unifying rituals for partisans, texts were secondary in importance to the *principles* they transmitted and the discourses they framed.¹⁰ Democrats were

⁹D. H. Roush to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, New Berlin, PA, November 12, 1858, Jeremiah S. Black Papers (microfilm edition), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C; A. Logan to Stephen A. Douglas, Mingo Lodge, near Davenport, IA, December 1, 1855, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Illinois; “Speech of C. Chauncey Burr,” in *Speeches Delivered at a Dinner, Given to Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, by Gen. Elijah Ward, in New York City, June 9th, 1854* (n.p.: Office of the National Democrat, [1854]), 8. See also, I. R. Askew to Stephen A. Douglas, Bethel, Morgan Co., IL, January 8, 1848; J. G. Shepherd to Stephen A. Douglas, Fayetteville, NC, April 22, 1848; D. A. Bokee to Stephen A. Douglas, Brooklyn, NY, March 24, 1856; and John A. T. Ballard to Stephen A. Douglas, Troy Post Office, Bradford Co., PA, April 24, 1856, all in the Douglas Papers.

¹⁰Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (1983; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1998); Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Andrew W. Robertson, “Voting Rites and Voting Acts: Electioneering Ritual, 1790-1820,” in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 57-78, on print culture, see 67-9.

Democrats, not simply because of how they read or behaved, but because they thought like Democrats. They recognized political rhetoric as powerful because it was the conduit of their ideas.¹¹ In 1856 a southern Democratic senator complained about statements made by Republican William H. Seward: “that will be spread through the machinery of the federal post office. It is printed in your Globe. It will be read, probably, by millions of people.” “No such faint voice as mine,” he whined, “can follow it to every village, to every hamlet, to every cottage to which it has spread.” More than the magnification of Seward’s voice troubled this southerner—it was the broadcasting of *what* he said about slavery. Seward was “the distinguished author of almost every heresy that appears on this subject,” and the thought of his antislavery doctrines invading households, especially in the Slave States, was disconcerting.¹²

Acknowledging that “folks think a senator should be a *talking machine*,” a congressman counseled circumspection to a colleague. Fortunately, few antebellum politicians heeded this advice, and in their gasconade, they intended not to prevaricate, but to define precisely what they believed. When Democrats imported documents or speakers into a district otherwise regarded as a “Stronghold of Negroism,” it was to deploy their ideas. Documents were “political missiles” used “to furnish speakers and writers with the material for defence or assault” in ideological

¹¹Scholars of the republican ideology reminded historians that political rhetoric registered substantive political debates, in contrast to assumptions of a dearth of meaningful ideological disagreement, whether because of stifling political consensus or because of the primacy of politics driven by “ethnocultural” identity. On republicanism, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 1967, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Watson, *Liberty and Power*; Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969; repr., Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*. For the consensus interpretation, see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (1955; repr., Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1991); and Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition, And the Men Who Made It* (1948; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1989); for the ethnocultural interpretation, see Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (1961; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

¹²*Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin, of Louisiana, on the Kansas Question. Delivered in the Senate, May 3, 1856* (Washington: The Union Office, 1856), 9.

combat.¹³ “We are confident, if the pending issues are properly discussed before the people, that the time-honored principles of the Democratic party will be sustained at the polls,” a Democratic committee implored Kentuckian Joseph Holt in 1855. Holt was also a sought-after speaker during the 1856 presidential canvass. In Louisville, Holt informed his wife, “I spoke 2 ½ hours, much longer than was prudent or kind to the audience.” “I found my clothes almost as wet as if I had been plunged in the river,” he recounted, “& in despite of all precautions I took cold.” His wife begged him to slow down, but Democrats beseeched. His party needed an ideological proselytizer in a contest the stakes of which transcended the mere spoils of patronage (see fig. 1).¹⁴

Current scholarship recognizes the Civil War era as riven by such ideological sparring, especially over sectionalism, race, and slavery. The Democratic party, however, rarely figures as protagonist. Eric Foner’s excavation of the Republican party’s free labor ideology reoriented the political history of the period away from accounts of politicians afflicted by “emotional unreason and overbold leadership,” blundering into an unnecessary war, to analyses of substantive political disagreements.¹⁵ Yet, compared not only to nascent Republicans, but also to the party

¹³Robert McClelland to Alpheus Felch, Monroe, April 28, 1850, Alpheus Felch Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; J. C. Wales to Stephen A. Douglas, Cleveland, OH, March 28, 1856, Douglas Papers; *Buchanan and Breckinridge. The Democratic Hand-Book, Compiled by Mich. W. Cluskey, of Washington City, D. C. Recommended by the Democratic National Committee* (Washington: R. A. Waters, 1856), 4. See also, John S. Armstrong to Stephen A. Douglas, Mission, Lasall [sic] Co., July 14, 1858, Douglas Papers.

¹⁴Quotations from Jephtha Dudley et al., Democratic Central Committee, to Joseph Holt, Frankfort, KY, June 14, 1855; Joseph Holt to Maggie Holt, Louisville, October 11, 14, 1856. See also, Thomas H. Holt to [Joseph Holt], Paris, KY, September 25, 1856; W. W. Trapp and J. Dudley to Joseph Holt, Frankfort, October 10, 1856; W. W. Trapp to Joseph Holt, Frankfort, October 16, 1856; B. N. Kearney to Joseph Holt, Chicago, October 16, 1856; and Maggie Holt to Joseph Holt, Washington, October 18, 1856; all in the Joseph Holt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

¹⁵Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (1970; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). For a concise statement of the revisionist historiography preceding Foner, see J. G. Randall, “The Blundering Generation,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 27, no. 1 (June 1940): 3-28, quotation on 15.

of Jackson in its first decades, the 1850s Democracy often appears as a moribund institution bereft of ideological vibrancy and impelled only by partisan inertia.¹⁶ Studies of ideological debates preceding the Civil War prioritize actors with sectional visions—antislavery northerners and proslavery, states' rights southerners—at the expense of bisectional nationalists such as Democrats. The genuine intractability of slavery and its role in hastening war should not obscure the fact that compromisers advanced their own ideological visions.¹⁷

The history of the late antebellum Democracy is one of decline—America's last national party fractured along the sectional divide in the 1860 presidential election and proved unable to prevent the country's impasse over slavery from becoming fratricidal war. That the party endured as a national institution in the increasingly sectionalized political atmosphere following the Mexican War until 1860 is nonetheless impressive. The 1850s witnessed a dislocating partisan realignment driven by slavery. Parties collapsed and new ones formed, while the Democracy endured. I study those political actors who identified as Democrats while they cooperated with that party, not prior to their entrance or after their departure. While many studies assume sectional differentiation between political actors and even between northern and

¹⁶For such assessments of the 1850s Democracy and its leadership, see Jean H. Baker, *James Buchanan* (New York: Times Books, 2004); and Roy Franklin Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (1948; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1968). Nichols's masterful study of the party aligns with the blundering generation approach. On the Democracy of Jackson, see Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945); Watson, *Liberty and Power*; and Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005).

¹⁷Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 8-9; Eric Foner, "Politics, Ideology, and the Origins of the American Civil War," in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34-53. For works focusing on ideology and sectionalism, see Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Michael J. McManus, *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840-1861* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1998); and Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

southern Democrats, the interbellum Democracy propounded a national ideology and culture and is, consequently, worthy of study as a nationally cohesive party.¹⁸

What united disparate political actors from both the Slave States and the Free States was a set of political principles and cultural beliefs. Democrats shared a *political ideology*, a comprehensive system of ideas detailing the proper ordering of government and society. In stump speeches and party platforms, Democrats delineated their Good Society and assigned the individual and the state a place within it. But political principles cannot account for the entirety of a party's practices and policies. Political principles interacted with cultural norms which marked the limits of acceptable policy. The ingrained attitudes regarding society, race, religion, and gender, as well as the habits, rituals, symbols, and scripts through which political actors communicated and enacted their principles, comprises *political culture*.¹⁹

Combining ideology and culture allows for seemingly abstract political thought to be grounded in its cultural context. Political principles dovetailed with the quotidian concerns of daily existence, intersecting with Democrats' attitudes toward race, gender, and family life, in addition to informing their very conception of self. Democrats' unpublished manuscripts show

¹⁸Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 10-11; Bruce Collins, "The Ideology of the Ante-bellum Northern Democrats," *Journal of American Studies* 11, no. 1 (April 1977): 103-21; Wallace Hettle, *The Peculiar Democracy: Southern Democrats in Peace and Civil War* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2001).

¹⁹On political ideology, see Nancy S. Love, "The End of Ideology—Again?" in *Understanding Dogmas and Dreams: A Text*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D. C.: CQ Press, 2006), 1-20; and Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 4-10. On cultural analysis and political culture, see Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 5-14; Jean Harvey Baker, "Politics, Paradigms, and Public Culture," *The Journal of American History* 84, no. 3 (Dec. 1997): 894-99; Ronald P. Formisano, "The Concept of Political Culture," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (Winter 2001): 393-426; and Andreas Reckwitz, "Toward a Theory of Social Practices: A Development in Culturalist Theorizing," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 2 (2002): 243-63. For examples of historical treatments of political culture, see Baker, *Affairs of Party*; Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997). The so-called "new new political history" entails an even more unequivocal cultural approach, in contrast to models of political culture, such as that of Jean H. Baker, in which ideas exist alongside cultural behavior and practices. For examples of this approach, see the essays in Pasley, Robertson, and Waldstreicher, *Beyond the Founders*.

that doctrinal pronouncements were rooted in personal beliefs. The juxtaposition of published texts and manuscript sources reveals that lived experience and partisanship were mutually reinforcing. Democrats, for example, defined manhood in a way that complemented their partisan ideology, and, furthermore, they enacted gender in ways that distinguished them from other parties. Shared constructions of manhood, mastery, and whiteness were just as determinative as positions on the tariff or theoretical formulations of the role of the state to defining a Democrat.²⁰

Conserving the White Man's Republic

An admirer told Joseph Holt that he wished to see one of his stump speeches from the 1852 canvass published as a pamphlet, as “it reflected light upon points otherwise obscure, and its embodiment in a form to be preserved would be of lasting benefits to the great party with which it is your pride to act.” Political rhetoric was not ephemeral. A similar testament to the regard with which Democrats treated political speech is Jabez Lamar Monroe Curry’s pamphlet library. Curry, an Alabama Democrat, assembled a collection of tracts on politics, religion, and education, which now fills 119 bound tomes in the Alabama State Department of Archives and History. Speeches were worthy of conservation, because they articulated principles that resonated beyond immediate policy debates. When haranguing voters on the hustings, Democrats were explicating their political philosophy. Employing Leo Strauss’s distinction, I

²⁰The stark division between ideas and culture presented here often breaks down in the historical record, which exhibits a seamlessness between political ideology and cultural values. Clifford Geertz collapses the difference between ideas and the cultural idioms through which they find expression. Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 57-65. For an opposite view of the importance of politics in Americans’ daily lives, see Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

thereby treat political speeches and pamphlets as “tracts” advancing public policy and as “treatises” wrestling with political theory.²¹

Treating sources as tracts and as treatises, as statements of policy and of principle, allows us to historicize Democrats’ variant of conservatism, an ideology that is uniquely a creature of its context. Conservatism has been defined, at one extreme, as a defense of the familiar present, a “disposition,” according to theorist Michael Oakeshott, “to delight in what is present rather than what was or what may be.” At the other extreme, it entails an ideology of systematic, timeless principles. Context, nonetheless, matters. Samuel P. Huntington, who defined conservatism as an “ideology” in opposition to Oakeshott’s “disposition,” still conceded it to be a “positional” ideology dependent upon the specific present its principles are enlisted to defend. The late-eighteenth-century thinker Edmund Burke, often regarded as the source for whatever enduring principles characterize conservatism, emphasized that “circumstances [...] give in reality to every political principle its distinguishing color and discriminating effect.” A Democrat in 1856 similarly noted that party principles had to meet “the practical demands upon our thought which a political crisis presses upon us.”²²

²¹Sheldon O’Hare to Joseph Holt, Louisville, October 19, 1852, Holt Papers; J. L. M. Curry Pamphlet Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; Leo Strauss, “Machiavelli’s Intention: The Prince,” *The American Political Science Review* 51, no. 1 (March 1957): 13-40. Unlike Strauss, I ground political ideas in their larger historical and cultural context. See also, Robert C. Grier to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Philadelphia, September 15, 1859, Black Papers.

²²For Huntington, conservatism lacks a “substantive ideal,” an envisioned utopian endpoint to work toward, defined in ideologies such as liberalism or socialism. Conservatives instead defend the present, but, unlike Oakeshott’s depiction, they do so not with a reflexive disposition, but with timeless principles derived from Burke. Michael Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative,” 1956, in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 1962, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 407-37, quotations on 407, 408; Samuel P. Huntington, “Conservatism as an Ideology,” *The American Political Science Review* 51, no. 2 (June 1957): 454-73, quotations on 457, 468; Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 7; *Proceedings of the Celebration of the Fourth of July, 1856, by the Jackson Democratic Association of Washington, at the Bladensburg Spa Spring Grove. Containing the Oration of Hon. A. E. Maxwell, of Florida, and Sketches of the Remarks of the Other Speakers* (n.p.: Office of “The National,” 1856), 5. See also, George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (1976; repr., Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996), 150-3. For examples of the contextual basis of American conservatism, see Twelve Southerners [Donald Davidson, John Gould Fletcher, Henry Blue Kline, Lyle H. Lanier, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Herman Clarence Nixon, Frank Lawrence Owsley, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, John

In responding to what they deemed a political crisis in the 1850s, Democrats no longer seemed to be the rabble-rousers caricatured by their conservative opponents in the 1820s and 1830s. Historian and Democratic partisan George Bancroft watched from London as the revolutions of 1848 convulsed the Continent. He found that “all Europe has its eyes turned towards us.” “The world has entered in a new era,” Bancroft effused, “with America openly in the lead among the nations; & the sovereigns know it.” Yet Bancroft was not referring to revolutionaries gazing longingly at the American republic, but to “the lovers of order [who] now look to the United States.” Bancroft told Lewis Cass, the Democrats’ presidential nominee in 1848, that “it is while all Europe is full of anxiety, that you will be called to preside over the happy republic, whose only danger is in the pride of its exuberant prosperity.” Americans’ “happy republic,” long detested by European and even American conservatives in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as destructively demotic, enticingly egalitarian, and rambunctiously republican, suddenly modeled stability for the crowns of Europe.²³

While in London as American minister, James Buchanan dined with exiled leaders of the failed revolutions reported on by Bancroft back in 1848. The luminaries at the 1854 dinner party thrown by Democratic diplomat George N. Sanders included Hungary’s Lajos Kossuth, Italy’s Giuseppe Garibaldi and Giuseppe Mazzini, Russian socialist Aleksandr Herzen, Arnold Ruge of the defunct Frankfurt Parliament, and French labor leader Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin. A ribald old flirt, Buchanan inquired of the host’s wife “if she was not afraid the combustible materials around her would explode & blow us all up.” “They are very able & agreeable men,”

Donald Wade, Robert Penn Warren, and Stark Young], *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); and Richard M. Weaver, “Two Orators,” in *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, ed. George M. Curtis III and James J. Thompson Jr. (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1987), 104-33.

²³George Bancroft to Lewis Cass, London, October 22, 1848, Lewis Cass Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Buchanan relayed to the secretary of state, and “should the revolutionary spirit again break out in Europe, which they all anticipate within a brief period, they are sensible of the necessity of confining it within more rational limits than in 1848.” Buchanan judged that “Kossuth’s views upon this subject are quite reasonable,” as he was “against Socialism, Fourierism & all other isms inconsistent with liberty & order.” Four years earlier Bancroft had suggested that monarchs besieged by these men look to America as a template of stability. Buchanan now seemed to suggest that Europe’s liberals and radicals do likewise. Both conservatives and revolutionaries could turn to the happy republic, a synthesis of “liberty & order.”²⁴

Even as they adopted a conservative disposition to defend their republic from further innovation, Democrats’ defense was principled, because their happy republic was itself the culmination of their ideology. The principles Democrats appealed to when making their conservative stand were, consequently, not those typically associated with ideological conservatism. Individualism, democracy, and egalitarianism were not standard conservative panaceas, yet they were precisely what Democrats sought to conserve. When Bancroft boasted that European monarchs envied America’s stability, it was not because traditionally conservative principles were at work there. “Our land system, our church system, our states right system” would pacify the particular demands of the Irish in 1848, noted Bancroft, but “to grant these is revolution.” The ideas that fostered liberty and order in the United States would foment revolution elsewhere. In their attempts to conserve their progressive, democratic republic, as well as its racial and gender prerequisites, Democrats relied on principles heretofore unsettling to conservatives.²⁵

²⁴James Buchanan to William L. Marcy, Legation of the United States, London, February 24, 1854, William L. Marcy Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

²⁵George Bancroft to Lewis Cass, London, October 22, 1848, Cass Papers.

Democrats were not simply resisting progress in preference for a status quo to which they had grown accustomed; rather, they delighted in their familiar present because they considered their happy republic to be already perfect. They resolved to conserve what had once been innovative—an economically prosperous, geographically expansive, and politically stable democratic republic. They were also determined to safeguard the racial and gender hierarchies which buttressed it. Examining political ideas in their cultural context reveals that seemingly neutral concepts such as rights, sovereignty, and equality were inextricably bound up with a raced and gendered present. Democrats' liberated individual was not a theoretical construct; rather, *he* was the white master of female and non-white dependents. Because he upheld the racial and gender hierarchies at home from which he benefited in the political sphere, the progressive individual was also the conservative bulwark of social order, with the intermingling of "liberty & order" in his person a microcosm of their reciprocity within the republic itself.

In 1815 James Buchanan, still a callow Federalist youth, had arraigned Democrats as "enemies of social order" and espousers of "wild and visionary theories." In 1856, as that party's presidential nominee, he lionized the Democracy as "the only true conservative party of the Country." That the staid and sober James Buchanan became the standard-bearer of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson's rough-and-tumble party shows the extent to which the Democracy had assumed a conservative posture by the 1850s. After decades of partisan brawling, Democrats had realized their wild and visionary theories in the brittle concreteness of the white man's republic. That Democrats imagined themselves as conservatives in the 1850s in their quest to protect this republic did not negate the fact that the ideas upon which they premised their conservatism possessed a radical edge. Democratic self-governance was a novel proposition for maintaining social order and, more specifically, racial and gender boundaries.

Indeed, the disastrous results of relying on the vicissitudes of local democracy to defuse fraught issues such as slavery and race relations in the 1850s eventually vindicated the young Buchanan's distrust of Democrats as guarantors of social order.²⁶

In the long-run, however, Democrats redefined American conservatism, giving it the buoyancy that carried it into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In attempting to perpetuate the gender and racial exclusivity of their republic, Democrats recast conservatism by placing it on a new foundation, that of majoritarian democracy and liberal individualism and antistatism. Somewhere between John Locke and Barry Goldwater, "liberalism" became "conservative" in the United States, and historians have vexed themselves in pursuit of the turning point. It was Democrats who laid the groundwork for the intellectual revolution that climaxed in the New Right as they defended their white man's republic in the 1850s. In attempting to conserve their democracy, Democrats democratized conservatism. They failed to preserve their happy republic in the 1850s, but they did start conservatism on a new trajectory, one in which democracy would be called upon to legitimize inequality and hierarchy, a distinctly American conservatism that endures in our republic today.

²⁶*James Buchanan, His Doctrines and Policy as Exhibited by Himself and Friends* (New York: Greeley and McElrath, Tribune Office, [1856]), 2, 4; James Buchanan to William B. Reed, Legation of the United States, London, February 29, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan*, 10:63.

HON. JOSEPH HOLT

Will address the citizens of Hardin county at Elizabethtown on the 27th day of October, at which time and place will be given a FREE

[1856]

DEMOCRATIC BARBECUE!

To which all are invited. Mr. Holt is one of the best orators in the West, and no one will regard it a loss of time to hear him.

Mr. Holt will certainly be present, as Judge A. H. Churchill has just received a letter to that effect. [Oct. 17.]

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Figure 1. Placard advertising a speech by Kentucky Democrat Joseph Holt during the 1856 presidential canvass. *Source:* Volume 17, Joseph Holt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

CHAPTER 1: THE NORTHERN MEN AND THEIR SOUTHERN PRINCIPLE:
JACKSONIAN IDEOLOGY, POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY, AND WHITE MEN'S
DEMOCRACY, 1847-1854

We shall have hard work to maintain the immense and sudden augmentation of our national character resulting from the Mexican War:—but we shall do it.

—Vice President George Mifflin Dallas, 1849

It is better to give time for the councils of moderation to be heard.

—Senator Lewis Cass, 1846¹

Democrats entered the last antebellum decade exultant. The Democratic Polk administration had successfully vanquished Mexico, transformed the United States into a continental republic, and implemented lasting economic reforms. By 1849, despite decades of Federalist and Whig obstruction, the party of Jefferson and Jackson had given the American people a political culture which sanctified mass democracy for equal white men, a political economy which had gone far toward sundering the state from the market, and a foreign policy which rejected colonization in favor of conquest, accession, and assimilation into an ever more eclectic federal system. Altogether it was a regime facilitating the unimpeded spread of a white man's republic across space and through time. The victorious Democracy thrilled over its happy republic and looked forward to an era of consolidation under its uncontested stewardship.

Yet, as became clear, Democrats would confront new challenges between the end of the Mexican War and the start of the Civil War. At the very moment of its continent-wide consummation, the foundation of the white man's republic seemed imperiled by a debate most

¹George M. Dallas, "Deductions from Public Life," [1849], in *Diary*, in "The Mystery of the Dallas Papers. Part II: Diary and Letters of George M. Dallas, December 4, 1848-March 6, 1849," [ed. Roy F. Nichols], *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 73, no. 4 (Oct. 1949): 517; Lewis Cass to Andrew T. McReynolds, Washington, December 26, 1846, Lewis Cass Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Democrats would have wished to avoid—that over the status of slavery in and the racial composition of the new national domain. Historians have exhaustively chronicled the labyrinthian debates over the disposition of the Mexican Cession. It is increasingly rendered as a story of ideological antipodes, with the proslavery South, demanding the expansion of slavery, and the antislavery North, demanding its proscription, framing a sectional debate for the rest of the decade. In this context, the Democratic party's compromise solution, that of "popular sovereignty," which would have allowed territorial settlers to determine the status of slavery themselves, often figures as a disingenuous hedge or a crass bid for southern support on the part of weak-kneed northern "Doughfaces," those "northern men with southern principles." By countenancing the democratically-sanctioned expansion of both free labor and enslaved labor, however, Democrats drew from their ideological heritage and understood themselves as taking a principled stand in favor of democracy and white supremacy.

Resorting to majoritarian democracy was Democrats' reflexive recourse whenever the racial basis of their white man's republic seemed endangered. To many Democrats, the increasingly strident opponents of slavery appeared to call into question the racial basis of the republic by contending for the rights of marginalized Americans. Any diminution of white men's democratic power, especially their right to legislate on slavery, undermined the racial exclusivity of democratic self-rule. Democrats did not jettison old ideas in the 1850s, nor did they stubbornly cling to outdated teachings; rather, they drew from an inherited ideology to formulate what they considered to be a national and conservative response to antislavery agitation and other "fanatical" reformism. Seen in this context, popular sovereignty was more than narrow pragmatism. It was an ideologically preconditioned recourse for preserving the white man's republic. Democrats relied on their Jacksonian preference for local self-government

in proposing that territorial settlers democratically decide the fate of African Americans, the ultimate testament to white men's monopoly of democratic power. The northern Democrats who introduced popular sovereignty promised that their doctrine would conserve the Union as well as white men's democracy. With their southern principle, these northern men put Jacksonian Democracy to conservative uses in the 1850s.

The Jacksonian Overture to the 1850s

Even with a Whig interregnum, only the second ever, commencing in 1849, Democrats saw themselves as the nation's natural majority party. "The Democratic has been the dominant and ruling party ever since the formation of the general government with the exception of the administration of the two Adams and Mr. Fillmore," boasted an Alabamian in the 1850s, concluding, "the principles of that party prevailed and now obtain in the country." James Shields, an Irish-born Illinoisan who donned a general's uniform in the Mexican War, similarly gloated in 1852 that "for the last fifty years the history of the democratic party is the political history of this country. There is not a prominent event in our national history, from the first day of Jefferson's administration to the last day of Polk's, that does not illustrate the genius of democracy." Given this ascendancy, a Tennessee Democrat suggested that the people investigate competing parties, in order "to satisfy themselves what party it is upon the administration of whose principles the country has attained its gigantic proportions and unequalled prosperity; to consider well the principles, measures and men of that party, its Union-wide organization and nationality."²

²A. A. Coleman, "Antebellum Democratic Party Address, before 1861," manuscript speech, 8-9, Coleman-Stuart Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; 1. *Letter of Hon. James Shields*. 2. *An Article from the Boston Pilot, Exposing the Falsehoods of the Scott Whigs Respecting General Pierce*. 3. *Extracts from Speeches of General Franklin Pierce before the Constitutional Convention, and before the People*,

Such an inquiry reveals that Jacksonian principles, forged in the party battles of the 1820s and 1830s, continued to animate the Democracy after the end of the Mexican War in 1848. When Democrats faced new challenges in the 1850s, they turned to their Jacksonian ideology. The Old Hero had primed his party to be wary of any agent of power other than its rightful wielders—the sovereign people. Monopolies, Jackson warned, whether in the guise of the state, a national bank, or, in the context of the 1850s, fanaticism, sapped white men’s democratic power. Democrats in the interbellum period transferred their animus from the Whiggish Money Power to a new tyrannical threat—fanatical reformers, those who would use centralized state power to inflict their moral reforms on otherwise autonomous white men. Democrats folded this foe into their worldview and responded as Jackson had taught them.

Angling for political advancement while a general in Mr. Polk’s army of occupation in Mexico City, William J. Worth answered a questionnaire about his political beliefs. Worth told his interlocutor that he preferred an independent treasury over a national bank, because a bank “must of necessity have within itself, elements dangerous to private and public virtue.” “It is difficult to imagine a scheme fraught with greater evil,” Worth added, “or more ingeniously devised to corrupt individuals and masses, States and Congress” than the Whiggish plot to distribute the proceeds of federal land sales to the states. A tariff was acceptable, provided that it was “for revenue,” not for the protection of industry, and that it was sectionally neutral, “adjusted to the various *interests* and *rights* of every part of the country.” Any tariff, moreover, would prove temporary; the general looked forward to “the day, and that not remote, when Trade

upon the Religious Test. 4. Voice of the Catholics of New Hampshire. 5. General Scott’s Letter to G. W. Reed and Others, of Philadelphia, in 1844 (n.p., [1852]), 1; *Letter of Hon. G. W. Jones, of Tennessee, to His Constituents* (n.p., [1856]), 15-6.

will be free and unfettered.” This Jacksonian also advocated “an economical administration of the affairs of the country” and countenanced only “proper, and constitutional internal improvement.”³

The Democracy claimed to be a party of principles, not of men, and while truly a party of both “men and measures,” Democrats such as Worth flaunted their principled nature by exhibiting their political beliefs. Public avowals of principles, Democrats contended, distinguished them from opponents. “When I see the measures which are in contest, and the distinctive principles upon which they are based,” James Bayard of Delaware asserted, “I know where to place myself.” He contrasted his certainty with “that class of politicians who bellow about democratic principles, without attempting to define them, and who consider *party* as a mere union of *men* to secure power of office.” Partisans like Worth and Bayard were expected to submit their principles to scrutiny when standing for election or grubbing after patronage. The self-interestedness of such declamations need not impugn their value as ideological artifacts. More than official party pronouncements, these personal platforms demonstrate how the party’s doctrines resonated with individual members.⁴

One’s “Democracy” came under constant scrutiny. A man counting himself among the party’s “Old Liners” wrote to a congressman to recommend another loyalist for a postmaster appointment, explaining, “he is undoubtedly qualified & his democracy, I believe is undoubted.” James Buchanan found Irish-Americans immune to Whig electioneering; they were “hard to be

³William J. Worth to Joseph Nill, City of Mexico, January 10, 1848, copy, William Hayden English Family Papers, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

⁴*Constitution and By-laws of the Young Men’s Democratic Club of Boston* (Boston: Press of the Franklin Printing House, 1857), 12; James A. Bayard to Dr. Jno. Merritt, Wilmington, October 24, 1854, copy, Thomas F. Bayard Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. For parties as institutions that furthered individual interests and political principles, see Nicole Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1787-1861* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 40-52.

blarneyed themselves, especially out of their Democracy.” Testaments to one’s Democracy were enhanced with an exposition of principles. Cabinet member John Y. Mason was introduced to two men in 1848 and learned that “politically, they are working Loco Focos, of the strictest sect.” Requesting franked government publications of his congressman, a constituent in Ohio prefaced, “I am a democrat and an admirer of the onward progress of democratic principles.”⁵

Democrats routinely submitted to political catechesis by itemizing the components of their democracy. Henry A. Wise of Virginia began and ended his antebellum political career as a Democrat. Accounting for the “wayward political predilections” which diverted him to Whiggery in the unorthodox interim, he later claimed to have remained true to the Democracy’s principles, if not to the party itself. Having returned to the fold, Wise explained his politics at length and summarized his consistent beliefs: “That is my democracy, contradistinguished on the one hand from the *Exclusive* principles which would erect an eminence high enough for *a few* only & which would kick all others down; and from the *mob* principles on the other hand which would kick & keep all down.”⁶

Robert Kyle, the former assistant doorkeeper of the Indiana Senate, sent Governor Joseph A. Wright “statements as it regards my Political creed.” His ambition ripened with vengefulness,

⁵G. F. Corkeely[?] to John G. Davis, Terre Haute, IN, January 12, 1854, John G. Davis Papers (microfilm edition), Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; *Great Speech of the Honourable James Buchanan, Delivered at the Mass Meeting of the Democracy of Western Pennsylvania, at Greensburg, on Thursday, Oct. 7, 1852* (Philadelphia, 1852), 13; L. H. Laughlin to John Y. Mason, Washington City, October 26, 1848, John Y. Mason Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Charles Patterson to William Allen, Cadiz, OH, December 31, 1846, William Allen Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. See also, an exchange between a constituent and Ohio senator William Allen, in which Allen responded to the constituent’s queries regarding his political views. James C. Johnson to William Allen, Columbus, January 30, 1849; and William Allen to James C. Johnson, Senate Chamber, [Washington, D. C.], February 6, 1849, copy, both in the Allen Papers. For patronage letters, see Charles Monroe to Horatio King, Washington, July 19, 1855; and J. Davis to Horatio King, Worcester, MA, December 11, 1855, both in Horatio King Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁶[Henry A. Wise] to [?], Rio de Janeiro, December 2, 1846, Henry A. Wise Papers (microfilm), Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Kyle intended to prove that, unlike the principal doorkeeper who had ousted him, he was a “Democrat of the right stripe.” “I was born a Democrat, descended from Democratic Ancestors, and always have been a Democrat,” he assured the governor. In testament to his fidelity, he recited Jacksonian maxims of political economy: “no connexion between Government [*sic*] & Banks,” “no Swindling Corporations,” “no extensive system of Internal Improvements,” and “no grants of exclusive charters, and privileges by special Legislation to Banks.”⁷

Kyle’s fellow Indianan William H. English, drafting a speech for his first congressional bid in 1852, followed his own advice that “it is the duty of every man, canvassing for an office involving political principles, to state frankly and fairly to the people [...] the line of policy he will pursue if elected.” English was “opposed to all class legislation” as well as to “fostering one branch of industry to the detriment of another or of cherishing the interests of one portion to the injury of another portion of our common country.” Like Kyle, English believed that no economic interest merited “advantages and privileges not enjoyed by the people at large.” Government should instead ensure “equal and exact justice to all men and all classes of men, no matter of what profession, what religion, or what political faith.” Individual liberty and equal rights were not facilitated by the state, but by its absence. In adhering to these precepts, English but “cordially subscribe[d] to the sentiment of that iron bound old patriot And^w Jackson.”⁸

In 1843 the New Hampshire Democratic State Central Committee worried that Levi Woodbury had lent his prestige to a rogue group of “disorganizers.” Woodbury assuaged them by promising to support the regular party nominees and by expounding his self-proclaimed “ultra” views concerning corporations. Private rail roads, he advised, should not enjoy eminent

⁷Robert Kyle to Joseph A. Wright, South Hanover, IN, May 10, 1852, Joseph A. Wright Correspondence and Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

⁸William H. English, draft speech in undated notebook, [1852?], English Family Papers.

domain. Corporations should not receive “special charters,” but should be “regulated under careful general laws,” ensuring that “they would, then, not be in any case matters of power or monopoly.” Woodbury’s “ultra” Jacksonianism consisted of antipathy toward any concentration of power contravening that of the people. For Kyle and English, equal treatment resulted when government got out of the way. “The people should be left free to pursue whatever course they may deem most conducive to their own happiness and good,” English concluded. “Democracy” entailed a limited state, individual autonomy, and a republican regime of equality before the law. Yet guaranteeing equality could require governmental agency, especially to contain grasping corporations, which Woodbury demanded. Democrats were not *laissez-faire* purists and did wield state power, especially that of the executive branch, to demolish powerful agglomerations which threatened the people’s equality.⁹

Democrats’ selective employment of state power struck some critics as unprincipled. One wag teased his Democratic friend Jackson Woodward that “since the day that the iron willed Tennessean your illustrious namesake dressed despotism in the garb of Democracy there is very little difference between an Emperor and a President.” Jacksonians, however, saw consistency in their ends. Democrats wanted to give equal white men a political, economic, and social order purged of despotic power blocs, a goal often necessitating the diminishment of the state, itself a source of tyranny, but occasionally requiring governmental energy to crush other monopolies. Despotism took more than economic forms; indeed, it was oppression beyond the realm of political economy that increasingly irked Democrats as they trudged through the 1850s.

Indianan Robert Kyle, for this reason, dreaded the “connexion between Church & State.”

⁹Franklin Pierce et al., Democratic State Central Committee, to Levi Woodbury, Concord, NH, February 6, 1843, copy; Levi Woodbury to Franklin Pierce et al., Democratic State Central Committee, Washington, February 11, 1843, both in the Franklin Pierce Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; English, draft speech in undated notebook, [1852?], English Family Papers.

Democrats looked back to undemocratic and inegalitarian aggregations including the Second Bank of the United States, the Supreme Court helping Native Americans fight Removal, exclusive corporations choking competition, South Carolinians nullifying the national will, abolitionists dictating to slaveholders, and religious fanatics forcing others to bow before their idols. And they smiled when they remembered that Jackson smote them all.¹⁰

The administration of President James K. Polk (1845-1849) left its own record of Jacksonian orthodoxy. In 1847 a Virginia congressman running for reelection brandished his support for the president, telling constituents, “under the auspices of his Administration, we have introduced, and have in successful operation, the leading and favorite measures of the Democratic party.” The Polk administration was, for many, the apogee of Jacksonian Democracy. The party’s 1848 national platform lionized Polk for having “fulfilled the hopes of the Democracy of the Union” and for “the strictness of his adherence to sound Democratic doctrines.” Aided by a cabinet of Democratic Nestors, including James Buchanan, William

¹⁰Paul. S. Preston to Jackson Woodward, Stockport, quotation from August 21, 1845, October 28, 1847, both in the Preston-Woodward Correspondence, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Robert Kyle to Joseph A. Wright, South Hanover, IN, May 10, 1852, Wright Correspondence and Papers. Explanations of Democratic hostility to monopolies, such as the Bank of the United States, are a litmus test for interpretations of Jacksonian Democracy in the 1820s through the 1840s. I regard Jacksonians, whose beliefs shaped Democratic thought in the 1850s, as rational actors who embraced progress and the capitalist Market Revolution, albeit in a way that meshed with their ideology of democracy, liberty, and republican equality. Harry L. Watson advances a similar view, with Democrats seeking to restrain the Market and make it safe for republicanism. Like Watson, John Ashworth, Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., and Sean Wilentz portray Jacksonians as ideologically contesting the Market Revolution and its undemocratic, inegalitarian aspects. Lawrence Kohl and Charles Sellers, in contrast, render opposition to monopolies as stubborn ideological attempts to resist capitalist modernity, while Daniel Walker Howe sees it as an outgrowth of Jackson’s personal efforts to destroy “rival power center[s]” which challenged his power and the people’s sovereignty. Marvin Meyers presents irrational Jacksonians cathartically lashing out at the Bank to make peace with a capitalist consensus, while Richard Hofstadter describes rational, non-ideological agents of that same consensus. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 1990, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006); Ashworth, “Agrarians” and “Aristocrats”: *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983); Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945); Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005); Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 328-445, 498-501, quotation on 376; Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (1957; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1961); Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition, And the Men Who Made It* (1948; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 57-86.

Learned Marcy, Robert J. Walker, and George Bancroft, Polk lived up to the designation “Young Hickory.” Like the Old Hero, who providentially passed at the beginning of his protégé’s presidency, Polk pursued territorial expansion and economic reform in order to further the individual liberty and democratic equality of white men.¹¹

Polk combined diplomacy and war to police the nation’s boundaries and hasten its supposed Manifest Destiny. Saber-rattling helped secure the Oregon Territory, even if its paltry size displeased many expansionists.¹² The administration’s most stunning success was the Mexican War, in which Democrats led a martial nation to “war with a Sister Republic.” An Ohioan, noting many Democrats’ disappointment over Oregon’s borders, still found “considerable excitement here about the war, many of our most worthy & talented citizens have volunteered & gone.” Former senator Franklin Pierce, mulling over a commission tendered him by the president, similarly observed that “this question of the War gives us immense meetings and everywhere there is the greatest enthusiasm.” While the nation was hardly unanimous in support of the conflict, most Democrats gloried in “prosecuting a war so just.” New York City’s Tammany Hall reminded Americans of “the great and important victory at New Orleans, fought by a handful of brave freemen under the immortal JACKSON against the best disciplined troops

¹¹*Address of Mr. George C. Dromgoole to His Constituents* (n.p.: J. and G. S. Gideon, Printers, [1847]), 1; “Democratic Platform of 1848,” in *National Party Platforms, 1840-1964*, ed. Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 12. See also, Charles Mills et al. to [William Allen], Tammany Hall, New York, December 5, 1845, printed invitation; and Floyd Silbey to William Allen, [?], August 16, 1846, both in the Allen Papers.

¹²Democrats demanded exclusive rights to the Oregon Territory north to 54° 40’ north latitude but ultimately only secured territory below the forty-ninth parallel. Many Democrats, especially in the North, but also some in the South, were angered over this concession, especially as the Slave States were seen as gaining more with the annexation of Texas. See James Parker to William Allen, [Somerset], OH, July 18, 1846; W. A. Cave to William Allen, Luray, VA, July 22, 1846; William C. McClure to William Allen, Upperville, Fauquier Co., Virginia, July 26, 1846; [?] to [William Allen], Washington, September 6, 1846, all in the Allen Papers; and David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, completed and ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976), 24-6.

of England.” Jackson and his soldiers “have been the high example which led our troops to a succession of victories in Mexico.”¹³

In addition to territorial accretion, the Polk administration oversaw “*a complete reform in the commercial and financial system of the country.*” During the 1848 presidential election, voters were told that supporting the Democratic nominee would ensure a continuation of Polk’s policies, which were themselves “the principles which guided the administration of the illustrious Jackson.” Polk put the finishing touches on Jackson and Martin Van Buren’s political-economic framework for a parsimonious state unable to erect monopolies that throttled white men’s equal opportunity. He revived the Independent Treasury, or subtreasury, first established by Van Buren to fill the fiscal void created by Jackson’s obliteration of the Second Bank of the United States. The subtreasury’s reinstatement was the last act in the acrimonious divorce of bank and state initiated by Jackson. “The working of the constitutional treasury, moreover, has proved that there is no necessity of a great moneyed corporation to regulate exchanges, thus annihilating the most potent whig argument in favor of a national bank,” concluded an election-year pamphlet in 1848.¹⁴

Other Jacksonian hobbies met their denouement under Polk. A purist on internal improvements, he vetoed a river and harbor improvements bill advanced by midwesterners in his

¹³*Great Speech of the Hon. George Mifflin Dallas, upon the Leading Topics of the Day, Delivered at Pittsburgh, PA., with a Brief Biographical Sketch, &c., &c.* (Philadelphia: Times and Keystone Job Office, 1847), 10; Jonathan D. White to William Allen, Georgetown, Brown Co., OH, July 19, 1846, Allen Papers; Franklin Pierce to Edmund Burke, Concord, NH, February 19, 1847, Pierce Papers; The National and Jackson Democratic Association, *The Democratic Policy and Its Fruits* (n.p., [1848]), 6; Elijah F. Purdy et al. to John Y. Mason, New York, December 1, 1847, printed invitation, Mason Papers. For support of the war, see also, George M. Dallas to Sophia Dallas, May 13, 1846, in “The Mystery of the Dallas Papers. Part I,” ed. Roy F. Nichols, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 73, no. 3 (July 1949): 378-9; S. B. Sims to William Allen, Hilton, Clermont County, OH, December 5, 1846; and P. B. Ayers to William Allen, Chesterville, Knox Co., OH, January 12, 1847, both in the Allen Papers. On the cultural legacy of Jackson and the Battle of New Orleans, see John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (1955; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

¹⁴The National and Jackson Democratic Association, *The Democratic Policy and Its Fruits*, 1-4.

party. The administration also supported the downward revision of tariff rates. The 1846 Walker Tariff was informed by the Jacksonian stricture that a tariff's constitutional purpose was to raise revenue, not unfairly protect sectors of the economy. Vice President George Mifflin Dallas cast the deciding vote for the tariff in the Senate, and he rendered his action in Jacksonian terms. Dallas exulted over defying the industrial interests in his home state of Pennsylvania, a course which, he reflected, "embittered against me the monopolists every where." Jacksonians welcomed such enmity. Another Democrat explained that "a tariff for revenue has been substituted for the unequal and unjust policy of selecting favored classes of industry for special protection and encouragement," thereby stultifying hated "monopolies." Polk was not the only Democrat who could claim Old Hickory's mantle. A pamphlet advancing Dallas as Polk's successor gushed, "the exasperation of the monopolist party at this vote was such as to remind one of the days of Jackson's veto of the Bank Charter."¹⁵

Climactic actions like the vice president's "*Casting Vote*" lent an aura of finality to the Polk administration's achievements. Ancient impasses that had once roiled the nation suddenly appeared settled. William Allen wearied of the decades-old tariff imbroglio, even as it peaked in 1846. Instead of listening to hackneyed arguments in the Senate, he caught up on correspondence. "The tariff debate is still going on, hot and heavy," he complained to his wife, "and I am obliged to pay some attention to it, though it is so old a subject, that I cannot pay much." Going into the presidential election of 1848, Democrats celebrated their definitive settlement of these issues, heralding "the Revenue Tariff and the Constitutional Treasury, in which the commercial and financial systems of the country are now, we trust, immutably

¹⁵George M. Dallas, Diary, March 2, 1849, 515; *Address of Mr. George C. Dromgoole*, 1; Democratic Committee of Publication, *Life of George Mifflin Dallas, Vice President of the United States*, 1844, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Times and Keystone Job Office, 1847), 15; Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 183-5. See also, John M. Belohlavek, *George Mifflin Dallas: Jacksonian Patrician* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 111-8.

established.” The Monster Bank was dead, and Whigs would never reanimate it. The Bank “has intellectually descended to the ‘tomb of the Capulets,’” eulogized Dallas, and, thanks to the subtreasury, added General Worth, “it is difficult to conceive a state of affairs, to tempt any sane, or excuse any honest man, in the effort to give it vital life again.” Even after the Whigs took the presidency in 1849, Rhode Island’s Thomas W. Dorr was confident that “the question of a high tariff has been decided forever in the negative.” A bank that comprised an undemocratic consolidation of power and a preferential tariff that violated republican equality, along with the rest of Whig political economy, were, Democrats decided, nothing more than “obsolete ideas” in national politics after 1848.¹⁶

Even when new issues arose, Democrats accommodated them to Jacksonian political economy. “California & gold, gold, is the leading topic of conversation,” a correspondent unnecessarily informed Michigan senator Alpheus Felch in 1848. The vice president agonized over “the gold delirium” sweeping the nation at the eclipse of Polk’s presidency. The effects of easy wealth “cannot fail to revolutionize the social systems and commercial relations of the civilized world,” he feared. The glut of specie meant that, even after dissolving the national debt, there would be “an impracticable surplus remaining on hand.” A good Jacksonian, Dallas assumed that the “prospect of golden treasure” would lead government as well as individuals to

¹⁶Democratic Committee of Publication, *Life of George Mifflin Dallas*, 15; William Allen to Effie Allen, Senate Chamber, [Washington, D. C.], July 17 (quotation), 21, 24, 1846, Allen Papers; The National and Jackson Democratic Association, *The Democratic Policy and Its Fruits*, 1; *Great Speech of the Hon. George Mifflin Dallas*, 16-7; William J. Worth to Joseph Nill, City of Mexico, January 10, 1848, copy, English Family Papers; Thomas W. Dorr to Edmund Burke, Providence, October 3, 1849, Edmund Burke Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. See also, George M. Dallas to Sophia Dallas, July 22, 1846, in “The Mystery of the Dallas Papers. Part I,” 385.

extravagance and speculation, symptoms of corruption and declension when “plainness & poverty are almost necessary props to republican government.”¹⁷

While Democrats congratulated themselves on the decisiveness of their foreign, fiscal, trade, and monetary endeavors, one divisive topic not only endured, but seeped into the vacuum left by the resolution of other disputes. It too required a Jacksonian response. The Democracy in its modern incarnation owed its existence to the desire to mitigate sectional antagonism over slavery. The founders of the second party system forged bisectional coalitions that instead jostled over economic agendas. Democrats’ martial and domestic success in the late 1840s, however, enhanced the political significance of slavery, a question which, despite their best efforts, had never lain dormant.¹⁸

Gold was, accordingly, not the only byproduct of the war which perturbed the vice president. In December 1848 he grumbled to his daughter, “I can’t perceive any business of interest in the future of this Session of Congress, except that connected with the Slavery question.” One year earlier, northern congressmen had rallied behind the Wilmot Proviso, a failed legislative rider outlawing slavery in the territory to be excised from Mexico. The furor over the Proviso indicated that, at the close of the 1840s, slavery would take on startling proportions and draw into its orbit other concerns. “Slavery broke out again in the Senate yesterday, as it probably will, in some way or other, every day during the Session,” Dallas

¹⁷Charles Richmond to Alpheus Felch, Detroit, December 21, 1848, Alpheus Felch Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; George M. Dallas, Diary, December 8, 1848, January 15, 20, 1849; George M. Dallas to Sophia Dallas, December 9, 1848, all in “The Mystery of the Dallas Papers. Part II,” 478-9, 479-80, 494, 497. See also, Madison Walthall to John Y. Mason, Columbus, December 23, 1848, Mason Papers; Samuel L. Bridge to Caleb Cushing, San Francisco, April 1, 1854, Caleb Cushing Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

¹⁸Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 236-8; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 70-2, 87-8, 165-6.

pouted at the start of 1849. Little seemed to have changed a decade later—a southern diarist complained in 1859 that “Congress is busy doing nothing but discussing the everlasting slavery question.”¹⁹

Balloting over the Wilmot Proviso shuffled congressmen into regional blocs that cut across party lines, raising the possibility of a sectionally-driven partisan realignment. What President Polk called “that delicate and most dangerous sectional controversy” jeopardized everything for which Jackson’s hoplites had fought for two decades. The stalemate alarmed party stalwarts, for, as one Democrat observed, “this question has now assumed a character far above party.” Many Democrats chafed at the imperative to reduce their political worldview to a stance on territorial slavery. A Democrat in Detroit preferred the old issues: “Instead of the present dangerous aspect of affairs at Washington, I should feel rejoiced to see the old party feuds raging even to bloodshed.” Sectional coalitions based on opposition to or support for slavery and its growth imperiled the party system, as “those parties can exist distinctly only so long as they are national parties. As soon as the country is sectionally divided the Whig & Democratic parties are dissolved.”²⁰

Intraparty divisions over slavery handicapped Democrats in the presidential election of 1848. Michigan Democrats faced a dilemma, as they had to weigh their antislavery convictions against supporting the presidential aspirations of favorite son Lewis Cass. Senator Cass wished to avoid antagonizing the southern wing of his party, even as many Democrats in Michigan and

¹⁹George M. Dallas to Sophia Dallas, December 11, 1848, January 11, 1849, in “The Mystery of the Dallas Papers. Part II,” 484, 491; Entry for Dec. 7, 1859, Daniel R. Hundley Diary, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. On the Wilmot Proviso, see Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 18-23. Potter’s account remains the best overview of national politics in the interbellum period.

²⁰James K. Polk to Lewis Cass, Washington City, January 9, 1849, Cass Papers; [A. B. Conduitt] to W. A. Gorman, Mooresville, IN, February 11, 1850, English Family Papers; Henry Chipman to Alpheus Felch, Detroit, March 1, 1850, Felch Papers.

throughout the Free States endorsed the Wilmot Proviso. One antislavery, pro-Cass Democrat attending Michigan's state party convention sighed, "I do not wish to vote upon the question of slavery at all." Cass rejected the Proviso, as did the national party platform upon which he was nominated.²¹ Party rupture ensued when some antislavery Democrats defected and fused with the likeminded of other parties to form the Free Soil party. Antislavery politicians enjoyed unprecedented influence in the interstices of the creaking party system. After the election, Ohio Democrat-turned-Free-Soiler Benjamin Tappan reported to Senator William Allen that in the state legislature, "neither of the old parties" could govern, as "the Free democracy holds the balance of power." Free Soil's effervescence ensured that Allen, a regular Democrat, lost his seat to Free Soiler Salmon Chase. Similar dislocations happened in other states, elevating antislavery politicians to newfound prominence outside of the dominant parties.²²

For the next decade, Democrats acknowledged that slavery and its expansion had become the propulsive force in American politics. As one Texan adjudged in 1856, "this question of slavery, and the power of Congress over it, is the great and exciting political question of the day. Parties have divided and organized upon it, and indeed, the destinies of our Republic, are dependent upon its judicious solution." Still, Democrats resisted political realignment driven by

²¹Quotation from George R. Griswold to [Alpheus Felch], Michigan, February 13, 1848, Felch Papers. On the Michigan Democracy's dilemma, see James K. Polk to Lewis Cass, Washington City, January 9, 1849, Cass Papers; George R. Griswold to [Alpheus Felch], Michigan, January 16, 1848; William A. Richmond to Alpheus Felch, Detroit, January 17, 1848; James B. Hunt to Alpheus Felch, Pontiac, January 24, 1848; R. P. Eldridge to [Alpheus Felch], Michigan, February 15, 1848; William Anderson to Alpheus Felch, Ann Arbor, February 19, 1848; George R. Griswold to [Alpheus Felch], Senate Chamber, Michigan, February 27, 1848; and C. C. Jackson to Alpheus Felch, Detroit, August 4, 1848, all in the Felch Papers; Martin J. Hershock, "'Agitation Is as Necessary as Tranquility Is Dangerous': Kinsley S. Bingham Becomes a Republican," in *Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s*, ed. Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 143-50.

²²Benjamin Tappan to William Allen, Columbus, December 25, 1848, Allen Papers. See also, H. C. Whitman to William Medill, Senate Chamber, Columbus, OH, January 30, 1849, Allen Papers; Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 182-7; and Daniel Feller, "A Brother in Arms: Benjamin Tappan and the Antislavery Democracy," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001): 48-74, especially 69-71.

the issue and dismissed third party efforts as illegitimate. A Virginia Democrat brushed off Free Soil departures as nothing more than “the debris from either of the great parties.” A Tennessee Democrat also assumed ethereality: “that most dangerous question—the question of slavery—which so deeply agitates the bosom of the nation at this moment—will receive its quietus in the elevation of ‘Cass & Butler.’” Cass and his running-mate William O. Butler of Kentucky nonetheless lost the election, and slavery endured as a divisive issue. At the same time, many Free Soilers returned to the Democracy in time for the presidential elections of 1852 and 1856, reinforcing Democrats’ preconception that third parties were neither lasting nor legitimate.²³

Opposition to slavery was not the only “one-idea” reform which rocked party regularity in the 1850s. Matching a northern Renaissance painter’s fervid nightmares, Democrats created a hellish triptych of demonic abolitionists, temperance crusaders, and bigoted nativists flaying men of their autonomy, manhood, and whiteness. Nativism and temperance, alongside antislavery, were not new impulses in American political culture, although the weakening of two-party politics under the strains of slavery allowed these forces to precipitate out of the major parties. Politicized temperance movements seeking prohibitory legislation fermented in the Free States, while the Know-Nothing party, an anti-Catholic and nativist movement, attempted to establish itself as the Democracy’s chief opponent on the ruins of Whiggery beginning in 1854.²⁴

²³W. S. Oldham, “Speech,” in *Rights of the South in Opposition to ‘Squatter Sovereignty.’ Speech of Hon. W. S. Oldham, at the Capitol, Delivered on the 27th Day of August, 1856, and Letter of Hon. William R. Scurry* (Austin, TX: Marshall and Oldham, State Printers, 1856), 3; John Y. Mason to Lewis Cass, Washington, September 25, 1848; Joseph B. Gilman to Lewis Cass, Jonesboro, TN, October 18, 1848, both in the Cass Papers. See also, Thomas Hart Benton to Lewis Cass, [June 1848], Cass Papers; and *Letter from Daniel Chandler, Esq. on the Principles of the Know Nothing Party* (n.p., [1855]), 7. Mark E. Neely Jr., in contrast, denies that Americans accepted a two-party system as normal in the Civil War era. Neely, *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 7-21.

²⁴Democrats’ and Whigs’ emphasis on issues of political economy subsumed so-called “ethnocultural” issues such as temperance and nativism. Such questions either ranked secondary in importance or were synthesized into coherent worldviews predicated on parties’ attitudes toward government, economics, and society. They were, by themselves, not the impetus of Jacksonian politics. Ashworth, “Agrarians” and “Aristocrats”, 177-223; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 172-97. For the ethnocultural argument, see Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian*

Like the issue of slavery, temperance and nativism confused party lines. From Louisiana came reports of the Know-Nothing “dark lantern crowd” who were “hoodwinking and deceiving” and “exercising a delusive sway over former good, well meaning democrats.” A Maryland Democrat was unsure what to make of Know-Nothingism, but anticipated that “while it exists side by side with the old party organizations and factions of the past, such as abolitionism & whiggery, I can well understand that its existence has had a disastrous influence upon the organization of the Democratic party.” Thus, even as they recognized the centrality of slavery, Democrats took other threats seriously, unsure of the final shape their amorphous opposition would assume. When the antislavery and exclusively northern Republican party congealed concurrently with the Know-Nothings, it seemed to Democrats as if every fanatical idea had embodied itself in its own single-issue party.²⁵

Democrats fought the urge to boil down political identity to “one-idea” positions such as the Wilmot Proviso, temperance legislation, or proscription of Catholics and immigrants. The single-minded pursuit of one reform forced a narrowing of political worldviews. Virginian R. M. T. Hunter opposed Know-Nothings in his state, asking, “if a representative is with you on political tests, does it matter, so far as the politician is concerned, what are his opinions upon other subjects? If he is with you on the subjects of trade, currency, and the principles of constitutional construction, when they are in issue, does it matter that he differs from you on the

Democracy: New York as a Test Case (1961; repr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1970); Joel H. Silbey, “‘Let the People See’: Reflections on Ethnoreligious Forces in American Politics,” in *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 69-84; and Robert P. Swierenga, “Ethnoreligious Political Behavior in the Mid-nineteenth Century: Voting, Values, Cultures,” in *Religion and American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s*, ed. Mark A. Noll (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 146-71.

²⁵L. W. Graves to John Perkins, Trinity, LA, July 30, 1855, John Perkins Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Robert McLane to Louis McLane, Paris, January 31, 1854[?], Louis McLane Correspondence, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

doctrine of transubstantiation?” Some Democrats still viewed the old economic disputes as the only legitimate “political tests.” James Bayard remained steadfast amidst pro-temperance Know-Nothings’ seizure of Delaware in 1854. “The exciting causes amongst the mass of the people *now* are for the most part of a *temporary* character, and I do not wish to embark in the divisions to which they give rise,” he reassured a correspondent. When temperance became an independent electoral question in Indiana, a Hoosier Democrat qualified that, although “I am a devoted Temperance man,” still, “I love my old party and will vote it whiskey or no whiskey.”²⁶

Democrats attributed one-idea politics to the splintering of comprehensive, national party platforms. An Ohio Democrat regretted the rise of the “*one-idea* party,” an organization “which discards all the political philosophy of both the great parties, which have directed the policy of the government since its beginning, so that its one idea may reign paramount.” This Democrat wanted the unattainable—a return to economic debates in a political landscape now conditioned by cultural and moral disagreements. Although unable to resuscitate the politics of political economy, Democrats did not despair of entering the 1850s with an encompassing ideology. Which of the one-ideas would emerge ascendant was an academic concern, as Democrats subsumed them all into a common enemy they designated “fanaticism.” Fanaticism replaced Whiggery as Democracy’s ideological antithesis, and, like Whiggery before it, fanaticism sought to consolidate power and degrade the liberty and equality of self-governing white men.

²⁶“Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” in James P. Hambleton, ed., *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise, with a History of the Political Campaign in Virginia in 1855. To Which is Added a Review of the Position of Parties in the Union, and a Statement of the Political Issues: Distinguishing Them on the Eve of the Presidential Campaign of 1856* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1856), 81; James A. Bayard to Dr. Jno. Merritt, Wilmington, October 24, 1854, copy, Bayard Papers; Leland R. [?] to John G. Davis, Greencastle, IN, April 23, 1854, John Givan Davis Papers (microfilm edition), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

Addressing new political issues with a coherent, national platform simply required Democrats to apply their Jacksonian principles to temperance, nativism, and, most importantly, slavery.²⁷

The Northern Men and Their National Principle

Prior to the Mexican War, all federal territory was open or closed to slavery by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the 1820 Missouri Compromise. The acquisition of California and the Southwest in 1848, however, raised anew the problem of slavery in the territories. Following the lead of John C. Calhoun, some southerners denied that any power could keep slavery out of the territories, while many northerners, such as David Wilmot, demanded proscription by Congressional fiat. Moderates scrambled for compromise in the precarious space between the blades of what historian David M. Potter called the “territorial shears.” Secretary of State James Buchanan signaled his presidential ambitions in an 1847 public letter proposing the extension of the Missouri Compromise Line through the Mexican Cession. Delaware Whig John M. Clayton, meanwhile, hoped to defer to the federal courts for eventual adjudication. Tense debates over the disposition of the Cession lasted several years, from the outbreak of war until resolution in the Compromise of 1850.²⁸

The prolonged agitation over slavery’s western future troubled moderate Democrats, who bemoaned the fanaticism aroused in each section. Senator William R. King opposed states’

²⁷Thomas M. Drake, *An Address, on the Doctrine and Discipline of the Democratic Party; and the Heresy of the Maine Liquor Law and Free Soilism, or Other Side Issues Being Incorporated into Its Creed. Delivered in Zanesville, Ohio, prior to the Late Election* (Zanesville, OH: E. C. Church, Printer, 1853), quotation on 3, 9-16.

²⁸James Buchanan to Charles Kessler et al., Washington, August 25, 1847, in *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908-11), 7:385-7. For an example of the extreme southern position, see “Resolutions from Sumter County, AL, Favoring the Resolutions of the Nashville Convention, 1850,” draft manuscript, Coleman-Stuart Family Papers. For the various proposals regarding slavery in the Mexican Cession, the election of 1848, and the Compromise of 1850, see Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 51-120, quotation on 51, 62.

rights Democrats in Alabama, led by William Lowndes Yancey, who demanded that the South gain the Calhounite position or secede. King juxtaposed his “moderation and firmness” against those “unprincipled political aspirants [who] were fanning the flames of fanaticism.” It was possible, King believed, “to settle this alarming question as to protect the rights of the South and save the Union.” Delaware’s James Bayard also dispensed with sectional dogma. It was best to disarm “the fanatical madness of men of extremes,” he advised, and to that end, although he preferred casting the Missouri Line across the continent, he bowed to the Compromise of 1850 as a sane alternative to the Wilmot Proviso.²⁹

Northern moderates also rejected their section’s antislavery shibboleth. A New Yorker in Schoharie County told Senator Stephen A. Douglas that he “now occup[ied] a well defined position as one of the leading *conservative* democrats of this county.” His “position,” and that of other “N.Y. Conservative Democrats,” entailed “the election of Anti-Wilmot-Proviso delegates to the” 1848 national convention. Antislavery absolutism only fomented fanaticism in the Slave States. “Moderate men of all parties” saw the “danger” in the Wilmot Proviso, argued Congressman Willis A. Gorman. A fellow Indianan agreed—while he did not want slavery to spread, he also did not wish to compound sectionalism when it was “humiliating to southerners to submit to the adoption of the Wilmot Proviso.” If slavery could be arrested in a less confrontational way, he suggested, “I can not see the necessity of wrangling about a particular manner of obtaining our wishes.” Each section’s fanaticism exacerbated the other. A hollow

²⁹William R. King to Neil Blue, Washington City, April 11, 1850, Matthew P. Blue Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; James A Bayard to Henry Clay, Wilmington, July 1, 1850, draft letter, Bayard Papers. See also, William R. King to Philip Phillips, Senate Chamber, March 11, 1851, Philip Phillips Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

sectional victory, Democrats throughout the nation agreed, was not worth further inflaming the “nullifiers and abolitionists who have been Siamese in their efforts.”³⁰

One group of conciliatory northern Democrats saw a solution in prohibiting the federal government from taking a stance altogether. Designated “non-intervention” or “popular sovereignty,” their proposal would prevent the federal government from favoring the institution’s limitation or growth and instead allow the people to decide if they wanted slavery in their territory or in the state it would become. Northern Democrats wishing to placate both the South and the North as they eyed the 1848 presidential election propounded the policy. In a speech in Pittsburgh in 1847, Vice President Dallas praised the Polk administration’s course on the tariff and the war and promised to deliver another “*casting vote*,” this time against the Wilmot Proviso. Rather than the congressional restriction of slavery, “the very best thing which can be done, when all is said upon the subject that may be said,” Dallas advised, “will be to let it alone entirely—leaving to the people of the territory to be acquired, the business of settling the matter for themselves.” Dallas established a theme that would recur in Democratic rhetoric for a decade when he announced that settlers “have the right, alone, to determine their own institutions.”³¹

Daniel Dickinson of New York, an inveterate foe of antislavery politicians, offered resolutions in the Senate on December 14, 1847 which asserted that the territorial people, not Congress, possessed power over slavery. “In organizing a territorial government for territories

³⁰N. T. Rosseter to Stephen A. Douglas, North Blenheim, Schoharie Co., NY, January 2, 1848, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Illinois; W. A. Gorman to A. B. Conduitt, Washington City, January 17, 1850, copy; [A. B. Conduitt] to W. A. Gorman, Mooresville, IN, February 11, 1850, both in the English Family Papers; J. F. Brown to Austin H. Brown, Washington, August 2, 1850, Austin H. Brown Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis. On popular sovereignty’s emergence out of moderates’ search for intersectional compromise, see Christopher Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty: Slavery, Manifest Destiny, and the Radicalization of Southern Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 102-34.

³¹*Great Speech of the Hon. George Mifflin Dallas*, 13-5. See also, Democratic Committee of Publication, *Life of George Mifflin Dallas*, 17-20.

belonging to the United States, the principle of self-government upon which our federative system rests,” Dickinson posited, “will be best promoted, [...] and the Confederacy strengthened, by leaving all questions concerning the domestic policy therein to the legislatures chosen by the people thereof.” Michigan senator Lewis Cass announced his presidential ambitions and laid claim to the doctrine in a public letter to Tennessee Democrat A. O. P. Nicholson the same month. He clarified his approach to territorial slavery: “I am opposed to the exercise of any jurisdiction by Congress over this matter; and I am in favor of leaving to the people of any territory, which may be hereafter acquired, the right to regulate it for themselves, under the general principles of the Constitution.” With Cass’s nomination in 1848, the policy became the Democracy’s doctrine.³²

Despite Cass’s defeat in the presidential election, popular sovereignty remained Democratic policy for over a decade. The idea was one ingredient in the Compromise of 1850, by which Congress admitted California as a free state and remained silent on slavery in the territories of Utah and New Mexico—effectively delegating authority to settlers. The 1852

³²“Speech on the Acquisition of Territory, and the Formation of Governments for the Territories.—The Doctrine of ‘Popular Sovereignty’ Proposed and Defended. Delivered in the Senate of the United States, January 12, 1848,” in *Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson, of New York. Including: Addresses on Important Public Topics; Speeches in the State and United States Senate, and in Support of the Government during the Rebellion; Correspondence, Private and Political (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Dickinson), Poems (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Mygatt), Etc.*, ed. John R. Dickinson (New York: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1867), 1:228; Lewis Cass to A. O. P. Nicholson, Washington, December 24, 1847, in *Letter from Hon. Lewis Cass, of Michigan, on the War and the Wilmot Proviso* (Washington, D. C.: Office of Blair and Rives, 1847), 5. Despite its association with Cass, popular sovereignty applied to territorial slavery was not expressly included in the 1848 Democratic platform. See “Democratic Platform of 1848,” 10-2; *The Territorial Slavery Question. Non-Intervention Principle. Position of the National Democracy* (n.p., [1854?]), 7-11; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 72; and Joel H. Silbey, *Party over Section: The Rough and Ready Presidential Election of 1848* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 120. On the origins of popular sovereignty and its subsequent development, see Bruce I. Ambacher, “The Pennsylvania Origins of Popular Sovereignty,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 98, no. 3 (July 1974): 339-52; Belohlavek, *George Mifflin Dallas*, 126-8; Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty*; Allen Johnson, “The Genesis of Popular Sovereignty,” *Iowa Journal of History and Politics* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 1905): 3-19; Willard Carl Klunder, “Lewis Cass, Stephen Douglas, and Popular Sovereignty: The Demise of Democratic Party Unity,” in *Politics and Culture of the Civil War Era: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Johannsen*, ed. Daniel McDonough and Kenneth W. Noe (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 129-53; and Willard Carl Klunder, “The Seeds of Popular Sovereignty: Governor Lewis Cass and Michigan Territory,” *Michigan Historical Review* 17, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 64-81.

Democratic and Whig platforms acquiesced in the Compromise as a final “settlement,” with the Democracy declaring that it would “resist all attempts at renewing, in congress or out of it, the agitation of the slavery question.” Democrats later pointed to these platforms as proof that both parties had tacitly endorsed popular sovereignty as the new paradigm for territorial settlement.³³ When Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois subsequently turned his attention to the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, he cited the Compromise as permission for resorting to popular sovereignty. Kansas and Nebraska were part of the Louisiana Purchase and had been reserved for freedom thirty-four years earlier by the Missouri Compromise. In order to curry southern support, the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act expressly repealed the Missouri Compromise. Alabama congressman Philip Phillips, one of the architects of revocation, later recounted his rationale: “If it is desirable to carry out the declaration of the Bill, they must be thrown open to all alike, and this can only be effected by a *repeal of the inhibition in the Act of 1820.*” Douglas and a cadre of southern Democrats secured President Franklin Pierce’s approval for elevating this divisive measure into a “party test.”³⁴

³³“Democratic Platform of 1852,” and “Whig Platform of 1852,” both in *National Party Platforms*, 17, 21; Robert McClelland to Alpheus Felch, Washington, January 27, 1854, Felch Papers; Philip Phillips, “The Repeal of the Missouri Act,” letter to the editor of the *Constitution*, Washington, August 24, 1860, clipping in bound volume, Box 13, Phillips Family Papers. Michael F. Holt argues that conservative northern Democrats based the Compromise of 1850 on popular sovereignty in order to undercut Free Soilers and define a more moderate position for their party. Holt, “Politics, Patronage, and Public Policy: The Compromise of 1850,” in Finkelman and Kennon, 18-35.

³⁴“Extract from Notes of P. Phillips Left for His Children,” [ca. 1870-76], typescript, 2, Phillips Family Papers; *The Territorial Slavery Question*, 11. See also, *Letter of Senator Douglas, in Reply to the Editor of the State Capitol Reporter, Concord, N. H.* (Washington, D. C.: Sentinel Office, 1854), 6. On Douglas and other Democrats’ use of Henry Clay’s legacy to argue that the Compromise of 1850 sanctioned popular sovereignty, see Sarah Bischoff Paulus, “America’s Long Eulogy for Compromise: Henry Clay and American Politics, 1854-58,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 11 (March 2014): 28-39. On the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the various motivations behind it, see Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty*, 204-33; William W. Freehling, *Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*, vol. 1 of *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 536-65; Michael F. Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 92-111; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 395-434; Henry Barrett Learned, “The Relation of Philip Phillips to the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise in 1854,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 8, no. 4 (March 1922): 303-17; Roy F. Nichols, “The Kansas-Nebraska Act: A Century of Historiography,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (Sept. 1956): 187-212; and Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 145-76.

Because popular sovereignty allowed slavery's expansion, antislavery critics attacked Cass, Douglas, and other northern Democrats as "Doughfaces"—a slur aimed at "northern men with southern principles." Yet these men viewed themselves as the conscience of a national party. They were northern men who advanced a "national" principle—popular sovereignty—that allowed both proslavery and antislavery Americans to flow westward and compete as equals in the democratic process. For all the turmoil produced by popular sovereignty, Democrats used their advocacy of it to define themselves as conservative nationalists. Even as late as 1856, a North Carolina Democrat who supported the Kansas-Nebraska Act still expected, despite evidence to the contrary, that "the success of its principles will give permanent repose to the country." With its abdication of fraught decision-making to "the people," popular sovereignty was, Democrats argued, a *conservative* solution. In its supposed sectional neutrality, moreover, it was a *national* policy.³⁵

Popular sovereignty helped moderates navigate sectionalism by enabling both proslavery and antislavery Americans to claim victory short of resorting to their respective section's extreme position. "The bill before us grants no favor to any section of the Union," Congressman Phillips explained, and "no one has the right to triumph; no one has cause to complain." Democrats told antislavery northerners that popular sovereignty would lead to free territories. Cass, for instance, argued that the Mexican Cession was climatically "unfit for the production of the great staples, which can alone render slave labor valuable." Allowing settlers to fulfill nature's mandate and create a free labor economy, Democrats suggested, was less onerous than relying on the Wilmot Proviso. Even Phillips conceded after the Civil War that, in supporting

³⁵*Address of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman, on the Political Condition and Prospects of the Country, to the Freemen of the Eighth Congressional District of North Carolina* (n.p., [1856]), 8.

the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, “I was well satisfied that slavery could never be established in the higher latitudes of these territories. I was actuated by what I then regarded as a *theoretical right*.” Southerners, for their part, could claim victory with their theoretical right or, more substantively, with the actual exportation of enslaved labor, especially to Kansas, contiguous as it was to the slave state of Missouri. While many northerners cited the “impracticability of the prosperous subsistence of the two systems of freedom and slavery in the same territory,” the Democracy toyed with having it both ways by allowing free and enslaved labor to share the national domain.³⁶

Popular sovereignty was also intended as a legislative sleight of hand that restored harmony by changing the venue in which slavery was contested. The doctrine answered one Democrats’ wish “to see congress throw aside all fanaticism.” Disputes over slavery, Cass told

³⁶*Speech of Hon. P. Phillips, of Alabama, on the Territorial Bill. Delivered in the House of Representatives, April 24, 1854* (n.p.: Towers, Printers, [1854]), 14; Lewis Cass to A. O. P. Nicholson, Washington, December 24, 1847, 6-7; “Extract from Notes of P. Phillips Left for His Children,” 5; *Review of the Administration of General Pierce. Anti-Nebraska, Anti-Administration and Anti-Rum Platform: Speech of Hon. James E. Cooley, at a Meeting of the Democracy, Assembled on Saturday, Nov. 4th, 1854, at the Village of Patchogue, in Suffolk CO, L. I.* (New York: John F. Trow, Printer, 1854), 8-9. See also, “Extract of the Remarks of Hon. W. A. Richardson, of Illinois,” January 12, 1856, in *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories. The Democratic Record* (Baltimore: Murphy and Co., [1860]), 11; *Letter of Senator Douglas*, 7; *Speech of General Aaron Ward, at the Great Democratic Mass Meeting, at White Plains, N. Y., on September 16, 1856* (New York: J. W. Bell, Daily News Job Office, [1856]), 8; and Charles W. Ramsdell, “The Natural Limits of Slavery Expansion,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 16, no. 2 (Sept. 1929): 151-71. In arguing for the climatic unsuitability of the territories to slavery, many Democrats did not heed the Free Soil contention that even the potential of slavery’s spread unfitted a territory for free labor society; according to a critic of the Democracy, “the extension of slavery to a new Territory virtually closes its doors upon the children of the Free States and of Europe.” Some Free Soilers simply assumed the inevitability of slavery’s expansion if not proscribed, thereby agreeing with John A. Dix that “our own experience teaches us that slaves will be carried wherever they are permitted to go; that no soil will be free where they are not excluded by law.” Many Democrats also failed to anticipate that some southerners would view the territorial spread of slavery, especially to Kansas, as more than a “*theoretical right*,” a state of affairs which transformed Kansas into a battleground between proslavery and antislavery forces and almost into a slave state. Russell Jarvis, *Facts and Arguments against the Election of General Cass, Respectfully Addressed to the Whigs and Democrats of All the Free States. By an Anti-Abolitionist* (New York: R. Craighead, 1848), 60; *Speech of Hon. John A. Dix, of New York, on the Bill to Establish Governments in the Territories. Delivered in the Senate of the United States, July 26, 1848* (Washington, D. C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1848), 4, 11-4, quotation on 11. See also, “Moral Responsibility of Statesmen. Speech of Hon. J. R. Giddings, of Ohio, in the House of Representatives, May 16, 1854,” *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1853-54, 23, appendix:989; Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty*, 174-5, 234-5; Paul Finkelman, “The Appeasement of 1850,” in Finkelman and Kennon, 50-5; Freehling, *Secessionists at Bay*, 550-1; William W. Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*, vol. 2 of *The Road to Disunion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 123-8; and Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 173-4.

A. O. P. Nicholson, “should be kept out of the National Legislature, and left to the people of the Confederacy.” Shunting the debate into the territories, Dickinson ventured, meant “that its intrusion may not hereafter arrest the policy, defeat the measures, or disturb the councils of the nation.” The Kansas-Nebraska Act denied extremists a national stage in the Capitol. “It will be in vain for fanatics, either North or South, to endeavor to create any permanent excitement in the minds of the American people,” for if Congress was barred from settling the issue, Judah P. Benjamin explained, “you may light the flame, but the fuel may be wanting.” Congressional quietus would engender a wider societal armistice, undercutting the fanatic “who claims that a phrenzied north has a right to sit in judgment upon the affairs of the south, or he who would rouse a maddened south to enter upon a crusade against the north.”³⁷

Popular sovereignty’s conservative repercussions would also reach to the nation’s hinterlands by providing for the orderly indulgence of expansionist zeal. Jacksonians craved national aggrandizement, which Congress held hostage to sectional intransigence. The Wilmot Proviso limited America’s potential, as southerners refused to organize territories from which slavery was excluded. “The people of the United States must choose between this restriction and the extension of their territorial limits. They cannot have both,” Cass decreed. In 1848 President Polk was willing to accept popular sovereignty, or any “*compromise*,” in order to organize California, which was otherwise hurtling toward “a state of anarchy—and without Government of law.” Phillips later hailed the Kansas-Nebraska Act as necessary to “prepare for the accommodation and protection of that swelling and resistless tide of population” which carried

³⁷[A. B. Conduitt] to W. A. Gorman, Mooresville, IN, February 11, 1850, English Family Papers; Lewis Cass to A. O. P. Nicholson, Washington, December 24, 1847, 2; Dickinson, “Speech on the Acquisition of Territory,” 229-30; “Extract of the Speech of the Hon. J. P. Benjamin, of Louisiana, Delivered in the Senate, on the 25th May, 1854,” in *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories. The Democratic Record*, 8; *A Speech Delivered at Webster, Mass., Providence, R. I., Nashua, N. H., and Other Places, during the Presidential Campaign of 1856, in Support of James Buchanan*, by George B. Loring, of Salem ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, 1856), 4-6. For criticism of this argument, see *Speech of Hon. John A. Dix*, 13.

American ideals ever westward. The Alabamian did not take lightly Congress's "high duty of organizing a government for a vast extent of territory, the seat of future States and empires," leading him to prescribe popular sovereignty as the accomplice of Manifest Destiny.³⁸

While Democrats argued that popular sovereignty would stifle political strife, its immediate effects buffeted the political system and struck many as anything but conservative. Not all northern Democrats were enthusiastic about a policy which countenanced the spread of slavery, prompting the 1848 Free Soil revolt. In 1849 Pennsylvanian Simon Cameron, who only a few years later would flee from the Democracy himself, alerted a New England colleague, "in the North, while all sensible Democrats are willing to let the South alone, there is none who could sustain themselves by even admitting the propriety of an extension of slavery to the territories." "The Nebraska outrage" of 1854 only restarted the egress of antislavery Democrats. A Maine Democrat who remained loyal understood those who defected over Kansas-Nebraska: "It was not difficult to foresee that the action of Congress in forcing the slavery question again upon the public mind in violation of every pledge [...] & in violation of the Compromise of 1820, that a great many old friends would be separated politically." The resulting antislavery coalition, unlike the Free Soilers, proved enduring with the founding of the Republican party.³⁹

The Kansas-Nebraska Act erased the Missouri Compromise Line and unsettled the status of slavery in territories that had been slated for freedom decades earlier. One Democrat complained that "the new fangled doctrine in respect to the Territories" overturned seventy years of precedent whereby Congress governed the territories, a reversal which "would seem to

³⁸Lewis Cass to A. O. P. Nicholson, Washington, December 24, 1847, 5; James K. Polk to Lewis Cass, Washington City, December 15, 1848, Cass Papers; *Speech of Hon. P. Phillips*, 1.

³⁹Simon Cameron to Edmund Burke, Middletown, June 15, 1849, Burke Papers; Josiah H. Drummond to Hannibal Hamlin, Waterville, ME, April 9, 1856; Ichabod Cole to Hannibal Hamlin, Eliot, June 6-7, 1856, both in the Hamlin Family Papers (microfilm edition), Special Collections Department, Raymond H. Fogler Library, The University of Maine at Orono.

indicate that nothing can ever hereafter be considered *settled* under our Government;—a very alarming thought certainly to conservative minds.” Even a slave-state Democrat could despair over the ensuing ruckus. “I feel however very gloomy as to the future prospects of the Union,” James Bayard groaned to his son, continuing, “the alienation of feelings is growing daily & I have almost lost hope that it will even last my day. Indeed the madness of the North, & the general tone of sentiment shakes my confidence in the *durability* of democratic institutions.” “That this measure increased the slavery agitation and hastened the crisis of 1861, is very probable,” Phillips lamely reflected after the Civil War. Popular sovereignty, for many Americans, was far from conservative and its authors anything but high-minded, national statesmen.⁴⁰

Reopening the agitation over territorial slavery turned men like Lewis Cass and Stephen Douglas into pariahs for those northerners resolved to repel the Slave Power’s encroachments. By denying that Congress should or could meddle with slavery in the territories, these men only facilitated its enlargement. They were Doughfaces, “northern men with southern principles,” who sabotaged free labor society. Doughfaces nevertheless understood themselves to be courageous and disinterested nationalists who elevated the Union above selfish sectionalism. They suspended personal judgment and treated Free States and Slave States, free labor and enslaved labor, as equal with the policy of popular sovereignty. What their antislavery critics disparaged as sectional treason, Doughfaces defined as national statesmanship.

A vibrant discourse surrounding Doughfacism existed by the 1850s. The splenetic John Randolph of Roanoke coined the epithet when lambasting northern congressmen who supported

⁴⁰F. J. Betts to Alpheus Felch, New Haven, July 30, 1856, Felch Papers; James A. Bayard to Thomas F. Bayard, Washington, July 9, 1854, Bayard Papers; “Extract from Notes of P. Phillips Left for His Children,” 6.

the 1820 Missouri Compromise, which added a new slave state to the Union. Randolph envenomed, “I knew *these would give way*.—They were scared at their own dough faces—yes, they were scared at their own dough faces!” Randolph heaped opprobrium on the Yankees, even as they aided the South, adding, “you can never find any difficulty in obtaining the support of men whose principles of morality and religion are bounded by thirty six degrees and thirty minutes north latitude!” The subsequent debate over the actions of these northern men set forth enduring motifs for Doughfaces as weak and unmanly men, unrepublican politicians lacking virtue, and traitors who aided southern society at the expense of northern free labor families.⁴¹

Doughfaces betrayed the Free States and free labor society. They were the “*servile*” tools of others, men who could be “moulded into any shape” by southern masters. One northern newspaper in 1820 called them “*slave-voter[s]*,” a reference either to their willingness to vote in favor of slavery or to their status as slaves themselves. For abolitionist Theodore Dwight Weld in 1839, the depravity of “northern dough-faces” was evidenced by their denial of slavery’s brutality, even when confronted with its harrowing physicality. Morally impotent Doughfaces comprised “the great northern staple for the southern market.” Walt Whitman had them mock themselves in verse: “We are all docile dough-faces, / They knead us with the fist, / They, the

⁴¹Randolph quoted in *Springfield (MA) Hampden Federalist and Public Journal*, April 12, 1820. Contemporaries debated whether the term was spelled “doe” or “dough” and whether it signified the “timidity” of female deer (*Hudson (NY) Northern Whig*, May 2, 1820; quotation from *Windsor, Vermont Journal*, June 12, 1820) or the pliability and “pallid hue of unbaked pastry” (*Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 22, 1820). Another explanation for the term ascribed it to a game in which children smeared their faces with dough and wrapped their bodies in sheets to frighten playmates. Just as these children could become startled at their own spectral physiognomy staring back at them from the mirror, northern representatives were “alarmed at the creatures of their own imaginary formation” (*Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 22, 1820; quotation from *New Haven, Connecticut Journal*, June 20, 1820). For more on the meanings assigned to the term, see, *New Haven, Connecticut Journal*, June 20, 1820; *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 22, 1820; Joshua A. Lynn, “Half-Baked Men: Doughface Masculinity and the Antebellum Politics of Household” (master’s thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), 14-20; Leonard L. Richards, *The Slave Power: The Free North and Southern Domination, 1780-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 85-6; and Hans Sperber and James N. Tidwell, “Words and Phrases in American Politics,” *American Speech* 25, no. 2 (May 1950): 95-100. For the subsequent history of Doughfaces, see Richards, *The Slave Power*, 83-215; and Nicholas Wood, “‘A Sacrifice on the Altar of Slavery’: Doughface Politics and Black Disenfranchisement in Pennsylvania, 1837-1838,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 75-106.

dashing southern lords, / We labor as they list; / For them we speak—or hold our tongues, / For them we turn and twist.”⁴²

Castigations of the Doughface reached a crescendo in the 1850s. Doughfacism seemed an avenue for the unprincipled self-promoter. The “mercenary, doughfaced-political tricksters and huckstering spoilsmen of the North” sought only political preferment from the South. The Democracy’s presidential aspirants seemed such panderers to slavery. Levi Woodbury was, according to a fellow Democrat, “the most Southern Northern man I know of.” James Buchanan was “the willing and supple instrument of the slave power.” With the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, a Democrat regretted the “prodigy Douglas is becoming under the direction of the Southern nullifiers.” Franklin Pierce, meanwhile, was “a Chief Magistrate who had been put in office by the Slave Power” and who “longed for nothing so much as to signalize his servility to the class to which he owed his honors.”⁴³

Doughfaces abetted the spread of slavery, if for no other reason than they were themselves slaves outside of the South. Flummoxed by the argument that the Compromise of 1850 “superseded” the Missouri Compromise, Free-Soil Democrat John Van Buren asked, “could anything but a desire to buy the South at the Presidential shambles dictate such an outrage?” Prince John’s paternity made him expert in such matters. While Van Buren claimed that unprincipled northerners were trying to bribe the South, many analogized such northern men

⁴²*Vermont Intelligencer and Bellows’ Falls Advertiser*, May 1, 1820; *Carlisle (PA) Republican*, Oct. 6, 1820; *Providence (RI) Gazette*, Aug. 14, 1820; [Theodore Dwight Weld], *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (New York: The American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 114; Walt Whitman, “Dough-face Song,” in *Complete Prose Works: Specimen Days and Collect, November Boughs and Good Bye My Fancy* (1881; repr., Boston: Small, Maynard and Company, 1901), 334.

⁴³Cooley, *Review of the Administration of General Pierce*, 17; James B. Hunt to Alpheus Felch, Pontiac, January 24, 1848, Felch Papers; *The Rise and Fall of the Democratic Party. Speech of Hon. Kinsley S. Bingham, of Michigan. Delivered in the United States Senate, May 24, 1860* (n.p.: Republican Congressional Committee, [1860]), 3; [?] to William Allen, Washington, February 10, 1854, Allen Papers; [Darius Lyman], *Leaven for Doughfaces; or Threescore and Ten Parables Touching Slavery. By a Former Resident of the South* (Cincinnati: Bangs and Company, 1856), 17.

to chattel purchased by slaveholders, making the northern political class a slave-pen for the fulfillment of southern political ambitions. A Democrat-turned-Republican denounced the “*traders in politics* at the South” who followed Calhoun’s lead in “bidding for Presidential nominations” among truckling northerners. Joshua R. Giddings, protesting the Kansas-Nebraska Act, resolved that “it is time that this slave trade, now carried on in the bodies of members of Congress, should be prohibited.” A frustrated New Englander could only conclude of northerners unwilling to defy the South, “they will not only deserve to be slaves but slaves they will be.”⁴⁴

In the 1850s Doughfacism became synonymous with northern Democrats and popular sovereignty—the “northern men” and their “southern principle.” By sanctioning new slave states, popular sovereignty made its advocates appear prosouthern. In reference to the Mexican Cession, a group of constituents pleaded with Michigan congressmen Alpheus Felch and Robert McClelland, “this territory we understand to be now free.” “Notwithstanding the opposite view of the power of Congress over territories put forth by certain *Northern Gentlemen*,” they believed Congress had the power to maintain it so. Yet Cass and “*Northern Gentlemen*” of his ilk strengthened slavery by denying Congress’s power to contain it. Their actions were treasonable—“Northern politicians, born and trained at firesides where slavery was ever regarded as a criminal violation of natural rights, a severe moral and political evil” should have known better than to demand the North’s acquiescence in slavery’s growth.⁴⁵

⁴⁴John Van Buren to [Jeremiah] Clemens, [1854?], Box 3, Folder 34, Cass Papers; *An Address Delivered by Hon. William D. Kelley, at Spring Garden Hall, Philadelphia, on September 9th, 1856* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Morning Times, [1856]), 7; Giddings, “Moral Responsibility of Statesmen,” 989; Hannibal Hamlin to [Leander] Valentine, Washington, June 6, 1856, Hamlin Family Papers.

⁴⁵W. M. Prentiss, J. P. Christian et al. to Robert McClelland and Alpheus Felch, Monroe, MI, July 17, 1848, Felch Papers; Jarvis, *Facts and Arguments against the Election of General Cass*, 3.

Pilloried with these criticisms, Doughfaces took heart from southerners, who were much more affirming of their northern men in the 1850s than was Randolph of Roanoke in 1820. Polk comforted his would-have-been successor, telling Cass that “neither yourself nor your friends made secret pledges or wrote inconsistent letters to different sections to defraud the people and secure votes.” Southerners reminded Doughfaces that the criticism they suffered spoke to their unbiased nationalism and rejection of northern fanaticism. Their unpopularity in the North was a measure of their disinterestedness. Henry Wise validated those northern men who, “in the midst of non-slaveholding passions and prejudices” and “with Fanaticism thundering Church anathemas and excommunications over their heads,” fought for “State rights and State equality” and “popular self-government.”⁴⁶

Electoral defeat only underscored Doughfaces’ principled defense of sectional equity. “It was for adhering to this non-intervention principle that northern men have been crushed,” extolled one pamphlet. The South praised as martyrs the bevy of northern congressmen struck down after voting for the Kansas-Nebraska Act. In the fall of 1854 the Democracy lost sixty-six out of ninety-one northern seats in the House, and men like Illinois’s “gallant Shields” were turned out of office. Given such sacrifice, a South Carolinian recommended standing by “the true men of the North.” “Will you turn from them, with callous and heartless indifference,” he asked other Carolinians, noting that they manned the front lines against the “fanaticism [which] raged with wild fury at the North.” Provided with such plaudits, Doughfaces could not help but

⁴⁶James K. Polk to Lewis Cass, Washington City, November 14, 1848, Cass Papers; *Letter of Governor Wise, of Virginia, on the Senatorial Election and the Kansas Policy of the Administration* (Washington, D. C., 1857), 6.

be convinced of their virtuous course. These “martyrs” were, an Alabamian told a crowd in Huntsville, Spartans at Thermopylae, the Light Brigade at Balaclava.⁴⁷

The Slave States looked to Doughfaces, especially the patent-holders of popular sovereignty, for likely presidential candidates. Virginia states’ rights Democrat A. Dudley Mann, citing Dallas’s support for congressional non-intervention in the territories and his desire to annex Cuba, assessed the Pennsylvanian as a “*reliable* man” and a “national patriot.” “The whole Press of the South in fact ought to hoist his name,” Mann told a Louisiana ally in 1856, “and thus make such a demonstration as to force the North to accept him.”⁴⁸ The Alabama Democracy called for Pierce’s reelection and offered him the “gratitude of the South,” while Dickinson was floated as a candidate pleasing to southern extremists in 1860.⁴⁹ Democrats evidenced their nationality by brainstorming presidential tickets featuring “one from the North and the other from the South,” including Lewis Cass-John Y. Mason, George Dallas-Jefferson Davis, Dallas-David Atchison, Stephen A. Douglas-R. M. T. Hunter, and Edwin M. Stanton-Joseph Holt. Southern support, however, could arouse northern suspicion. “Mr. Douglas, the South, it is presumed you are aware, will support you in the National Convention,” an operative told the Illinoisan, fretting, “but the North is what we Arkansas *boys* dread.” The southern

⁴⁷*The Territorial Slavery Question*, 11; *Letter from Daniel Chandler, Esq.*, 3; *The Cincinnati Convention. Letter from James L. Orr, of South Carolina, to Hon. C. W. Dudley, on the Propriety of Having the State of South Carolina Represented in the Democratic National Convention, to Be Held in Cincinnati* (Washington, D. C.: H. Polkinhorn’s Steam Book and Job Printing Office, [1855]), 2; *Speech of Richard W. Walker, Esq., on the Presidential Election, Delivered at Huntsville, ALA. On Thursday, the 28th of August, 1856* (Florence, AL: Gazette Office, 1856), 14; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 175.

⁴⁸A. Dudley Mann to John Perkins, Washington, May 14, 1855; A. Dudley Mann to John Perkins, New York, June 24, 1855; quotation from [A. Dudley Mann], “The Candidate of the South,” draft newspaper article, [1856], Box 1, Folder 5; quotation from A. Dudley Mann to [John Perkins], [January 11, 1856], all in the Perkins Papers. See also, Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty*, 124-5.

⁴⁹*Official Proceedings of the Democratic and Anti-Know-Nothing State Convention of Alabama, Held in the City of Montgomery, January 8th and 9th, 1856* (Montgomery: Advertiser and Gazette Book and Job Office, 1856), 7; Henry W. Hilliard to Nathaniel Niles, Montgomery, AL, January 31, April 4, 1860, Nathaniel Niles Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

endorsements some interpreted as liability, Democrats nonetheless considered a signifier of national stature.⁵⁰

Doughfaces played more than a mediating role between North and South; they also performed a moderating function within each section. As Virginian John Y. Mason told Cass, “the fidelity of northern democrats to the compromises of the Constitution met by a confiding support of a northern Democrat for the Presidency will defeat all bare sectional manouvres, of fanatics and knaves.” An antislavery Democrat in Centre Sandwich, New Hampshire complained that Doughfaces routinely sounded the alarm of southern secession to cow the North. “If the friends of freedom continue to insist upon no more extension of slavery, or should fail to execute the fugitive slave law,” he complained, then “southern hostpurs” along with “doughfaces and official sycophants” trotted out the “old *Humbug*” that “*the union* is in danger.” According to Whitman, calculating northern men sang, “Then, all together, dough-faces! / Let’s stop the exciting clatter, / And pacify slave-breeding wrath / By yielding all the matter; / For otherwise, as sure as guns, / The Union it will shatter.” Despite the transparency of such scare-mongering, a decade of Doughface political dominance registered the strategy’s effectiveness.⁵¹

⁵⁰Quotations from *Speech of General Aaron Ward*, 6; Wilford D. Wyatt to Stephen A. Douglas, Pine Bluff, AR, February 26, 1852, Douglas Papers. For Cass-Mason, see Richard Mentor Johnson to Lewis Cass, White Sulphur, KY, April 6, 1848, Cass Papers; for Dallas-Davis, see A. Dudley Mann to John Perkins, Richmond, June 1, 1855; and A. Dudley Mann to [John Perkins], London, Friday Night, [1854 or 1855], both in the Perkins Papers; for Dallas-Atchison, see [A. Dudley Mann to John Perkins], “P.S.—*Confidential*,” [1856?], Box 1, Folder 5, Perkins Papers; for Douglas-Hunter, see James A. Seddon to R. M. T. Hunter, Richmond, [VA], February 7, 1852, in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876,” ed. Charles Henry Ambler, vol. 2 of *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1916* (Washington, 1918), 137-8; and Norvin Green to William H. English, Frankfort, December 14, 1851, enclosed in William H. English to Stephen A. Douglas, Indianapolis, December 24, 1851, Douglas Papers; and for Stanton-Holt, see William M. Corry to [Joseph Holt], Cincinnati, May 1, 1856, Joseph Holt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. A bisectonal presidential ticket was standard practice for antebellum political parties; yet, by the late 1850s, only Democrats could pull it off convincingly. That the Liberty party nominated a Virginian for vice president in 1856 did not a national party make. David W. Blight, *Frederick Douglass’ Civil War: Keeping Faith in Jubilee* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 50.

⁵¹John Y. Mason to Lewis Cass, Washington, September 25, 1848, Cass Papers; Daniel Hoit to [J. A. Bean], Centre Sandwich, January 31, 1851, Hoit Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Whitman, “Dough-face Song,” 335. See also, Jarvis, *Facts and Arguments against the Election of General Cass*, 3.

While Doughfaces summoned the specter of secession to overawe the Free States, southern moderates invoked Doughfaces to tamp down disunionist tendencies at home. Nationally-minded Democrats in the South checked states' rights extremists by citing Doughfaces as proof that the Union and the Democracy were still safe for slavery. Douglas reported from the South that Cass's nomination was well received in 1848. "In Alabama," Douglas discovered, "the Democrats are well pleased with the nomination & disapprove of the course of Yancey." With allies like Cass, southerners did not need Yancey's go-it-alone sectionalism. Running for governor of Georgia in 1855, Herschel V. Johnson sought a course "sufficiently sectional to protect the rights of the South and yet sufficiently national to maintain such an organization as is best calculated to preserve the integrity of the Union." Doughfaces advanced his goal by showing the South that a "sectional party" was unnecessary. "In the ranks of the Northern Democracy are to be found the only reliable friends of the South; and they are many," and, Johnson argued, "with their co-operation, the South *may* maintain her rights *in* the Union." Even a states' rights Louisianan could be persuaded. Although the Democracy "has not entirely escaped the taint of abolitionism," John Perkins begrudged, "*in the Democratic organization at the north are embraced the truest and most reliable friends of the South.*"⁵²

Northern Democrats presented their dalliance with southerners as evidence of principled nationalism. A New Yorker refuted "the charge made by our sectional opponents that the Democracy is a proslavery party, and seeks the extension of slavery into Free Territory." Democrats practiced sectional neutrality, which antislavery northerners misrepresented as proslavery partiality. The Republican party "stigmatizes those as cowardly and base who stand

⁵²Stephen A. Douglas to Lewis Cass, Monticello, MS, June 13, 1848, Cass Papers; Herschel V. Johnson to Levi B. Smith et al., (Committee), Milledgeville, GA, June 8, 1855, copy, Herschel V. Johnson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; *Speech of Hon. John Perkins, Jr., of Louisiana, on the Results of Two Years' Democratic Rule in the Country* (n.p., [1855]), 31-2.

upon Northern soil to speak for our whole country,” lamented New York’s Horatio Seymour. Such critics failed to interpret southern support as an index of a northern man’s nationalism and conservatism. In 1852 an Indianan hypothesized about Douglas’s presidential prospects: “What States in the Union are more conservative than our own? If a candidate from a *free State* must be selected by the Slave States. Who more likely to command their votes [...]” than a midwesterner like Douglas? The South would look to the Midwest, because, “in all questions deeply affecting their ‘peculiar institution,’ we have done them justice.”⁵³

Robert McLane, following the course of the Kansas-Nebraska Act from a diplomatic post in China, diagnosed the Doughface dilemma. The bill would only encourage the South to demand more, placing northern Democrats in an increasingly untenable position. From Shanghai he wrote his father Louis McLane, a veteran of Jackson’s cabinet, predicting, “Douglass [*sic*], or any other northern man who gives impulse to this wave will be overwhelmed in the south when he hesitates to ride on its summit to the breakers.” And if Douglas did sate the South, “he will be repudiated by a public sentiment in the north, infinitely more active in its zeal and fanaticism, than any passion the south will ever feel on this question.” While a decade of sparring over slavery would bear out McLane’s prescience, Doughfaces had made themselves the fulcrum of bisectonal politics in the short-term. That they ultimately failed to hold their party and the Union together need not detract from their impressive achievement. In the charged politics of the 1850s, these northern men intended to use popular sovereignty to build a national alliance of white men in what they deemed a pursuit of a principle, not simply power or plunder.⁵⁴

⁵³*Speech of General Aaron Ward*, 7-8; *Speech of the Hon. Horatio Seymour at Springfield, Mass., July 4, 1856* (Buffalo, NY: Campaign Courier, 1856), 7; John Law to Stephen A. Douglas, Evansville, IN, December 6, 1851, Douglas Papers.

⁵⁴Robert McLane to Louis McLane, U. S. Legation, Shanghai, China, June 15, 1854, McLane Correspondence.

Popular Sovereignty and Jacksonian Democracy

While most Democrats recorded their beliefs in letters beseeching patronage or ratified them in party platforms, two Democrats in Portugal found a more creative way to convey their party's cardinal tenets. In 1848 they dispatched a dozen bottles of Madeira to each of four leading Democrats. Colonel Jefferson Davis received bottles emblazoned with "Buena Vista," the battle at which he was wounded during the Mexican War. Secretary of the Treasury Walker was slated to receive bottles championing "the whole of Mexico," a slogan seized upon by Democrats who, giddy over battlefield success, demanded that Mexicans forfeit their entire country as territorial indemnity. The bottles to be enjoyed by Senator Douglas bore the designation "Progressive," while "Non intervention" graced those allotted to President Polk.⁵⁵

"Non intervention," a reference to the proposed policy of congressional inaction regarding slavery in America's new domain, squared with the party's preexisting foreign policy goals—"Buena Vista" and "the whole of Mexico"—and its "Progressive" reforms, including those in the realm of political economy. Democrats' testaments of faith, whether enumerated in stump speeches or inscribed on bottles of fortified wine, reveal that they entered the interbellum era clinging to Jacksonian maxims—territorial expansion, egalitarian democracy for white men, and animus toward consolidated power. Yet political conditions after the Mexican War necessitated adaptation, and popular sovereignty functioned as an ideological bridge into the 1850s. The doctrine informed Democrats' approach not just to slavery, but also to nativism and temperance. The principle of popular sovereignty grew out of Jacksonian beliefs, which allowed Democrats to engage in new political debates by affirming, as opposed to abandoning, their timeworn ideology.

⁵⁵G. W. Hopkins to [Stephen A. Douglas], Lisbon, January 18, 1848, Douglas Papers.

Even with the deterioration of Whiggery and the easing of age-old enmities, politics was hardly bereft of ideological stakes in the 1850s. Democrats warned that equality, liberty, and democracy still required protection from monopoly and corruption, even if those threats no longer emanated from a Federalist aristocracy or the Whiggish Money Power. Democrats responded to the new “one-idea” reformers, especially antislavery fanatics, without themselves foregoing a comprehensive political ideology. They thereby maintained their relevance and distinct partisan identity, even as the second party system collapsed about them. Democrats resisted the blurring of partisan boundaries by arguing that Jacksonian sensibilities were still needed to protect white men’s democratic self-rule and republican equality from the depredations of concentrated power. Popular sovereignty equipped Democrats to develop an ideologically Jacksonian response to the political turbulence of the 1850s.⁵⁶

Democrats constructed a narrative of political history in which popular sovereignty drove the major developments of the 1850s—the doctrine provided the “the principles embodied in the compromise measures of 1850, and approved by the people in the presidential election of 1852, and incorporated into the Kansas-Nebraska act of 1854, and confirmed by the Cincinnati platform and ratified by the people in the presidential election of 1856.” One critic of the doctrine asked, “have the Compromise Measures of 1850, has the Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854,

⁵⁶Michael F. Holt argues that the second party system faltered because Democrats and Whigs converged on political issues and failed to offer voters distinct choices, leading to the rise of parties which identified new threats to the republic. Holt fails to see that the Democratic party remained relevant by defining itself on the plane of ideology against Republican, Know-Nothing, and temperance fanaticism. While the Democratic party maintained a distinct ideology and partisan identity and resisted sectional fracture in the 1850s, there was a convergence on old issues of political economy between Democrats and Whigs at the state level. Lacy K. Ford Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 308-37; Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (1978; repr., New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983), 101-81; J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 165-342.

the resolutions of National Conventions, and the endorsement of a Presidential Candidate metamorphosed a policy into a principle, an expediency into a right?”⁵⁷

One Democrat did textually metamorphose policy into principle in a letter to Stephen Douglas in 1854. Murray McConnel, appropriately living in Jacksonville, Illinois, reported to the Little Giant that “the whigs and free soilers and some of the democrats will be united and are now agitating upon and against the princiles [*sic*] of the Nebraska bill.” Still, he reassured Douglas, the issue was “so clearly right that if properly presented to the People and *in time* we can triumphantly carry them.” McConnel initially wrote “the subject of the Nebraska bill,” but crossed out and replaced the word “subject,” making the final phrasing read, “the princiles [*sic*] of the Nebraska bill.” For this Democrat, larger principles were at stake in the contest over the legislation.⁵⁸

Although many critics dismissed popular sovereignty as an opportunistic and even immoral attempt to straddle the sectional divide, Democrats cherished it as a political principle. An Ohio Democrat took comfort over the brightening prospects of the Kansas-Nebraska Act’s passage, informing Douglas, “the people are just beginning to get hold of the doctrine upon which it is based. *Popular Sovereignty* will win, if it is thoroughly & properly discussed & understood.” The principle simply had to be explained to the people—“discussion has helped and will continue to help the cause.” Howell Cobb cheered Douglas on with the support of the “entire Georgia democracy.” “The doctrine of non-intervention” was sound, Cobb maintained.

⁵⁷Stephen A. Douglas, *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black* (n.p., [1859]), 23; *Douglas’ Doctrine of Popular Sovereignty in the Territories; Its Counterpart. By a Missourian* (St. Louis: R. V. Kennedy and Company, 1860), 30-1. See also, *Speech of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, of Maryland, Delivered before the Political Friends of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, at a Meeting in Faneuil Hall, Boston, on Thursday, June 7, 1860. To Which Is Added the Letter of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, to the Chairman of the Douglas Meeting in New York on the 22d of May, 1860* (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860), 3; and *The Territorial Slavery Question*.

⁵⁸Murray McConnel to Stephen A. Douglas, Jacksonville, IL, January 28, 1854, Douglas Papers.

He judged it “a doctrine worthy of the democratic party” and one that “has never yet been fairly repudiated by the people.”⁵⁹

For Democrats, popular sovereignty constituted both a “practical issue” and an “abstract principle.” Lewis Cass’s 1847 Nicholson letter set the tone with its mixture of the pragmatic and the principled. “By going back to our true principles, we go back to the road of peace and safety,” Cass advised. In the short-term, the policy guaranteed “peace and safety” by ending contention in Congress and permitting orderly territorial development. It did so by appealing to the party and the nation’s founding principles. “Leave to the people, who will be affected by this question, to adjust it upon their own responsibility, and in their own manner,” Cass demanded, “and we shall render another tribute to the original principles of our Government, and furnish another guarantee for its permanence and prosperity.”⁶⁰

While touted as a means to defuse sectional brinksmanship, popular sovereignty transcended momentary compromise for Democrats. By this logic, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was part of the inevitable unfolding of a larger political theory. In 1854 New Hampshire Democrat Edmund Burke surmised that the Kansas-Nebraska Act built on the principles of the Compromise of 1850. He told Douglas, “I am glad to see that you are not disposed to treat the principles of the late Compromise Acts, as nullities,—mere expedients to escape the peril of the moment.” Congressman Philip Phillips agreed that the bill represented a fulfillment of principle, not merely a convenient means of organizing new territories. Urging Congress to approve the

⁵⁹S. W. Johnston to [Stephen A. Douglas], Georgetown, OH, March 24, 1854; Howell Cobb to Stephen A. Douglas, Athens, GA, February 5, 1854, both in the Douglas Papers.

⁶⁰*The Territorial Slavery Question*, 6; Lewis Cass to A. O. P. Nicholson, Washington, December 24, 1847, 7.

legislation, he exhorted, “let us, beyond all things, avoid a resort to any temporary expedient, but plant our measures upon the broad foundation of the constitution.”⁶¹

Democrats in 1854 were not simply endowing a pragmatic hedge with theoretical heft in retrospect. Popular sovereignty had already been acknowledged as an ennobling component of the Compromise Measures. In 1852 a Democrat claimed that “the doctrines of Lewis Cass. The doctrines of the Nicholson letter, the doctrine of non-intervention, were recognized as the true part of statesmanship, and were adopted as the basis of the compromise.” Douglas, who played a central role in crafting the Compromise, argued in 1850 that the inclusion of popular sovereignty elevated it to the plane of political principle. Bills granting Californians’ request to enter the Union as a free state and “leaving the people to regulate their own domestic institutions” in New Mexico and Utah were “predicated on the great fundamental principle that every people ought to possess the right of forming and regulating their own internal concerns and domestic institutions in their own way.” The Compromise was not a compromise of principle, as “each of the measures [was] substantially right in itself.”⁶²

Democrats went further and traced their doctrine’s ideological lineage to a source antedating the Compromise Measures or the Nicholson letter. As Douglas explained his

⁶¹Edmund Burke to Stephen A. Douglas, Newport, NH, January 9, 1854, Douglas Papers; *Speech of Hon. P. Phillips*, 7-8.

⁶²“[Speech of] Hon. Jno. L. Dawson, of Pennsylvania,” in *Speeches Delivered at Tammany Hall, New York City, Sept. 2, 1852, by Hon. Lewis Cass, of Michigan. Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois. Hon. John L. Dawson, of Pennsylvania. Hon. Robert McLane, of Maryland. Hon. Simon Cameron, of Pennsylvania. Hon. Willis A. Gorman, of Indiana. Also Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798 and 1799* ([New York]: Evening Post, [1852]), 8; *Speech of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on the “Measures of Adjustment,” Delivered in the City Hall, Chicago, October 23, 1850* (Washington: Gideon and Co., Printers, 1851), 6-7, 11. On popular sovereignty as pragmatism, see Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 233, 239-40; as a mixture of principle and pragmatism, see Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty*; as political theory, see Johnson, “The Genesis of Popular Sovereignty.” The historiography has not been kind to the contention that the Compromise of 1850 was not a compromise due to the universal applicability of its provisions. David M. Potter refers to it as an “armistice,” pointing out that neither side conceded anything to the other, thereby invalidating its claim to be a compromise. Paul Finkelman goes further, branding it northern “appeasement” which only encouraged southern intransigence. Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 113-20; Finkelman, “The Appeasement of 1850,” 36-79.

motivation for advancing the Kansas-Nebraska Act: “I have therefore only attempted to carry out the great work which [...] was begun at the first dawn of the first principles of liberty upon this country, and was continued up to 1850 [...] and is only now being carried out by the bill lately passed.” “The bill rests upon, and proposes to carry into effect,” he thundered, “the great fundamental principle of self-government upon which our republican institutions are predicated.” An additional milestone in the popular sovereignty narrative of the 1850s occurred with presidential candidate James Buchanan’s embrace of the party’s 1856 Cincinnati platform. Accepting the platform, which endorsed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Buchanan pontificated that “this legislation is founded upon principles as ancient as free government itself,” principles which stemmed “from the original and pure fountain of legitimate political power, the will of the majority.”⁶³

Democrats enhanced their doctrine’s pedigree by conflating it with a more encompassing philosophy inherited from the American Revolution. Thinkers in the late eighteenth century ceased to define sovereignty as power granted by the people to the government, substituting the far more radical proposition that the people never yielded their inherent power. Seventeenth-century English social contract theory had not provided for such a departure. Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, for example, posited a social compact in which the people willed their power to “the sovereign.” When founding a social and political order, the people consensually divested themselves of a sustained role in governance. The people did not exercise sovereignty after society’s emergence from the state of nature, although Locke did provide for the sovereign’s rare

⁶³“Speech of Judge Douglas,” in *Speeches Delivered at a Dinner, Given to Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, by Gen. Elijah Ward, in New York City, June 9th, 1854* (n.p.: Office of the National Democrat, [1854]), 5-6; *Letter of Senator Douglas*, 3; James Buchanan to John E. Ward et al., Committee, Wheatland (near Lancaster), June 16, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan*, 10:82-3.

and revolutionary overthrow, which allowed the people to reclaim power by plunging society back into the state of nature.⁶⁴

By enshrining the people's inalienable power, the American Founders bequeathed to the world a radical innovation—government denuded of sovereignty. American politicians collapsed the distinction in Western political thought between “rulers” and “ruled,” making the two synonymous in the body of “the people.” When founding new governments, revolutionaries such as Thomas Paine advised, it was best “that the *elected* might never form to themselves an interest separate from the *electors*.” The means of avoiding arbitrary government, like that of Great Britain in which Parliament claimed supremacy, was to deny that any government enjoyed any sovereignty whatsoever because the people never surrendered it. This theory, known as “popular sovereignty,” became firmly entrenched in American constitutionalism and political culture after the Revolution. It represented, according to one historian, “the decisive achievement of the American political imagination.”⁶⁵

⁶⁴Thomas Hobbes argues that the people are the “author” of all that the sovereign subsequently does after they initially empower him. However, they are only authors in the first instance, with absolutely no role in subsequent governance or ability to designate a new sovereign. Hobbes uses the fact that the people are “authors” of the sovereign to cloak everything the sovereign might do in legitimacy and to, for all practical purposes, completely disempower the people. John Locke similarly fails to designate a regular role for the people in government after their creation of it, although they could create a limited state, unlike Hobbes's omnipotent Leviathan. Montesquieu, who was influential among eighteenth-century American thinkers, contends that in a democracy the ruler and ruled are united. Yet he cautions against excessive democracy and prescribes the moderating influence of aristocracy, in which sovereignty resides in the hands of a few. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (1651; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), chap. 18; Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C. B. Macpherson (1690; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1980), chaps. 2, 3, 9, 11, 19; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. and trans. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (1748; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), bk. 2, chaps. 2-3; bk. 3, chaps. 2-3.

⁶⁵Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (1776; repr., London: Penguin Books, 1986), 67; James T. Kloppenberg, “The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse,” *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 1 (June 1987): 23-5, 30-3, quotation on 24. For a mid-nineteenth-century view of the theory of popular sovereignty along these lines, see John B. Dillon, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Uses of Political Sovereignty* (Indianapolis: Journal Company's Steam Printing Establishment, 1860). On popular sovereignty, see also, Horst Dippel, “The Changing Idea of Popular Sovereignty in Early American Constitutionalism: Breaking Away from European Patterns,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 21-45; Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988); and Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American*

Democrats elevated their policy on territorial slavery by tapping into this philosophical tradition—the people should decide on slavery, because, as the American Revolution instructed, they possessed inherent power and were capable of ruling themselves. Daniel Dickinson, when first articulating popular sovereignty in 1847, had lectured, “the republican theory teaches that sovereignty resides with the people of a State, and not with its political organization.” Douglas referred to popular sovereignty in its 1850s incarnation as “that great fundamental principle in defense of which the battles of the Revolution were fought.” Those who advocated for congressional power over the territories, meanwhile, were regurgitating the “doctrine of Lord North,” vituperated Alexander H. Stephens, who rammed the Kansas-Nebraska Act through the House. The purpose of the Revolution was “to assert in arms the principle, that the true basis of government is the consent of the governed,” and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Phillips argued, was “founded upon the great principle of self-government consecrated by our Revolution.”⁶⁶

Having imbibed the republican ideology of the founding generation, nineteenth-century Americans conceptualized a zero-sum balance between liberty and power—wary republicans had to guard the people’s sovereignty, liberty, and equality against the state’s incremental incursions. Republicanism served as the ideological template for the second party system, with Whigs and Democrats accusing each other of corrupting the republic. Jackson’s Democracy employed the idiom of republicanism by presenting itself as the vehicle of the people’s sovereignty and the bulwark of their liberty and equality against concentrations of power. A Democratic mass

Republic, 1776-1787 (1969; repr., Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 344-89, 446-53, 519-64, 593-615.

⁶⁶Dickinson, “Speech on the Acquisition of Territory,” 241; Stephen A. Douglas, *The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty in the Territories* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1859), 24; “Extracts of a Speech of Hon. A. H. Stephens, of Georgia, Delivered in the House of Representatives, February 17, 1854,” in *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories. The Democratic Record*, 8; “Letter of Hon. Philip Phillips,” *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 24, 1855, clipping in bound volume, Box 13, Phillips Family Papers; *Speech of Hon. P. Phillips*, 14.

meeting in Philadelphia resolved in 1847 “that the fundamental principles and inseparable designs of the Democratic party are to shield from encroachments, the reserved sovereignty of each State, and the sovereign power of the people: to maintain inviolate the constitutional and legal equality of the people.” The Democratic preference for limited and local government ensured that both liberty *and* power were enjoyed only by America’s true sovereigns—the people.⁶⁷

Jackson made his party responsible for insulating the people’s sovereignty from unrepublican usurpers. Jacksonians regularly professed their “abiding confidence in the great body of the people.” “In your hands is rightfully placed the sovereignty of the country,” Jackson imparted to the nation in 1837, chiding, “never for moment believe that the great body of the citizens of any State or States can deliberately intend to do wrong.” As the conduit of the people’s sovereignty, Jackson attacked all rivals to their power. Hence the necessity of slaying the Monster Bank, an institution which allegedly questioned “whether the people of the United States are to govern through representatives chosen by their unbiased suffrages or whether the money and power of a great corporation are to be secretly exerted to influence their judgment and control their decisions.” Democrats in the 1850s channeled Jackson with similar affirmations: “we have full faith in the ability of the great body of our people, to reason and judge correctly.” A Connecticut Democrat considering his party’s 1857 gubernatorial

⁶⁷“Great Dallas Meeting in Philadelphia,” December 1, 1847, in *Great Speech of the Hon. George Mifflin Dallas*, 26. On republicanism, see Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept,” *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 1 (June 1992): 11-38; on republicanism before and during the American Revolution, see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 1967, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic*; and Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1993); on republicanism during the early republic and under the second party system, see Watson, *Liberty and Power*; on republicanism during the 1850s, see Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*.

nomination likely had Old Hickory in mind when he hoped for “an old fashioned reliable Democrat one that will bring the party back to the old original land mark and one that will contend for and carry out in principal [*sic*] the right of the people to manage there [*sic*] own affairs.”⁶⁸

The Kansas-Nebraska Act was one more Jacksonian endorsement of the people’s capacity for self-governance. At a dinner in New York City honoring Douglas, Aaron Ward held that “the great constitutional issue that is approaching, is not unlike that which accompanied the downfall of the United States Bank.” “The question when it first arose was imperfectly understood by the people,” he elaborated, “but when it came before them and was discussed and explained, General Jackson was triumphantly sustained. So it will be with this great constitutional question.” Jackson had relied on the people during that crisis of the republic. Ward similarly effused, “I believe the people are capable of self-government, and are willing to trust the citizens of Kansas and Nebraska in organizing governments for themselves.” “*Keep it before the people* that the only question involved in the Nebraska issue is; are the popular masses capable of self-government,” instructed a Democratic newspaper.⁶⁹

By steering a middle course between antislavery northerners and extreme states’ rights southerners, popular sovereignty also spoke to the Jacksonian urge to quell sectionalism and protect slavery by wrapping a *cordon sanitaire* around fanaticism, especially its northern variant. Although Jackson demonstrated his Unionism in opposing nullification and by expanding and

⁶⁸Lewis Cass to E. G. Robinson, Washington, February 13, 1847, Cass Papers; Andrew Jackson, “Farewell Address,” March 4, 1837, and “Fifth Annual Message,” December 3, 1833, both in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896-99), 3:30, 296, 306; Drake, *An Address, on the Doctrine and Discipline of the Democratic Party*, 19; Isaac Chadbourne to Charles G. Bellamy, Alfred, January 15, 1857, Charles G. Bellamy Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

⁶⁹“Speech of General Aaron Ward,” in *Speeches Delivered at a Dinner, Given to Hon. Stephen A. Douglas*, 12; (*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, March 9, 1854.

securing national boundaries, he and his party also sanctified states' rights to safeguard slavery. One of Democracy's discontents noted that "the South accuses the North of fanaticism," and, indeed, Jacksonians nationwide placed the onus of sectional agitation on the Free States. Northern fanaticism begat its southern counterpart. Jackson and his postmaster general accordingly permitted the interception and destruction of abolitionist propaganda mailed to Slave States. Jackson also raged against the reenergized abolitionist movement of the 1830s, commanding citizens to "frown upon any proceedings within their own borders likely to disturb the tranquility of their political brethren in other portions of the Union." A Democrat who joined the Free Soilers in 1848 argued that enough had been done to assuage the South: "We have almost gone, at the North, to the extreme of mobbing abolitionism, when it contemplated interference with the question of slavery in the States, and of instituting a scrutiny of the public mails to arrest the circulation of incendiary publications." Combatting proslavery and states' rights extremism in the South by silencing antislavery fanatics in the North comprised Jacksonian Unionism.⁷⁰

In 1852 James Buchanan likewise told northerners that it was best to "permit the Southern States to manage their own domestic affairs, in their own way, without foreign interference." Popular sovereignty, by prohibiting outsiders from tampering with the territories, sought to apply the Jacksonian dictum that slaveholders were the best judges of their own interests. Just as abolitionists could not touch slavery in the southern states, neither could they overreach and destabilize it in the territories. "The Democracy of the North," Congressman

⁷⁰Paul S. Preston to Jackson Woodward, Stockport, August 3, 1848, Preston-Woodward Correspondence; Jackson, "Farewell Address," 295-9, quotation on 297; *Speech of Hon. John A. Dix*, 5. On the Democratic party, the second party system, and the protection of slavery, see William J. Cooper Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Richards, *The Slave Power*, 107-215; William G. Shade, "'The Most Delicate and Exciting Topics': Martin Van Buren, Slavery, and the Election of 1836," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 459-84; and Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 70-2, 202-4, 240.

William H. English testified, “believe that States and Territories, like individuals, ought to mind their own business, and let the business of their neighbors alone.” Self-determination for states and for territories meant safety for slavery. The Democracy “says to the people of every Territory, regulate your own domestic concerns, frame your own constitution, and come into the Union, when you have the requisite population, with all the rights of sovereignty which each state now enjoys,” explained a group of New England Democrats. Non-interference with slavery in the territories was essential to its security in the Slave States.⁷¹

Their faith in the people and localism also made Democrats responsive to grassroots clamor for equal rights and self-government. Oregonians’ request for formal organization as a territory stalled due to congressional bickering over slavery. An Ohioan who settled in Oregon pleaded with a congressman, “with very great anxiety we have been and are yet looking for the extension of the jurisdiction of the U.S. over the territory.” Laws were unenforceable, and white settlers were abusing the indigenous population. The new Oregonian implored, “are we not bone of your bone and flesh of your flesh, then why delay to do us the same measure of justice we would have received at home We are not the less citizens of the U. States than we were when in the places of our nativity.” Stability would only come to Oregon when white men were accorded equality. When a convention of New Mexicans petitioned for recognition in 1848, one correspondent expressed to a Democratic senator his hope that Congress would “succeed in giving them a government,” as “the people themselves ought to know what they want.” “Throwing them back into a territorial condition,” after “the people themselves have framed and

⁷¹*Great Speech of the Honourable James Buchanan*, 14; *Letter from William H. English, of Indiana, in Response to a Nomination for Reëlection to Congress, Tendered to him by the Democracy of the Second Congressional District* ([Washington, D. C.]: Office of the Congressional Globe, [1856]), 4; B. F. Hallett, James Cheever, Silas Peirce, Stephen D. Massey, and Benjamin J. Gerrish (Committee), *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men against Northern Fusion and Sectionalism. From the Democracy of Boston and Suffolk. Adopted by the Ward and County Committees, in Convention, October, 1855* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, [1855]), 7.

adopted their own fundamental law,” invalidated self-determination, noted a Democrat in 1850. A southerner defended Stephen Douglas’s decision to organize Kansas and Nebraska, as “the matter came up naturally of itself [...] forced upon attention by the people themselves legitimately through petition expressing a want.”⁷²

“My Dear Douglass [*sic*],” James Shields wrote his former colleague from his new home in Minnesota Territory, “I myself am a squatter now.” Shields had been one of the many northern Democrats ousted from Congress in retribution for the Kansas-Nebraska Act, whereupon the former Illinois senator decamped for the West. “I live amongst squatters I know something of their condition,” he updated Douglas in 1856. Shields’s fellow settlers were “building little cabins to shelter their families, cutting rails making fences, and trying work I say trying to live.” “I haul rails every day myself,” the former senator boasted. Emigrants desired fairness, which meant minimal federal interference. Referencing the troubles brewing in Kansas, Shields warned, “the people would do what they did in Oregon, in California, and wherever they were left to themselves. Give them no *rule* and they will make a *rule*. Give them misrule, and even poor squatters will not be content, and you will have to make them content with the bayonet.” Popular sovereignty originated, in part, as a response to territorial settlers’ demands to govern themselves—pleas which self-respecting democrats could not ignore.⁷³

⁷²Carlos W. Shane to William Allen, Oregon City, July 5, 1847, Allen Papers; Charles Richmond to Alpheus Felch, Detroit, December 21, 1848; Robert McClelland to Alpheus Felch, Monroe, January 3, 1850, both in the Felch Papers; *Speech of Hon. John Perkins, Jr.*, 29. See also, George M. Dallas, Diary, December 13, 1848, 485; Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 221-5, 395, 398-400; and Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 63-7. Democrats did not monopolize the grassroots demand for territorial self-governance. In 1860 a free-state supporter in Kansas told a Republican senator of Kansans’ demand for statehood, explaining, “our people are all exceedingly anxious to throw off this cumbrous and awkward machinery and assume an organization of their own creation.” He noted that Republicans and Democrats concurred in the sentiment. John W. Robinson to William P. Fessenden, Manhattan, Kansas Territory, January 10, 1860, William P. Fessenden Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

⁷³James Shields to Stephen A. Douglas, Faribault, Rice Co., Minnesota Territory, March 6, 1856, Douglas Papers.

Popular sovereignty adhered to the Jacksonian teaching that sovereignty reposed with the people and that opposing power sources diminished liberty and equality. Lewis Cass counseled, “it is hardly expedient to call into exercise a doubtful and invidious authority, which questions the intelligence of a respectable portion of our citizens.” He was referring to a legislature which, in the throes of antislavery fanaticism, would deny democracy to white men. The fanatical state was the latest guise worn by the spirit of Federalism and Whiggery, a worldview which “did not believe in the capacity of man for self government” and would rather empower monopolies to oppress the masses. Democrats, on the other hand, believed that all white men could rule themselves, that settlers were “just as capable of doing so as the people of the States.” To argue otherwise “would give to Congress despotic power, uncontrolled by the Constitution.” By opposing popular sovereignty, fanatics not only denied that white men could rule themselves, they also doubted their ability to govern allegedly inferior races, raising troubling implications for democracy and racial supremacy in the white man’s republic.⁷⁴

Popular Sovereignty and White Men’s Democracy

Although enamored with the sovereignty of “the people,” Democrats hardly wished to politically empower all Americans. When Daniel Dickinson effused that popular sovereignty “would practically acknowledge man’s capacity for self-government, and vindicate the integrity of his race,” he, along with the rest of his party, had in mind a precise definition of that “race” capable of self-government. Antislavery forces, Democrats believed, did not share their racially exclusive notions of political legitimacy. Abolitionists, Free Soilers, and Republicans not only opposed slavery, Democrats charged, but welcomed black political agency, an invalidation of the

⁷⁴Lewis Cass to A. O. P. Nicholson, Washington, December 24, 1847, 4; “Speech of General Lewis Cass,” in *Speeches Delivered at Tammany Hall*, 3.

strict correlation between whiteness and political power imparted by Jefferson and Jackson. As the sentinels of the people's sovereignty, Democrats meant to ensure that fanatics did not recognize it as belonging to non-white men, because, in the racialized worldview of Jacksonians, political legitimacy was not expansible. White Americans surrendered their sovereignty in proportion to its exercise by men of color. By confirming white men's right to legislate for all others, popular sovereignty maintained racial equilibrium in the white man's republic.⁷⁵

In presenting popular sovereignty as preservative of white male supremacy, Democrats worked out of a larger Jacksonian tradition of white men's democracy. Ranking alongside the importance of the Bank War, the nullification crisis, and white male enfranchisement in defining the contours of Jacksonian Democracy were Old Hickory's Indian wars, staunch support for the rights of states and of slaveholders, and displacement of Native Americans in exchange for white settlement, plantation agriculture, and enslaved labor. Democrats premised their radical egalitarianism on the hard exclusion of Americans of color, a formula scholars have labeled *Herrenvolk* democracy. Jacksonians' political and economic reforms could only benefit white men if they were the republic's sole political actors. Although often studied in a southern context, *Herrenvolk* democracy was a nationally shared value within the Democracy. Northern Democrats showed as much solicitude as southerners for their racial monopoly of political privilege and its consequent leveling effects among white men. A Whig disparaged that party "which, in the nominally Free States, plants its heel on the neck of the abject and powerless negro, and hurls its axe after the flying form of the plundered, homeless, and desolate Indian." The pervasiveness of Democratic racism was evident among Free Soilers and Republicans of

⁷⁵Dickinson, "Speech on the Acquisition of Territory," 244.

Democratic provenance. Many who demanded slavery's proscription did so, not out of sympathy with African Americans, but to engineer a racially pure West. New York's John A. Dix, for instance, decried the presence of a "black population—a burden and an incumbrance to the white race, and an impediment to its moral and physical development."⁷⁶

The brazenness of antislavery Americans after the Mexican War hazarded the white man's republic that Jackson built. Free Soilers, although often sharing their culture's racism, undermined racial hierarchy nationwide by questioning slavery and by softening the barriers of racial separation in the Free States. An Ohio Democrat complained in 1849 that Free Soilers in the legislature had "bamboozled" Democrats into voting for "a *Repeal* of the whole Black Code of Ohio!!!" Free States, especially in the Midwest, employed black codes to restrict the movement and rights of African Americans—as this Democrat explained, "a principle of high state Policy laid at the foundation of the Black Laws." Yet, "*humbugged* and cheated" by

⁷⁶Horace Greeley, *Why I Am a Whig: Reply to an Inquiring Friend* (New York: The Tribune Office, [1852?]), 16; *Speech of Hon. John A. Dix*, 11-4, quotation on 11. On *Herrenvolk* Democracy, see George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (1971; repr., Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 58-70; and Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 51-4. Democrats did not invent, but did improve upon, the dialectic of white freedom and black slavery that dated back to the colonial era; see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975). On white racial formation among the antebellum working class and the consequent development of "*herrenvolk* republicanism," see David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 1991, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1999), especially 59-60. On Jackson and his party's racial views, see Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (1983; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 177-258; Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 90-6; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 342-57, 421-30, 524, 544-6, 584-6, 638-41; Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 140-4; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 119-62; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 13-4, 104-13, 241-3; and Wood, "A Sacrifice on the Altar of Slavery," 75-106. On the racism which Democrats carried into antislavery politics, see Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (1970; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 261-80; and Eric Foner, "Racial Attitudes of the New York Free Soilers," in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 77-93. Jonathan H. Earle and Sean Wilentz argue against the historiographical trend that would "turn white supremacy into an essential feature of Jacksonian politics." While the Jacksonian impulse, especially when manifesting itself outside of the Democratic party, could inspire racial egalitarianism, they miss how intrinsic racial categorization was to the creation of the national Jacksonian ideology and its tenets of equality, democracy, and individualism. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil*; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 512-3, 598-9, 790-1; Wilentz, "Slavery, Antislavery, and Jacksonian Democracy," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 202-23, quotation on 205.

antislavery forces, Ohio Democrats had “vot[ed] contrary to the professions [*sic*] and votes of the Party for years past” by repealing restrictions “deeply connected with the future prosperity of Ohio.” The political exclusion of African Americans comprised the bedrock of white men’s democracy in the North and South, and Free Soilers seemed intent on its erosion.⁷⁷

With popular sovereignty, Democrats reaffirmed white men’s liberty and equality. Territorial self-governance reified white male egalitarianism by treating western settlers as the political equals of white men in existing states. Jeffersonian Republicans had already decided against treating the West as a colonial periphery and its denizens as vassals. A Democratic newspaper thus criticized an anti-Nebraska meeting for its assertion that Congress governed the territories, as it “denies to the people of the territories a right, which is sanctioned by the usage of our people. It seeks to degrade the citizens of the States who emigrate to the territories.” Congressional supremacists “would yield to that central power, the Federal Government, the prerogative of making a law for a territory or State—to *bind the people in all time to come*.” In a slaveholding republic, efforts to “bind” white men were troubling indeed and made laughable Republicans’ contention that they were America’s “new party of freedom.” “Whether in a State or in a Territory,” a correspondent lectured New Hampshire representative Harry Hibbard, “their rights are the same for they are *Americans* & have the inherent right to form their Government & make their own laws.” Democrats taught that white men need not sacrifice their political equality for geographical mobility.⁷⁸

⁷⁷H. C. Whitman to William Medill, Senate Chamber, Columbus, OH, January 30, 1849, Allen Papers; Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind*, 133-5.

⁷⁸*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, March 2, 1854; Charles F. Gowe to Harry Hibbard, Nashville, April 7, 1850, Burke Papers. See also, Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty*, 10-1, 19; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (1984; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 131-42, 287-8; John R. Van Atta, “‘A Lawless Rabble’: Henry Clay and the Cultural Politics of Squatters’ Rights, 1832-1841,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 337-78; and Major L. Wilson, *Space, Time, and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict, 1815-1861* (Westport, CT:

The advocates of popular sovereignty also shared Jefferson and Jackson's assumption that racial minorities would be subjugated or otherwise vanish before the inevitable onslaught of white civilization. In 1853 Oliver Wendell Holmes beamed, "Andrew Jackson never occupied a doubtful position upon any question," especially that of "Indian warfare" and the expulsion of "savage life" from lands destined for white settlement. Jackson's Indian wars as a military leader, as well as his and Van Buren's Indian Removal policy as presidents, laid bare Democrats' supposition that other races yielded to white Americans. Daniel Dickinson, proselytizing popular sovereignty, noted that "numerous aboriginal nations have been displaced before the resistless tide of our prevailing arts, arms, and free principles." George Dallas, meanwhile, heady with victory over Mexico, prophesized that "the Yankees will in time overrun that portion of their territory; and though there is much Mexican blood upon it, we may look to the period as not more remote" when new states would join the "constellation of our Union." Popular sovereignty hastened racial oblivion, a precursor to the political equality of both white men and of nascent states in America's unfolding federal system.⁷⁹

The opponents of popular sovereignty would derail this destiny by denying "that those of our fellow citizens who emigrated to the shores of the Pacific and to our other territories, were as capable of self-government as their neighbors and kindred whom they left behind them," surmised Stephen Douglas. But antislavery fanatics did not simply belittle the equality of white men or slander their democratic qualifications—they also challenged their propensity to govern

Greenwood Press, 1974), 29-34. On notions of masculinity being intrinsic to Manifest Destiny, see Amy S. Greenberg, "Manifest Destiny's Hangover: Congress Confronts Territorial Expansion and Martial Masculinity in the 1850s," in Finkelman and Kennon, 97-119.

⁷⁹Oliver Holmes, *The Harp and the Hickory Tree: An Address Delivered before the Baltimore Democratic Association* (Baltimore: Sherwood and Co., 1853), 6-8; Dickinson, "Speech on the Acquisition of Territory," quotation on 231, 233-5; *Great Speech of the Hon. George Mifflin Dallas*, 13. See also, Belohlavek, *George Mifflin Dallas*, 125; and Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 53-4.

non-white Americans. Explaining the Compromise of 1850 to a skeptical Chicago audience, Douglas defended the application of white self-rule to the future of slavery: “If they have the requisite intelligence and honesty to be intrusted with the enactment of laws for the government of white men, I know of no reason why they should not be deemed competent to legislate for the negro.” Aspersing white men’s democratic acumen insulted them and suggested a higher threshold for the legitimate governance of America’s non-white population, perhaps even that of allowing them to rule themselves. Opposing popular sovereignty, Democrats believed, denigrated white men and created space for black political agency.⁸⁰

Democrats presumed that the enemies of slavery would strip white men of political rights in order to transfer them to black men. Democrats often referred to Republicans as “Black” Republicans. Isaac Chadbourne, a Democrat in Connecticut, condensed the epithet when he fumed that “the Blacks contend that Congress must be the guardians of the people for the reason the people are not competent to manage their own affairs.” With the designation “Black,” Democrats implied that Republicans prioritized African Americans over white men—when Republicans criticized popular sovereignty, it could only be to politically empower “blacks.” “That doctrine must and will prevail,” Chadbourne confidently concluded of popular sovereignty, as “public sentiment is a hard current to stem[;] the Blacks will so find it.” “The leading principle of our revolutionary struggle, and also that of the old Republicans of Jefferson’s day,” explained a North Carolina Democrat, “was the question of the right of the people in each locality to govern themselves.” In the 1850s, however, “this great privilege is now denied by this party which seeks at the same time to deprive the white men of the Territories

⁸⁰*Speech of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on the “Measures of Adjustment,”* 6-7.

of the right of self-government, and to put negroes on a level with them.” The ultimate result of such machinations could only be the “degradation and destruction of the white race.”⁸¹

White men had to be ever vigilant against “degradation.” Denying white men the power to govern those of color degraded them to enslaved status themselves— as Dickinson explained, opposition to popular sovereignty “inculcates a system of slavery tenfold more abject than that it professes to discountenance.” The trough of degradation was enslavement. In the political culture of the white man’s republic, the rhetorical trope of slavery referred to white men’s forfeiture of the political emoluments incident to whiteness and manhood. A Democratic newspaper presented the stark options for white men, editorializing, “No Slavery in Kansas— Popular Sovereignty there.” Allowing white men to spread black slavery staved off white slavery and, Democratic paternalists argued, benefited both slaveholders and slaves. A Democratic pamphlet asked, “have they not attempted to enslave the posterity of the whites, in the territories, by denying the people the rights of self-government, and have they not attempted to exclude the slave from the blessings of new territory *because* he is a slave?” Hypocritical antislavery restrictions did not benefit African Americans; rather, “they help to *degrade* him, by attempting to degrade his master.” Popular sovereignty guarded white men from degradation, which Democrats defined as the best course for *all* Americans.⁸²

Thus did denying popular sovereignty strike at a white man’s paternal prerogative at home, degrading him and harming his dependents. Free-state senator John B. Weller argued that empowering Congress at the expense of the people reversed the republican assumption as to the

⁸¹Isaac Chadbourne to Charles G. Bellamy, Alfred, February 28, 1860, Bellamy Papers; *Address of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman*, 11.

⁸²Dickinson, “Speech on the Acquisition of Territory,” 244; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 11, 1854; *Plain Facts and Considerations: Addressed to the People of the United States, without Distinction of Party, in Favor of James Buchanan, of Pennsylvania, for President, and John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, for Vice President. By an American Citizen* (Boston: Brown, Bazin, and Company, 1856), 27.

location of sovereignty. Congress, composed of “the agents and representatives of the people,” would effectively tell citizens that “the servant has become wiser than the master.” Servants dethroning masters had ramifications beyond political theory, especially for the masters of plantation households. Douglas similarly hinted that antislavery fanatics weakened white men’s control over his “servants” and other household dependents: “They are willing to allow the people to legislate for themselves in relation to husband and wife, parent and child, master and servant, and guardian and ward, so far as white persons are to be affected; but seem to think that it requires a higher degree of civilization and refinement to legislate for the negro race than can reasonably be expected the people of a Territory to possess.” If white men could not be trusted to legislate for African Americans, perhaps they were, in fact, also unqualified to legislate for white dependents. Douglas intimated to northern men that fanatics were not simply questioning the household mastery of southern men.⁸³

Cass used his Nicholson letter to unite white heads of household in the Free States and in the Slave States against meddling fanatics and invasive government. He implored, “if the relation of master and servant may be regulated or annihilated by its [Congress’s] legislation, so may the relation of husband and wife, of parent and child, and of any other condition which our institutions and the habits of our society recognize.” A ban on territorial slavery undercut white southerners’ lordship over their white and enslaved “families,” and, by extension, the mastery of husbands and fathers in the Free States. Cass presented southerners’ plight in terms northerners could understand, asking, “what would be thought if Congress should undertake to prescribe the terms of marriage in New York, or to regulate the authority of parents over their children in Pennsylvania?” Democrats held that all white heads of households enjoyed equal dominion over

⁸³“Extract of a Speech of Hon. John B. Weller, of California, in the United States Senate, February 13, 1854,” in *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories. The Democratic Record*, 19; *Letter of Senator Douglas*, 3.

their diverse “families,” both black and white, free and enslaved. The Democratic defense of household mastery resonated with northern men, especially those wary of the market economy’s subversion of traditional patriarchy and women’s colonization of the home as a feminine “sphere.” A New Englander bristled, “when the US sells me a farm & I move onto it, Congress has no more power over me or my farm, than it has over the person & farm of any other man whether that farm & myself are in Missouri or Oregon.”⁸⁴

Popular sovereignty could only advance *Herrenvolk* democracy if *all* white men could partake. Democrats therefore railed against Whig senator John M. Clayton’s amendment to the Kansas-Nebraska Act prohibiting the foreign-born from voting and holding territorial office. This amendment was symptomatic of the country’s inflamed nativism, which institutionalized itself as the Know-Nothing party in 1854. Considering the Democracy’s dependence on immigrant support, an Indianan expressed his concern to Congressman William H. English that “this odious discrimination against foreigners” would “utterly defeat the democratic party in the North & West.” A Philadelphia Democrat concurred regarding “Clayton’s amendment relating to aliens which our German and Irish populations greatly disapprove.” Democrats defeated the amendment in order to appease their foreign-born allies and because of principled objections to any such restriction.⁸⁵

Prohibiting immigrants from exercising popular sovereignty offended Democrats. The fanatical impulse which would enslave white men by denying them territorial self-governance, Daniel Dickinson discerned, was “the same spirit which [...] looks upon free suffrage with

⁸⁴Lewis Cass to A. O. P. Nicholson, Washington, December 24, 1847, 4; Charles F. Gowe to Harry Hibbard, Nashville, April 7, 1850, Burke Papers.

⁸⁵W. F. Stuart to William H. English, Logansport, March 13, 1854, English Family Papers; J. C. Van Dyke to Stephen A. Douglas, Philadelphia, March 10, 1854, Douglas Papers. On Clayton’s amendment, see Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, 428, 434; Nichols, “The Kansas-Nebraska Act,” 209-11.

consternation, and with holy horror upon the naturalization of foreigners; which would itself enslave one race, lest they should tolerate a system which holds in bondage another.” As with native-born white men, denying foreign-born white men purview over slavery effectively made them slaves. A Democratic convention in Jefferson County, Indiana endorsed the Kansas-Nebraska Act, shorn of Clayton’s amendment. Just as white men were equal whether residing in territories or states, the Hoosiers resolved, so too were white men regardless of nativity. With the bill under consideration in Congress, Indiana’s governor advised a representative, “I think the House should by all means strike out that provision that excludes foreigners from voting, give all the white men of every nation” who “settle there the absolute right to select their own law making, without any restriction as to Birth Education or property.” Alabamian Philip Phillips, meanwhile, was an eloquent crusader against the Know-Nothing party. Addressing an 1855 meeting of Philadelphia Democrats, he decried “the fanatical spirit which seeks to divide us, by distinctions of religion and nativity.” “Closely identified with this anti-republican movement,” he elaborated, “is the sectional aggression now combining its forces in the Northern States.” Both degrading strains of fanaticism—nativism and abolitionism—would be thwarted by popular sovereignty’s recognition of all white men as equally superior to all other men.⁸⁶

In 1854 Senator Salmon P. Chase wrote to his predecessor, William Allen, and told him, “I look now for a reorganization of parties.” Chase decreed that “the old democratic

⁸⁶Dickinson, “Speech on the Acquisition of Territory,” 244; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 20, 1854; Joseph A. Wright to John G. Davis, Indianapolis, IN, March 18, 1854, Davis Papers, Indianapolis; “Letter of Hon. Philip Phillips,” *Pennsylvanian*, October 24, 1855. For the similar sentiments of other Democratic conventions in Indiana, see *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 12, 13, 22, 23, 25, 1854. See also, W. H. Brown to John G. Davis, Indianapolis, March 13, 1854; Joseph A. Wright to John G. Davis, Indianapolis, IN, March 27, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; Samuel S. Cox to [Stephen A. Douglas], Columbus, March 24, 1854; D. P. Rhodes to Stephen A. Douglas, Ohio City, March 27, 1854, both in the Douglas Papers; *Letter of Hon. P. Phillips, of Mobile, Ala., on the Religious Proscription of Catholics* (n.p., [1855]); and *Letter on Naturalization and Citizenship, from Hon. Philip Phillips, of Alabama. December 18, 1854* (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, Printer, 1854).

organization” had “fulfilled its mission when the Ind^t. Treasury was established on the Ruins of the Slave Power.” Although Chase had never been a Democrat, he was a doctrinaire Jacksonian in matters of political economy, and he hoped to fuse Jacksonianism with antislavery principles. With the Bank War resolved and the question of slavery’s expansion ascendant at the end of the Mexican War, Chase had cast his lot with the Free Soilers, who rewarded him with Allen’s Senate seat in 1849. Now, in 1854, with the passage of the Kansas Nebraska-Act, Chase anticipated a more thorough realignment. “There must be as heretofore a Democratic Party & a Conservative Party under some name,” Chase told Allen. The new Democratic party he hoped for was not the current one dominated by the Slave Power and its Doughface acolytes. It would instead be “a really progressive earnestly resolute democracy, suited to the times,” which, for Chase, meant that it would oppose slavery.⁸⁷

Chase, like many Americans, thought in terms of a two-party system pitting progress against conservatism. Chase agreed that Jacksonian economic thought was a progressive force. In choosing to be a Free Soiler and later a Republican, however, he had concluded that the Democracy would never rekindle its progressive ethos, smothered as it was by the party’s proslavery stance. Many stalwart Democrats disagreed. In 1852 another Ohioan, William M. Corry, shared with Kentucky’s Joseph Holt his belief that the Democracy was yet America’s progressive party and was destined to play a pivotal role in world affairs. He divined the outcome of the halting realignment: “The Whigs and the Democrats will decompose and recombine:—the former making their organisation under the name of a Union party; and the

⁸⁷Salmon P. Chase to William Allen, Washington, April 8, 1854, Allen Papers. On Chase, see Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil*, 144-7, 154-62, 182-4; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 73-102; and William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 88-9.

latter calling themselves Progressive democrats.” “There is no question upon which side the strength will be,” this progressive Democrat assured Holt.⁸⁸

While Democrats in the 1850s assumed that they remained agents of progress, many began to conceive a new role for their party suited to the times, one that defied the progressive-conservative binary through which many Americans viewed politics. They took advantage of the partisan realignment to claim both the progressive and conservative mantles. Jacksonians had always regarded themselves as the representatives of America’s republican majority, and although they pioneered the concept of legitimate two-party competition, they still evinced a reflexive urge to monopolize political legitimacy. It was therefore only natural that the party of the people, the only truly legitimate party, would aspire to synthesize the best of progressivism and conservatism.⁸⁹

By the end of the Mexican War, the Democracy had created an unprecedentedly free and equal democratic polity for white men. Yet Democrats anticipated that fanaticism unmoored from the faltering two-party system would erase the racial inequality antecedent to white democracy. Democrats consequently resolved to conserve the progress they had already achieved. White male democracy, geographical expansion, and the limited state were not simply the fruits of progressive reform. By arguing that these concepts were simultaneously conservative pillars of social order and racial hierarchy, Democrats intended to become America’s progressive *and* conservative party. To do so, they would not have to become supplicants of the Slave Power, as Salmon Chase predicted. Nor would they have to restrain the ructious democratic radicalism they had already unleashed. With popular sovereignty,

⁸⁸William M. Corry to Joseph Holt, Cincinnati, March 1, 1852, Holt Papers.

⁸⁹Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System*.

Democrats hoped to prove to white men anxious about losing their political prerogative that a hearty dose of local self-government and egalitarian democracy would conserve their happy republic.

CHAPTER 2: CONSERVATISM AND FANATICISM:
THE POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF THE DEMOCRACY BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

That party to which we have all been so long attached, has doubtless, not been always perfectly right in its movements, because perfection does not appertain to man or to associations of men. But, with this qualification, I think I venture nothing in saying, that of all the political parties which have arisen in this or any other country, there has not been another, in the formation and history of which, there have been such exclusive regard and devotion to the maintenance of human rights, and the happiness and welfare of the masses of the people.

—Martin Van Buren, 1856¹

Jonathan S. Wilcox's diary presents a near caricature of Yankee stolidity. The entries capture the deliberate rhythms of his life as a farmer and merchant, Christian, and Democrat in Madison, Connecticut. Terse notations record the day's weather and the agricultural tasks it permitted. Weekly entries on the Sabbath attest to Wilcox's religious devotion. The less frequent, but no less regular, tides of American democracy also flow into the diary. Wilcox was a staunch party man, and he attended the various county and state nominating conventions that punctuated the life of an antebellum partisan. As with farming, these events merited brief mention—"I attended a county convention of the Democrats I was President of the convention" as noteworthy as "I this day planted Potatoes!!" Wilcox structured his life around the predictability of raising and marketing his crop, paying obeisance to his God, and observing the electoral calendar. There was little that intruded upon his equipoise with enough force to provoke sustained reflection in his diary.²

¹*Letter of Ex-President Van Buren. June 28, 1856* (Philadelphia: William Rice, Printer, [1856]), 3.

²Entries for March 6, April 7, 1860, Jonathan S. Wilcox Diaries, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Wilcox did indulge in occasional loquacity on Sundays, when his uprightness extended to appraisals of the day's sermons, those delivered "in the a m" and "in the pm." After the usual notation, "I attended church all day," follow his assessments of the preachers' efforts. The morning sermon for July 31, 1859, on "the sins of omission," he judged "pretty good." Wilcox was less charitable to the evening sermon, when the pastor "preach'd what I call socialist doctrine *That is*—he wanted all men to be made equal in every respect." Wilcox's livelihood, faith, and politics usually coexisted. Occasionally, however, a dissonant note, such as socialist claptrap about human equality, jolted this New England burgher just enough for us to glimpse the assumptions undergirding his worldview. Departures from the usual parsimony of his diary register these rare bouts of mental atonality.³

A similar incident in April 1860 impelled Wilcox to resort to the catharsis of writing to restore his self-assurance as a civic leader, God-fearing patriarch, and devout Democrat. In an unusually long entry he fumed over a "Political harangue" masquerading as a sermon, an act which Wilcox deemed a "desecration of the Pulpit & of the Sabbath." Wilcox recounted his confrontation with the preacher afterward: "I said to him that I had one request to ask him, and that was—If he wished to give Madison people a Political Lecture and would do it on a week day—we would hear it—But I did not want him to do it on the Sabbath." In a moment of self-doubt, he wondered if "I shold [*sic*] be concerned—for what I said, as 7/8 of the people present—agree with the Preacher in Politics and I do not." "I am a Democrat," he yelled into his diary, his confidence restored, "and believe that each state in the Union of states have a perfect right to make their own municipal Laws as suits themselves." This Democrat refused to tolerate an attack on his party's beliefs, especially one that feigned the sanction of a higher authority.

³Ibid., entries for July 31, 1859, Feb. 19, 1860.

The matter so ruffled Wilcox that he deviated from habit and refused to “go to church in the PM as I did not want to hear him any more such Preaching on the Sabbath.”⁴

Wilcox took offense at an antislavery preacher chastising the Slave States, as he would have bristled at similar dictation leveled at him personally, because he understood his individual prerogative as tied to a state’s power to legalize or proscribe slavery. This Connecticut Yankee’s rights were bound up with the self-rule of white men in the South. The white male individual lay at the heart of Democrats’ understanding of politics and society. Building on the assumption of this raced and gendered citizen, Democrats formulated notions of social progress and order, individual rights, national belonging, and, ultimately, their Good Society. Presuming to instruct the Slave States, as Wilcox’s minister did, was one manifestation of fanaticism forcing a foreign morality on *all* white men. Any diminution of a white man’s individual self-determination, whether to rule himself or to take part in the governance of his community, was a threat to all. Democrats were experts at ferreting out even the slightest intimation of such degradation. Individual mastery and fanatical degradation were the ideological antipodes orienting Democrats’ mental universe, and the preservation of their autonomy demanded constant vigilance.

The individual, enjoying mastery at home and treated as a democratic equal in public, was simultaneously the salient of social progress and the redoubt of social order. Reflecting the multiple roles they assigned individuals, Democrats used several terms to describe their political beliefs. The New Hampshire Democracy, for instance, received praise in 1852 for being “ever conservative to preserve the good of our polity, and ever progressive to adopt a well-based

⁴Ibid., entries for April 8, 1860.

experiment.” South Carolina’s James L. Orr, attempting to persuade his state’s Democrats to trust the national party, reassured them in 1855 that they had allies among Doughfaces, those “conservative men at the North,” who doubled as those “liberal men from the North.” In their contest against Know Nothings in 1854, Democrats in Indiana, “true to the great and liberal principles of our Government,” vowed to “manfully battle against all such illiberal, narrow and anti-republican platforms.” In the 1850s, Democrats referred to themselves as progressive, liberal, and conservative, sometimes in the same breath.⁵

This nomenclatural variation should restrain the reflexive, ahistorical urge to assume that past party systems possessed one progressive and one conservative party. In a time of political instability, Democrats seized all monikers. Precisely defining each term requires the recognition that Democrats drew from larger traditions of political thought as they reacted to their immediate political context. Democrats regarded themselves as progressives, liberals, and conservatives, as well as nationalists, as they would have defined those terms. They wanted to conserve a progressive nation premised on mass democracy and liberal toleration of individual diversity. Democrats intensified their devotion to liberal, national, and progressive precepts and bent them in a conservative direction in the 1850s. Beset with new challenges, Democrats attempted to conserve what had been progressive, if not even radical—a geographically expansive white man’s republic composed of democratically self-governing individuals.⁶

⁵*Sketches of the Lives of Franklin Pierce and Wm. R. King, Candidates of the Democratic Republican Party for the Presidency and Vice Presidency of the United States* (n.p., [1852]), 4; *The Cincinnati Convention. Letter from James L. Orr, of South Carolina, to Hon. C. W. Dudley, on the Propriety of Having the State of South Carolina Represented in the Democratic National Convention, to Be Held in Cincinnati* (Washington, D. C.: H. Polkinhorn’s Steam Book and Job Printing Office, [1855]), 3; *(Indianapolis) Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 19, 1854.

⁶Democrats’ conservatism was the political parallel of the broader intellectual and cultural turn toward order and consolidation at midcentury. John Higham, “From Boundlessness to Consolidation: The Transformation of American Culture, 1848-1860,” in *Hanging Together: Unity and Diversity in American Culture*, ed. Carl J. Guarneri (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 149-65. For the southern context, see Timothy M. Roberts, “‘Revolutions Have Become the Bloody Toy of the Multitude’: European Revolutions, the South, and the Crisis of 1850,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 259-83.

Democrats took advantage of the realignment's flux to monopolize all legitimate points on the political spectrum and to dismiss all opposition as illegitimate fanaticism. They approached their diverse enemies as variations of this ideological monolith. The hydra of fanaticism presented itself in the middle of the nineteenth century as "Free-Loveism, Spiritualism," "Millerism, Mesmerism, Mormonism," "know nothingism, Dowism, abolitionism," "Wilmot *proviso-ism*," "transcendentalism," "anti-Foreignism," "Native-Americanism," "Fanny Wrightism, Agrarianism," "higher-lawism," "Puritanism," "communism and socialism," "Church burning Nativism," "Sectionalism, Maine Law-ism, Woman's Rights-ism, and every other ism that can be conceived of."⁷ Infatuated with their *isms*, "Grahamites and Fourierites," "Dorrites," "anti-renters," "the agrarian and leveler," "small editors, little speakers

⁷*Infidelity and Abolitionism: An Open Letter to the Friends of Religion, Morality, and the American Union* (n.p., [1856]), 5; "Speech of Hon. Isaac D. Jones," in *Letter from the Hon. James Alfred Pearce, United States Senator from Maryland, on the Politics of the Day. Letter from the Hon. Thomas G. Pratt, United States Senator from Maryland, to the Whigs of That State. Speech of the Hon. Isaac D. Jones, Delivered in Response to the Call of a Democratic Procession at Princess Anne, Somerset County, Md., on the Evening of Tuesday, July 15, 1856. Speech of the Hon. John W. Crisfield, Delivered at Princess Anne, Somerset County, Md., on Tuesday Evening, July 15, 1856, Responding to the Call of a Democratic Procession* (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Standard, 1856), 13; B. F. Hallett, James Cheever, Silas Peirce, Stephen D. Massey, and Benjamin J. Gerrish (Committee), *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men against Northern Fusion and Sectionalism. From the Democracy of Boston and Suffolk. Adopted by the Ward and County Committees, in Convention, October, 1855* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, [1855]), 4; "Letter of Hon. W. R. Scurry, Austin, August 26th, 1856," in *Rights of the South in Opposition to 'Squatter Sovereignty.'* *Speech of Hon. W. S. Oldham, at the Capitol, Delivered on the 27th Day of August, 1856, and Letter of Hon. William R. Scurry* (Austin, TX: Marshall and Oldham, State Printers, 1856), 35; A. A. Coleman, "Address on Change in Boyhood Home, before 1861," manuscript speech, 13, Coleman-Stuart Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Nov. 27, 1854; *A Document for All Thinking Men! The Political Letters and Writings of General Scott, Reviewed, Discussed, and Compared* (n.p., [1852]), 1; "The Slavery Question. Speech of Hon. James A. Stewart, of Maryland, in the House of Representatives, July 23, 1856," *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1855-56, 25, appendix:991, 992; *Speech of Fernando Wood, Delivered before the Meeting of the National Democratic Delegation to the Charleston Convention, at Syracuse, February 7, 1860* (New York: Office of the Daily News, [1860]), 4; "Speech of General Lewis Cass," in *Speeches Delivered at Tammany Hall, New York City, Sept. 2, 1852, by Hon. Lewis Cass, of Michigan. Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, of Illinois. Hon. John L. Dawson, of Pennsylvania. Hon. Robert McLane, of Maryland. Hon. Simon Cameron, of Pennsylvania. Hon. Willis A. Gorman, of Indiana. Also Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions of 1798 and 1799* ([New York]: Evening Post, [1852]), 4; James Ferguson to Austin H. Brown, Cincinnati, OH, October 14, 1848, Austin H. Brown Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; "Speech on the Maine Law Question. Delivered at a Democratic Ratification Meeting, Held at the Broadway Tabernacle, New York, November 1, 1854," in *Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson, of New York. Including: Addresses on Important Public Topics; Speeches in the State and United States Senate, and in Support of the Government during the Rebellion; Correspondence, Private and Political (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Dickinson), Poems (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Mygatt), Etc.,* ed. John R. Dickinson (New York: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1867), 1:506.

on low stumps, writers of bad novels and forgotten poems, preachers of Pantheism,” and other “mad-brained fanatics, and visionary reformers” sowed disorder in the pursuit of their perfectionist hobbies. Democrats detected a common impulse behind the “many conflicting *isms* as belong to the idiosyncratic school of modern Babel.” After accounting for variations, the dross that remained was the fanatical tendency to employ the state to impose exclusive moral codes on independent white men.⁸

This “strange medley of united fanaticisms” composed a discordant accompaniment to Democrats’ harmonious worldview. Democrats valued the *progress* which resulted from individuals and communities democratically governing themselves, while fanatics violated individual rights and resorted to centralized state power to inflict destructive reforms. Basing progress on the individual demanded *liberal* toleration of white men’s diversity, a celebration of difference which, in turn, fostered an inclusive and embracing *nationalism*. Fanatical bigotry sacrificed diversity for uniformity and defined national belonging narrowly. The Democratic individual was a raced and gendered being—abstract individualism took concrete form in the master of non-white and female dependents. While he served as the dynamo of social progress, this individual also functioned as the conduit of *conservatism*—the exclusive boundaries of the white man’s republic were made safe by his maintenance of racial and gender hierarchies at home. Fanatics denied the racial and gender basis of individualism and, consequently, degraded white men and the white man’s republic by encouraging female and non-white political agency.

⁸[Muscoe R. H. Garnett], *The Union, Past and Future: How it Works, and How to Save It. By a Citizen of Virginia*, 3rd ed. (Washington, D. C.: John T. Towers, 1850), 26; *Address of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, before the Democratic Association of Nashville, June 24, 1856* (Nashville: G. C. Torbett and Company, 1856), 6; “Speech ‘On the Political Topics Now Prominent before the Country,’ Delivered at Lowell, Mass., October 28, 1856,” in Rufus Choate and Samuel Gilman Brown, *The Works of Rufus Choate with a Memoir of His Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1862), 2:393; *Infidelity and Abolitionism*, 7; *Plain Facts and Considerations: Addressed to the People of the United States, without Distinction of Party, in Favor of James Buchanan, of Pennsylvania, for President, and John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, for Vice President. By an American Citizen* (Boston: Brown, Bazin, and Company, 1856), 31.

Faced with fanaticism in the 1850s, Democrats did not abandon their Jacksonian progressivism. But by newly emphasizing that the individual energy that catalyzed progress also exerted a soothing conservatism, they fused their progressive past with the conservative posture that present exigencies demanded.⁹

Progressive Individualism or Fanatical Centralization

Democrats in the late 1840s and 1850s were enamored of the progressive dispensation in which they lived. All Democrats, not merely the newer generation in the Free States attuned to the “Young America” movement, hailed the era’s ubiquitous signs of human ingenuity. Old Foggies and southern states’ rights Democrats welcomed industrial progress, geographical expansion, and the accumulation of knowledge. Democrats even lionized progress that seemed antithetical to Thomas Jefferson’s agrarian vision. Vice President George M. Dallas, visiting Pittsburgh, hoped that the city government would not try to disperse the “dark and almost fixed

⁹“Insanity of the Times—Present Condition of Political Parties. Speech of Hon. S. S. Marshall, of Illinois, in the House of Representatives, August 6, 1856,” *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1855-56, 25, appendix:1227. Democratic ideology in the 1850s has not been adequately studied. Bruce Collins acknowledges that northern Democrats opposed moral reform, but argues that they continued to be preoccupied with the Money Power, not fanaticism. Jean H. Baker provides the most rigorous and creative overview of Democratic beliefs in the 1850s and pays particular attention to their republicanism, conservatism, and racism. Yet she focuses only on northern Democrats and, by contending that cultural values engendered over time do not shift abruptly, she does not regard the 1850s as a transitional period in Democratic thought and does not emphasize ideological evolution across the Jacksonian, late antebellum, wartime, and postbellum eras. Joel H. Silbey examines the ideology of the wartime northern Democracy, which, he finds, grew out of 1850s Democrats’ aversion to moral reform, sectional agitation, and racial equality. Yonatan Eyal attempts to argue that the Democracy became more progressive in the 1850s owing to the influence of the Young America movement; however, his study is unrepresentative, largely ignores the southern Democracy, and trivializes the importance of slavery and white supremacy. Nicole Etcheson’s excellent study of upland southerners in the Midwest accounts for Democrats’ aversion to moral reform and embrace of popular sovereignty as rooted in their culturally southern republicanism and rejection of New England moralism. Collins, “The Ideology of the Ante-bellum Northern Democrats,” *Journal of American Studies* 11, no. 1 (April 1977): 103-21; Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (1983; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1998); Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1977), 23-9, 66-88; Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1787-1861* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 63-126. On the beliefs of wartime midwestern Democrats, see Thomas E. Rodgers, “Liberty, Will, and Violence: The Political Ideology of the Democrats of West-central Indiana during the Civil War,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 92 (June 1996): 133-59.

cloud of coal smoke” that enwombed the city—residents should thrill at this atmospheric testament to the “rising prosperity, and wealth, and importance of the ‘Iron City.’” Democrats anticipated the onward march of progress, even unto perfection. In 1847 a Virginia congressman welcomed the millennium that Democratic free trade policy would inaugurate with the eradication of “illiberal restrictions, ancient prejudices, and venerated errors.” “Civilization will advance, then, with more rapid and joyful steps,” and “the World will acquire additional and stronger guaranties for the permanent preservation of general peace, and for the continuous amelioration of Humanity.”¹⁰

Democrats attributed domestic progress to their party’s “benign principles.” The country’s international reputation as the guidon of political liberty was also owing to the party. “There is no safety for European monarchical governments,” taunted one Democrat, “if the progressive sprit of the Democracy of the United States is allowed to succeed.” Democratic individualism laid the groundwork for these achievements. Change could be wrenching and disruptive, especially if foisted upon the people by a fanatical and centralized state. As opposed to actively facilitating social reforms and economic development, Democrats preferred using the government to “remove impediments from national progress,” including those erected by the state itself. Recognizing the political rights of sovereign individuals and autonomous communities to rule themselves and effect their own progress harnessed the potential of the citizenry and led to orderly development. It was these “great principles of progressive

¹⁰*Great Speech of the Hon. George Mifflin Dallas, upon the Leading Topics of the Day, Delivered at Pittsburgh, PA., with a Brief Biographical Sketch, &c., &c.* (Philadelphia: Times and Keystone Job Office, 1847), 7-8; *Address of Mr. George C. Dromgoole to His Constituents* (n.p.: J. and G. S. Gideon, Printers, [1847]), 1-2.

Democracy” that gave free reign to the “full expression of the energies and capacity of this great and progressive people.”¹¹

Senator James Shields of Illinois enumerated his party’s central beliefs: “national progress, territorial extension, the constitutional independence of the States, and the political liberty of the individual.” Individual liberty anteceded the others: the “cardinal principle of that party—the cherished principle of every liberal heart—is its sacred regard for the natural and political rights of individuals.” Democrats defined individual liberty expansively. Shields demanded “freedom of action in all cases where the act is not prejudicial to others.” Individual liberty also required a curious and open mind so that each white man could decide for himself, especially concerning personal morality. “It ought to be our pride and boast,” maintained an Alabamian, “that there never has been and never can be in this country any organization of

¹¹*Letter from William H. English, of Indiana, in Response to a Nomination for Reëlection to Congress, Tendered to him by the Democracy of the Second Congressional District* ([Washington, D. C.]: Office of the Congressional Globe, [1856]), 3; *The True Democracy. A Speech Delivered at East Cambridge, Sept. 29, 1854. By J. C. Lovejoy, of Cambridgeport* (Boston: C. C. F. Moody, Printer, [1856?]), 10; 1. *Letter of Hon. James Shields*. 2. *An Article from the Boston Pilot, Exposing the Falsehoods of the Scott Whigs Respecting General Pierce*. 3. *Extracts from Speeches of General Franklin Pierce before the Constitutional Convention, and before the People, upon the Religious Test*. 4. *Voice of the Catholics of New Hampshire*. 5. *General Scott’s Letter to G. W. Reed and Others, of Philadelphia, in 1844* (n.p., [1852]), 1; *Great Speech of the Hon. George Mifflin Dallas*, 28; *Proceedings of the Celebration of the Fourth of July, 1856, by the Jackson Democratic Association of Washington, at the Bladensburg Spa Spring Grove. Containing the Oration of Hon. A. E. Maxwell, of Florida, and Sketches of the Remarks of the Other Speakers* (n.p.: Office of “The National,” 1856), 11. While Democrats were in harmony with the progressive tempo of their time, their specific means for pursuing progress were out of tune with those of many other Americans. 1850s America was undergoing a legal revolution, with law used as a positive instrument to release capitalist energy, and was on the cusp of unprecedented growth in state power. Several historians have found evidence of a partisan convergence on the state level in the South, with Democrats agreeing with Whigs on the merits of employing positive state power to catalyze the economy, but Democratic antistatism endured at the federal level. On the “instrumentalist” approach to American law, see Morton J. Horwitz, *The Transformation of American Law, 1780-1860* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); and James Willard Hurst, *Law and the Conditions of Freedom in the Nineteenth-century United States* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1956). On the state, see Richard Franklin Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (1990; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). On party convergence, see Lacy K. Ford Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 308-37; Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (1978; repr., New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983), 110-7; and J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 267-342.

society to awe the mind from an investigation of what claims to be established creeds.”

Corollary to and growing out of individualism was self-determination for local governments composed of autonomous white men. Democrats thwarted fanaticism by allowing individuals to pursue progress within their own bailiwicks. The party enshrined “the right of every man to make the sacredness of his hearthstone known by the free exercise of his wisdom in domestic control,” along with the corresponding “right of every town, of those ‘little democracies,’ [...] to manage their own municipal matters in their own way.”¹²

The individual unloosed and the community self-governing were the engines of progress. “Human imagination has never conceived a system,” effused Virginian Robert M. T. Hunter, “which could give so powerful a spur to human progress, and so great an impulse to human energy.” “It calls into play all the active elements of human character, and affords an opportunity for the peaceful exercise of each,” Hunter continued. “To what else is it,” he asked, “that we owe the scene of universal energy which our country exhibits.” American advancement, according to James L. Orr, “has been attained by aggregating individual industry and energy.” “Man,” he implored before graduates at Furman University, “individual man, has made these brilliant achievements, and still has left much for you to accomplish.” Individual agency led to both private and public happiness. National progress could not occur but in the hands of these unfettered individuals, because “under our form of Government, [...] the people are sovereign, and have in their own hands the destiny of their country.”¹³

¹²*I. Letter of Hon. James Shields*, 1-2; Coleman, “Address on Change in Boyhood Home,” 15; *A Speech Delivered at Webster, Mass., Providence, R. I., Nashua, N. H., and Other Places, during the Presidential Campaign of 1856, in Support of James Buchanan*, by George B. Loring, of Salem ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, 1856), 4.

¹³*Address of R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia, before the Democratic Association of Richmond, October 1, 1852* (Washington, D. C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1853), 4; James L. Orr, *An Address Delivered before the Philosopher and Adelpian Societies of the Furman University, at Their Annual Meeting, Greenville, S. C., July 18, 1855* (Greenville, SC: G. E. Elford and Co., 1855), 26-7; *Letter from Daniel Chandler, Esq. on the Principles of the Know Nothing Party* (n.p., [1855]), 4.

Their faith in the capacity of “the sovereign people” for self-government reflected Democrats’ devotion to the theory of popular sovereignty inherited from the American Revolution. A Democrat in Mobile countered nativists by arguing that immigrants could not help but be cowed by this American invention: “He soon finds that the people here are the *sovereigns*, and he leads a virtuous and industrious life to win their confidence and merit their esteem.” A Virginian could not understand how anyone could mock the militia, composed as it was of “men whom the constitution makes the chief depository of political power, and pronounces capable and worthy to control the complex and splendid machinery of our government.” Putting theory into practice, Democrats empowered the people to rule themselves. They were proud of America’s unprecedented franchise for white men, by the 1850s a *fait accompli*. Voting was the moment when the people’s sovereignty emerged out of abstraction to operate as a mechanism of governance: “it is the duty, as well as the privilege, of every freeman entitled to the right of suffrage to exercise the high prerogative of a freeman in reality—in other words, to be his own representative.” Even in voting for a legislative representative, white men did not abdicate sovereignty, as “here in this enlightened government each individual man is a sovereign within himself.”¹⁴

The assumption that power resided with the people, and not with the government, transcended Fourth of July grandiloquence—it shaped Democratic culture and policy. A correspondent told Senator Stephen A. Douglas that “I have some claim to your attention for several reasons first (I am one of the Sovereigns [*sic*]).” Douglas took this sovereign seriously

¹⁴Robert McClelland to Alpheus Felch, Monroe, January 17, 1852, Alpheus Felch Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; *Letter from Daniel Chandler, Esq.*, 5; *Speech of James L. Kemper, Delegate from Madison, on the Public Defences of the Commonwealth—The Relations of Slavery—Southern Resistance and Retaliation. Delivered in the House of Delegates of Virginia, Monday, February 25th, 1856* (Richmond: Charles H. Wynne, 1856), 14; *Great Speech of the Hon. George Mifflin Dallas*, 21; A. A. Coleman, “Antebellum Democratic Party Address, before 1861,” manuscript speech, 15, Coleman-Stuart Family Papers.

and made sure to thank him. Upon his 1851 inauguration, Governor William H. Ross lent his support to a convention to revise Delaware's constitution. He was content to follow the people in this matter, because "the will of the people is the sovereign power" and "should control the action of their agents" such as himself. Virginia Democrat John Y. Mason, one such officeholding "agent," only reclaimed his sovereignty when he left the cabinet in 1849. A friend reflected that "we have both returned to private life, & [are] both therefore *Sovereigns*." Democrats acknowledged the sovereignty of the people most dramatically by allowing territorial settlers to legislate on slavery, a specific policy distilled from the larger political theory and also labeled "popular sovereignty." Douglas, the policy's most vocal proponent, received news of an "immense meeting" in Ohio, at which "at least *twelve hundred popular sovereigns* sent up their shouts of gladness" in support of the Little Giant.¹⁵

Their encomiums to popular sovereignty and the connection they made between individual agency and national progress reveals that Democrats held a positive view of human nature. Several historians have argued that Democrats were pessimistic regarding individuals' self-interestedness and tendency toward unrepublican corruption. Despairing of man's instinctive self-aggrandizement, Democrats wanted to disempower the state, lest individuals use it to further their selfish ends. In his inaugural editorial of *The Democratic Review* in 1837, John L. O'Sullivan had condoned "'restraints' on the free action of the popular opinion and will" in order to forestall "precipitate legislation." He admonished, "all government is evil, and the

¹⁵William A. Thurston to Stephen A. Douglas, Fort Madison, IA, March 5, 1852, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Illinois; William H. Ross, "Inaugural Address," January 21, 1851, in *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Delaware, at a Session of the General Assembly, Commenced and Held at Dover, on Tuesday, the Seventh Day of January, in the Year of Our Lord, One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty-One, and of the Independence of the United States, the Seventy-Fifth* (Dover, DE: S. Kimmey, Printer, 1851), 159; M. Jordan to John Y. Mason, Potomac House, Washington, October 29, 1849, John Y. Mason Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; James B. Steedman to Stephen A. Douglas, Toledo, OH, November 7, 1858, Douglas Papers.

parent of evil.” He also imparted to American politics the memorable dictum: “the best government is that which governs least.” Listening to such statements has led scholars to ascribe Democrats’ antistatism to trepidation about human nature.¹⁶

Yet Democrats could hardly have been so optimistic about self-government if man was inherently debased. They at times evinced saccharine optimism when extolling the people. O’Sullivan, for instance, although suspicious of the state, trusted the people, declaring, “we have an abiding confidence in the virtue, intelligence, and full capacity for self-government, of the great mass of our people—our industrious, honest, manly, intelligent millions of freemen.” “Democracy is the cause of Humanity. It has faith in human nature,” he trumpeted. This praise echoed in the 1850s. A Democrat in 1854 claimed that his party “believes the people may be safely entrusted with power, and that man is advancing to a state of greater perfectibility, and that even ancient laws may be modified to meet the progressive spirit of the age.” Democrats encouraged individuals in their pursuits of perfection.¹⁷

Democrats did prefer, however, that individuals indulge perfectionist strivings in private, not through the tyrannical state, for perfectionism was a potentially fanatical tendency, latent within all. According to a Massachusetts Democrat, there was a “madness which fanaticism always arouses in the human heart.” When individuals presumed to force the unwilling into their personal utopias, fanatical despotism ensued. A Tennessee Democrat found the seeds of

¹⁶“Introduction,” *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review*, Oct. 1837, quotations on 2, 6. According to John Ashworth, “the Democratic view of man was essentially ambivalent and dualistic for while the ordinary man was naturally good and virtuous he was also potentially greedy and grasping.” Ashworth, “Agrarians” and “Aristocrats”: *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983), 15-20, quotation on 16. See also, Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 24-6, 123-9; Rodgers, “Liberty, Will, and Violence,” 148-50; and Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 1990, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 240-1.

¹⁷“Introduction,” *The United States Magazine, and Democratic Review*, Oct. 1837, quotations on 2, 11; “Speech of General E. Ward,” in *Speeches Delivered at a Dinner, Given to Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, by Gen. Elijah Ward, in New York City, June 9th, 1854* (n.p.: Office of the National Democrat, [1854]), 3.

fanaticism in individuals' selective disregard for parts of the Constitution, such as the fugitive slave clause, that guarded the rights of other white men—"they begin by resisting it *in their hearts*, rebelling against it *in their feelings*," acts which could escalate into "open warfare against both the Constitution and Law of Congress." In reference to the antislavery movement, R. M. T. Hunter complained that "the debates and action of Congress were sought to be perverted to the creation of a moral machinery for the destruction of the institutions of some of the States." Access to the state's "moral machinery" metastasized individuals' perfectionism into governmental fanaticism. Democrats like Hunter would have agreed with the twentieth-century British political theorist Michael Oakeshott that "the conjunction of dreaming and ruling generates tyranny."¹⁸

If the state left every man free to chase his own Good Society, individuals' perfectionist endeavors would, on the contrary, safely spur national progress. A Floridian reminded fellow Democrats that Jackson's "faith in their capacity to conduct for themselves all the operations of business with which they might be connected was complete, and he saw no justice but to let them do it uncontrolled and unawed by any central agent." Perfectionist striving, free from centralized oversight, ensured that individuals and communities could follow their own visions without impinging on others. "The only safe or justifiable rule under our system," advised an Illinoisan, "is for every people to attend to the correction of their own evils and their own laws, and leave other communities the right and privilege of doing the same thing for themselves." Under these auspices, perfectionism did not perturb Democrats. According to another midwesterner, all "should be left free to arrive [*sic*] at full perfection, without the influences of a great

¹⁸Loring, *A Speech Delivered at Webster, Mass.*, 22; *Address of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown*, 6; *Address of R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia, before the Democratic Association of Richmond*, 8; Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," 1956, in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 434. See also, *Substance of the Speech of Hon. W. K. Sebastian, Made before the Democratic Mass Meeting, at Helena, November 23, 1855* (Washington, D. C.: Congressional Globe Office, [1855]), 2.

overshadowing, central, consolidated government.” Their desire that all men have equal opportunity to achieve perfection, not revulsion at human nature itself, constituted the basis of their antistatism.¹⁹

While Democrats reveled in progress, they were culturally alienated from some of the age’s intellectual currents, especially reformism they deemed fanatical. Ohio’s George Pugh praised this “age of unexampled achievement in the mechanical arts, in commercial adventure, in whatever ministers to physical comfort or desire.” But beneath “material prosperity” festered the spiritual rot of fanaticism. The fanatical impulse promised only social strife, not orderly advancement. Fanatical reforms were illusory—seduced by fanaticism, Pugh observed, “we look for something vast, and intricate, and new, some panacea,” including antislavery agitation, temperance, and nativism. In a speech inveighing against the “insanity of the times,” Illinois congressman Samuel S. Marshall observed that “we believe ourselves to be the most intelligent and enlightened people that the sun shines on.” “And yet,” he lamented, “within the past few years there is no folly so great, no theory in religion, morals, or politics, so wild and visionary, that it will not find numerous and zealous advocates among our people.” Modern Americans, in short, were smitten with “wild and crazy theories.”²⁰

¹⁹*Proceedings of the Celebration of the Fourth of July, 1856*, 9; Marshall, “Insanity of the Times,” 1228; *An Address Delivered by Gov. Joseph A. Wright, on the 6th Day of October, 1853, at Livonia, Washington County, Indiana, to the District Agricultural Society, Composed of the Counties of Washington and Orange* (Indianapolis: Austin H. Brown and Co., Printers, 1854), 15; William Burton, “Inaugural Address,” January 18, 1859, in *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Delaware, at a Session of the General Assembly, Convened and Held at Dover, on Tuesday, the Fourth of January, in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Fifty-Nine, and of the Independence of the United States the Eighty-Third* (Dover, DE: James Kirk, Printer, 1859), 87.

²⁰George E. Pugh, *Oration Delivered before the Triennial Convention of the Alpha Delta Phi, at Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, July 5, 1859* (Washington, D. C.: Lemuel Towers, 1860), 9-12; Marshall, “Insanity of the Times,” 1226, 1227.

The fanatical disposition assumed a variety of forms, including religious persecution and superstition, its oldest variant, alongside experimentation with novel social forms, including communalism, “woman’s rights conventions,” and “free-love societies.” Fanaticism, moreover, prompted individuals and communities to coerce others. It created a society in which “each of us bewails the necessity of reformation in every body except himself; and pursuing this benevolent design, we have enacted laws for the regulation of social as well as political duties.” Democrats insisted that intermeddling was most destructive when fanatics seized the state’s “moral machinery” to impose their exclusionary conceptions of the Good Society on unwilling white men. If fanaticism was misguided as a social impulse, then as a political force, it imperiled the republic.²¹

The inclination to intermeddle characterized all fanatics, leading Democrats to approach political contests as a cosmic showdown between “two opposite views of government.” Their own “theory of local self-government” sparred with “the meddling theory of government.” Fanaticism was the ancient enemy of democracy in a new guise. Fanatics had inherited “the Federal, or Whig philosophy,” an export of Massachusetts. The “Democratic philosophy,” meanwhile, had taken root in Virginia. Temperance, nativism, and abolitionism in the 1850s comprised the latest reincarnation of what Democrats variously called Toryism, Federalism, or Whiggery. Federalists and their fanatical heirs allegedly distrusted the people and relied instead on centralized state power. A Democrat in Cincinnati isolated “the true issue between the two great antagonistical principles in all governments, Democracy and Monarchy.” According to the Democrats of Muskingum County, Ohio, the two worldviews could be traced back to antiquity. Federalism stemmed from Aristotle’s preference for monarchy, while Democracy descended

²¹Marshall, “Insanity of the Times,” 1227; Pugh, *Oration Delivered before the Triennial Convention of the Alpha Delta Phi*, 11-2.

from Plato's republicanism. With their divergent genealogies, and "being guided by very different systems, the Federalist, and the Democrat, must in their legislation, and governmental policy, arrive at and produce very different results."²²

Fanatics consolidated governmental power because they despaired of white men's ability to govern themselves; Democrats, meanwhile, circumscribed the state to preserve popular sovereignty. Just as Democrats stressed that denying territorial settlers the ability to decide on slavery impugned their democratic acumen, they also found that when the government "interfere[s] with the pursuits of the governed" and "assumes the power of discriminating between different classes, it is usurping a power of sovereignty which the people have never conferred." *The Democratic Review* advised that the "concession or surrender of power, belonging to the people in their organic functions, in their capacities as sovereigns, should be contemplated with prudence." The state should be starved of power: "We would say, Reserve as much as is possible to the sovereigns, the people." In 1854 Democratic candidates in Virginia were touted as "Limitarians—strict Constructionists" and for being "out and out against consolidation. Out and out for restraining the improper exercise of federal power." The desire to impoverish the state reflected the belief that sovereignty rested with the people.²³

²²Loring, *A Speech Delivered at Webster, Mass.*, 6; *Speech of the Hon. Horatio Seymour at Springfield, Mass., July 4, 1856* (Buffalo, NY: Campaign Courier, 1856), 1-4; James Ferguson to William Allen, Cincinnati, OH, November 12, 1848, William Allen Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; "Resolutions," August 13, 1853, in Thomas M. Drake, *An Address, on the Doctrine and Discipline of the Democratic Party; and the Heresy of the Maine Liquor Law and Free Soilism, or Other Side Issues Being Incorporated into Its Creed. Delivered in Zanesville, Ohio, prior to the Late Election* (Zanesville, OH: E. C. Church, Printer, 1853), 26-7. See also, *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 26, 1854; and J. S. Brinkerhoff to William Allen, Bronson, Huron Co., OH, January 25, 1847, Allen Papers.

²³"The Inauguration of William Medill, Governor Elect," *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 19, 1854; "Consolidation," *The United States Democratic Review*, Oct. 1857, 311, 314; "The Nominees of the Democratic Party," *Richmond Enquirer*, Dec. 5, 1854, clipping in Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook of Ellen Wright Wise, 1840-1896, Henry A. Wise Papers (microfilm), Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Democrats feared that once the moral machinery of the government was accepted as a tool with which to engineer progress or implement reform, the growth of the state would prove inevitable. Even admirable philanthropic intentions harbingered tyranny when coupled with state power. A Democratic newspaper cheered President Pierce's 1854 veto of the "Insane Bill," which would have charged Congress with caring for "the indigent insane of the different States." Once the federal government assumed stewardship over one class of citizens, state paternalism would know no bounds. The reform would "empower the federal government to take under its protection the indigent who are not insane." There would be no "limit or restraint to the charitable impulses of Congress," with the state becoming "a husband to the widow and a father to the fatherless." In their own version of this slippery slope mindset, southerners feared that the state could also become the master of their slaves. In this view they hearkened back to Nathaniel Macon, the Old Republican who had soothsaid, "if Congress can make canals, they can with more propriety emancipate." Agreeing with republicans of the Revolutionary era, Democrats feared that governmental power accreted over time. Eventually the state would even usurp the place of white men as masters of household dependents.²⁴

State power was only one of the supposedly disproportionate and unnecessary means fanatics used to effect their reforms. Fanatics also relied on "inflammatory addresses made to the passions," instead of appeals to reason. They were "base enough to attempt to obtain

²⁴*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 15, 1854; Macon quoted in Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 62. See also, *Inaugural Address of Governor John A. Winston, Delivered in the Representative Hall, December 20, 1853* (Montgomery, AL: Brittan and Blue, State Printers, 1853), 3-4. For the revolutionaries' slippery slope argument against parliamentary taxation, see John Dickinson's 1767 letters against the Townshend Acts, in which he counseled, "here then, my dear countrymen, ROUSE yourselves, and behold the ruin hanging over your heads. If you ONCE admit, that *Great Britain* may lay duties upon her exportations to us, *for the purpose of levying money on us only*, she then will have nothing to do, but to lay those duties on the articles which she prohibits us to manufacture—and the tragedy of *American* liberty is finished." John Dickinson and Richard Henry Lee, *Empire and Nation: Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania and Letters from the Federal Farmer*, 2nd ed., ed. Forrest McDonald (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1999), 14.

political power by catering to morbid sentimentality.” A short distance separated impassioned politics from violence, whereupon “missionaries of blood” would introduce “the guillotines of reckless politicians” to the United States.²⁵ The “personal worshipers and particular fannatical [*sic*] followers” of antislavery congressman Joshua R. Giddings, for example, “would destroy the Union itself if they could by that course accomplish their fiendish purpose.” Democrats recognized that political ideas had consequences and ought to be handled cautiously. When Winfield Scott ran for president in 1852, Democrats remembered that nativist riots in Philadelphia in 1844 had been “the legitimate consequences of his views” on immigrants and Catholics. Democrats also pointed to “abolitionists and other ruffians, armed with rifles, cannon, and the like weapons” enforcing antislavery dogma in Kansas. “Armed men, incited to the wildest excesses by the dangerous teachings of a false philanthropy” were but “the necessary results of a rabid fanaticism, that loses the substance in grasping the shadow.”²⁶

That the state only engorged itself over time and that fanatics failed to calibrate their means to their ends meant that their reforms yielded unintended consequences. In trying to cure social ills, fanatics only provoked new evils or compounded existing ones. A Whig who threw his support to the Democrats grumbled about this “distempered and unmeaning philanthropy” which longed for “the cure of one evil by the creation of ten thousand.” Those “boastful philanthropies and philosophies” and those “machineries to be engrafted upon legislation” then in vogue would only “be successful, [...] because they include and foster the very disease which they profess to extirpate.” Antislavery fanatics would always be able to rail against slavery, as

²⁵Burton, “Inaugural Address,” 88; *Speech of Fernando Wood*, 4; *The Last Appeal to Pennsylvania* (n.p., [1856]), 6; *Plain Facts and Considerations*, 29.

²⁶Charles Perkins to William Allen, Kingsville, February 4, 1847, Allen Papers; *A Document for All Thinking Men!*, 2, 17; *Address of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman, on the Political Condition and Prospects of the Country, to the Freemen of the Eighth Congressional District of North Carolina* (n.p., [1856]), 8-9; *Address of the National Democratic Volunteers. March, 1860* (New York: John W. Oliver, Printer, 1860), 3-4.

their agitation ensured its continuance. “But for the rashness and inconsiderate zeal of outside agitators,” claimed a Marylander in 1852, “the progress of emancipation would have been much greater than it has been for the last thirty years.” James Henry Hammond enthused over “the happy results of this abolition discussion,” which had prompted a “re-examination and explosion of the false theories of religion, philanthropy and political economy” by which slavery was previously considered “an evil.” Thanks to abolitionists, southerners claimed, they now saw the institution for what it really was—a positive good.²⁷

Democrats’ critiques tapped into a tradition of lodging maledictions against fanaticism. Many European political theorists, having witnessed the Continent’s religious wars and England’s Puritan despotism in the seventeenth century, denounced overly enthusiastic politics. “Enthusiasm,” according to David Hume, was “founded on strong spirits, and a presumptuous boldness of character.” Dire consequences resulted when passion “rises to that height as to inspire the deluded fanatic with the opinion of divine illuminations, and with a contempt for the common rules of reason, morality, and prudence.” In the ecstasy of their own righteousness, fanatics could not help but infringe upon others. Voltaire’s play *Fanaticism* featured Mahomet, a caricature of religious extremism, who is rebuked by another character for “hav[ing] the nerve to think you can mold the world to your whims and order people to think like you do, even as you bring them nothing but carnage and fear.” Anti-fanaticism energized the Enlightenment as

²⁷“Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall, October 31, 1855,” in *The Works of Rufus Choate*, 2:334; Pugh, *Oration Delivered before the Triennial Convention of the Alpha Delta Phi*, 12; *Speech of Rev. Henry Slicer, Delivered in the General Conference at Indianapolis, 28th May, 1856, on the Subject of the Proposed Change in the Methodist Discipline, Making Non-Slave-Holding a Test or Condition of Membership in Said Church* (Washington: H. Polkinhorn, [1856?]), 5; “Speech Delivered at Barnwell C. H., S. C., October 29, 1858,” in *Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina* (1866; repr., Spartanburg, SC: The Reprint Company, Publishers, 1978), 344-5. See also, *Address of R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia, before the Democratic Association of Richmond*, 11.

theorists enshrined reason and natural law, as well as a social contract that limited the state and protected individual rights, to mitigate the ramifications of impassioned politics.²⁸

Democrats agreed that fanaticism corroded social order by casting society into perpetual flux. It comprised a mode of conducting politics, rather than a set of clear goals or definition of the Good Society. “Abolition will not stop,” and “run-mad fanaticism” would never desist, because there was always one more reform to agitate in the pursuit of amorphous and unattainable utopias. Fanatics were “those who cannot let well enough alone,” as they hurried “from one subject of excitement to another, from one hatred to another, from one persecution to another.”²⁹ They worked against political stability and social consolidation; “phrenzied fanaticism,” in its “nervous haste to discuss new topics before old ones are understood,” could not be glutted. Former president James Buchanan, looking back on the turmoil of the 1850s, delivered the epitaph for the fanatical decade: “Fanaticism never stops to reason. Driven by honest impulse, it rushes on to its object without regard to interposing obstacles.” “This spirit of interference with what we may choose to consider the domestic evils of other nations,” he

²⁸David Hume, “Of Superstition and Enthusiasm,” in *Essays: Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: LibertyClassics, 1985), 77; Voltaire, *Fanaticism, or Mahomet the Prophet*, trans. Hanna Burton (1741; repr., Sacramento, CA: Litwin Books, 2013), 58. See also, John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. James H. Tully (1689; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), especially 47-9; Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, ed. Andrew Kahn, trans. Margaret Mauldon (1721; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Letters 55, 58, 59, 73, 83, pp. 74-6, 78-81, 102-3, 115-7; and John Passmore, “Fanaticism, Toleration and Philosophy,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 11, no. 2 (June 2003): 211-22. Using the abolitionist movement as an example, Joel Olson works against this “pejorative tradition” regarding fanaticism by arguing that zealotry can benefit democracy. Olson, “The Freshness of Fanaticism: The Abolitionist Defense of Zealotry,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 4 (Dec. 2007): 685-701.

²⁹[Garnett], *The Union, Past and Future*, 6; “Franklin Pierce and His Abolition Allies” (n.p., [1852]), 4; Dickinson, “Speech on the Maine Law Question,” 499-500; *Speech of the Hon. Horatio Seymour*, 8. See also, Isaac Edward Holmes to R. M. T. Hunter, Charleston, [SC], June 8, 1855, in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876,” ed. Charles Henry Ambler, vol. 2 of *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1916* (Washington, 1918), 164-5.

moralized while watching the Civil War roil the nation, “has in former periods covered the earth with blood.”³⁰

Liberal Toleration or Fanatical Bigotry

Jonathan S. Wilcox was a devout man, and his diary records his approval of evangelical reforms, such as temperance and the colonization of African Americans. The tempo of his trade regularly took Wilcox from Connecticut to New York City to market goods, and he attended services while traveling. We can imagine an impish, even voyeuristic, urge propelling Wilcox to “Henry Ward Beechers church in Brooklyn” in February 1854. “Had I not have known that it was a church and the pastor a professed preacher of Christ,” he recollected, “I should have thought that I had been in a political caucus.” Wilcox resolved not to “desecrate another Sabbath ever in hearing such a libelious [*sic*] & seditious harrange [*sic*].”³¹

Whether the profanation at which he took umbrage was the adulteration of matters spiritual by those temporal or a crafty cleric’s efforts to cloak political polemic in religious garb, the mixing of religion and politics struck Wilcox as indecorous. His revulsion was indicative of the Democracy’s aversion to a symbiotic church and state. Religious extremism fueled many fanatical political crusades, Democrats maintained, including those aimed at Catholicism, slavery, and alcohol. Religious zealots like Beecher, who “bray a political religion and religious politics,” manifested a trait common to all fanatics—bigoted intolerance. Fanatical bigotry

³⁰Clement C. Clay Jr., *The Love of Truth for Its Own Sake: An Address before the Erosophic and Philomathic Societies of the University of Alabama, at Its Commencement, in July, 1855* (Tuscaloosa, AL: M. D. J. Slade, 1855), 30; *Plain Facts and Considerations*, 26; James Buchanan, *Mr. Buchanan’s Administration on the Eve of the Rebellion* (1866; repr., Scituate, MA: Digital Scanning, 1999), 64. On fanaticism as a “disposition” and means of conducting politics, see Jay Newman, *Fanatics and Hypocrites* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1986).

³¹Entries for Feb. 19 (quotations), April 4, May 14, July 4, 1854, Oct. 7, 1860, Wilcox Diaries. For an Alabama diarist’s similar reaction to hearing “the Rev. Humbug Wind Bunkum,” see entries for April 21, 24, 1859, Daniel R. Hundley Diary, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

injected schismatic proscription and inquisitional persecution into American politics. An intolerant state, under the sway of “politico-religious fanaticism,” would excommunicate white men from the body politic.³²

“Bigotry and intollerance [*sic*]” characterized the fanatical opposition in the minds of Democrats. Clement C. Clay rebuked “that intolerance, which, in some countries, has proven a bloody scourge, and is, in all, the chief bane of social concord.” In 1852 Whig presidential candidate Winfield Scott, with his nativist baggage, epitomized this narrow-mindedness. Democrats appraised him as “a man of envious spirit, narrow and malignant feelings, and intolerant and proscriptive nature.” Indulging intolerance set a disturbing precedent—according to a Catholic member of the Democracy, “in a Government like ours, the rights of no class, however humble they may be, can be assailed without endangering the rights of all.” When bigots used the state to discriminate against one group of white men, such as Catholics, they invalidated the equality enjoyed by all white men.³³

Democrats answered fanatics’ bigoted intolerance with their own liberal toleration. They called themselves and their principles “liberal,” a term which they used to refer to their acceptance of diversity. The Democracy, for example, stood on a “broad, just and liberal platform in favor of naturalization.” Andrew Jackson was ever the inspiration, given “the generous and liberal heart which throbbed in his bosom, and the generous and liberal principles which signalized his political creed, [which] would never have permitted that he should give his

³²*The Lecompton Question. Governor Wise’s Tammany, Philadelphia and Illinois Letters, Together with Letters to Charles W. Russell, Esq. by a Virginia Democrat.* ([Richmond?, 1858?]), 2; *Sketches of the Lives of Franklin Pierce and Wm. R. King*, 9.

³³Horatio Seymour to James Campbell, Utica, August 7, 1856, Horatio King Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Clay, *The Love of Truth*, 12; *A Document for All Thinking Men!*, 14; “Civil and Religious Liberty Defended. Speech of Hon. John Kelly, of New York, in the House of Representatives, August 9, 1856,” *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1855-56, 25, appendix:1264.

agency to encourage a spirit of civil and religious intolerance.” Following Jackson’s lead, Democrats in the 1850s tolerated much that other Americans considered social, political, or moral “evils,” including ethnic and religious diversity among white men, teetotaling and tipping, enslavement and freedom—they were truly broad-minded.³⁴

Intolerant fanaticism nursed the very ills it diagnosed because it acted on its bigotry through improper means—legal coercion, rather than moral suasion. Democrats believed that reformers should appeal to white men as equals and allow them to choose whether to modify their behavior. Individuals exercised autonomy when adopting a new moral code, but it was an affront to individual rights and democratic self-rule for the state to enforce adherence to a minority’s religious scruples. The political campaign against alcohol was, accordingly, “intemperate in its temperance,” as governmental regulation “enthrones a legal inquisition in place of moral suasion.” Democrats’ toleration complemented their antistatism; the state ought to be both small and neutral.³⁵

Many Democrats went further and attacked bigotry not only on the part of the state but also within society. Toleration, they argued, was a fundamental American value. Private bigotry only tempted individuals to sate their prejudices through politics. “Intolerance lies dormant in the breast,” merely awaiting the opportune moment “to stimulate this feeling for political objects.” An individual who did not value freedom of conscience was “both a bigot and a tyrant”—personal bigotry easily slipping into political tyranny. Democrats wanted to avoid the amplification of personal intolerance through the state. “Next to a bigot in religion, a bigot in

³⁴*Great Speech of the Honourable James Buchanan, Delivered at the Mass Meeting of the Democracy of Western Pennsylvania, at Greensburg, on Thursday, Oct. 7, 1852* (Philadelphia, 1852), 13; *Proceedings of the Celebration of the Fourth of July, 1856*, 11.

³⁵Hallett et al., *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men*, 3.

politics is perhaps the bitterest and the worst,” preached a Democratic pamphlet, “but when, as in the present instance, political bigotry is nearly allied to religious bigotry, there is difficulty in discriminating between the two.” Democrats demanded an inclusive society in addition to a neutral state. They would not tolerate intolerance in the white man’s republic.³⁶

Many Democrats conceded that northerners could privately oppose slavery, provided they publicly honored slaveholders’ rights. Franklin Pierce, a campaign pamphlet noted, “spoke of slavery as all conservative northern men speak of it”—as an “evil” that “we must endure.” Georgian Howell Cobb, perhaps amused to play the exotic southerner, denied to a New England audience that “my purpose in addressing you would be to convert you into advocates of the peculiar institutions of my own section of the country.” Cobb reassured them that “I come not to invite you to the adoption of our local institutions,” although he did “come with the constitution of our common country in my hands, to ask you to abide by its obligations.” Refusing to treat “the abstract question of slavery,” he invoked only constitutional right. “On the subject of slavery,” he simplified, “there is but one question and one answer.” The question was “not whether slavery is right or wrong [...] but the only question is, What says the constitution?” The answer was that northerners had to tolerate slavery.³⁷

Northern Democrats shared Cobb’s aversion to “that self-righteous idea that one man is called upon to be the conscience-keeper of another.” When righteousness wedded itself to “the strong arm of the law,” then “the convincing argument of the philanthropist, and the persuasive

³⁶*Letter of Hon. P. Phillips, of Mobile, Ala., on the Religious Proscription of Catholics* (n.p., [1855]), 7; *Great Speech of the Honourable James Buchanan*, 9; *A Document for All Thinking Men!*, 14. On toleration as a curative for fanatical intolerance, see Passmore, “Fanaticism, Toleration and Philosophy,” 219-22.

³⁷“*Franklin Pierce and His Abolition Allies*”, 2; “Mr. [Howell] Cobb’s Speech, in Depot Hall,” in *Speeches of Messrs. Weller, Orr, Lane, and Cobb, Delivered in Phœnix and Depot Halls, Concord, N. H., at a Mass Meeting of the Democratic Party of Merrimac County* (n.p., [1856?]), 23, 25.

appeals of good men [...] are thrown aside for the more effective weapon of legislative power.” An Indianan acknowledged that “I have always in sentiment, been opposed to Slavery.” But he clarified that he “never proposed any other means than moral suasion for its eradication.” Rufus W. Peckham, the patriarch of a Democratic family in Albany, sympathized with southern secession after the election of a Republican president in 1860, justifying to his son that “I love the pharisees or the bigots of the present day no better than those of olden time.” Peckham did “not feel it a sin to be honest & to do unto others as I would they should do unto me,” and he resolved “to fulfil the obligations in a strait forward manly manner, which our national constitution imposes.” Toleration had to be mutual and unbegrudging, so that all white men could enjoy it. A South Carolinian reminded northern listeners that slavery had been abolished in the Free States only by southern forbearance. He explained, “we believed you were the best judges of your own interest, and we knew that we had no right under our system of government to enter your State and either advocate or oppose emancipation.”³⁸

The sop to southerners—that northerners could privately detest slavery provided they remained politically neutral—did not go far enough for all Democrats. Some northerners cheered slavery as a positive good. An Alabamian registered his satisfaction that New York’s Charles O’Conor “made a telling speech, in which he took the bull by the horns, and declared that negro slavery is right and not wrong, and that the South must be protected at all hazards.” A Democrat in Minnesota Territory attributed Americans’ role as “the chosen people of God, commissioned to work out the salvation of mankind” to the economic benefits of enslaved labor.

³⁸“Mr. Cobb’s Speech, in Depot Hall,” 26; *John G Davis. His Opinions upon the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise; His Opinions upon the Fugitive Slave Law. Choice Extracts from His Correspondence. Remarks by J. O. Jones* (Terre Haute, IN: Western Star Print, [1856?]), 2; Rufus W. Peckham [Sr.] to Wheeler H. Peckham, Albany, December 17, 1860; see also, Rufus W. Peckham [Sr.] to Wheeler H. Peckham, Albany, January 4, 1860, both in the Wheeler H. Peckham Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; “Mr. [James L.] Orr’s Speech in Phœnix Hall,” in *Speeches of Messrs. Weller, Orr, Lane, and Cobb*, 10.

National prosperity originated in the South, where “the labor of the inferior negro race, is directed by the superior intellect of the white man, on a better system of servile labor, a more humane system, than has ever existed.”³⁹ Democrats’ racism led them to designate slavery the most efficient regime for the coexistence of unequal races. “Abolitionists,” on the contrary, “with their false and heartless sympathies,” hypocritically “claim equal rights for a race that is void of means necessary to its own continued existence.” Those genuinely concerned with the plight of the enslaved knew that emancipation would be detrimental, Democrats clarified, while allowing slavery to spread would enhance slaves’ well-being.⁴⁰

Along with slaveholders and free laborers, Democrats also tolerated abstainers and partakers. Many Democrats approved of shaping a temperate citizenry through moral suasion, and some sanctioned temperance legislation. Even when the “Whig Main [*sic*] Law-Abolition Ticket” trounced the Connecticut Democracy in 1854, Jonathan Wilcox solaced himself with the “hope they will make a good law to stop ardent spirits from being sold at all in any way.” But pro-temperance Democrats had to balance hostility toward alcohol with their wariness of state power. Many Democrats were reticent to join the temperance movement, so long as those reformers advocated coercive legislation such as Maine’s infamous 1851 prohibitory law. A “*Maine Law* man” complained that the Democracy would maintain the allegiance of those “who only *occasionally* taste it—or who *never* taste it, but don’t approve of restraints, & the principle of the *Maine Law*.” Many Democrats supported the ends, but not the means, of the temperance movement. As an Ohio Democrat summarized, “the question is this: Shall we use the sovereign

³⁹Entry for Dec. 23, 1859, Hundley Diary; *The South and the Democratic Party. A Speech by D. A. Robertson, Delivered in St. Paul, Wednesday, Sept. 30* (Saint Paul, MN: Goodrich, Somers, and Co., Printers, 1857), 9-11, quotations on 10.

⁴⁰Robertson, *The South and the Democratic Party*, 9-11; “Mr. Cobb’s Speech, in Depot Hall,” 32; *Plain Facts and Considerations*, 27.

power of the State, for the enforcement of a moral principle, and to compel the performance of what is esteemed a private moral duty.”⁴¹

Even short of legislative enactment, temperance manacled white men’s moral faculties. A manuscript speech in the papers of Alabama Democrat Sydenham Moore protests against personally pledging oneself to temperance: “Now this tying a man up not to commit an act in itself indifferent, is such a restraint upon his freedom of action, as in a large proportion of cases, will make [him] restless & dissatisfied.” Like other fanatical nostrums, the temperance pledge had unintended consequences, being “productive of more injury than benefit [...]. For if the moral sense is of itself too weak to resist the temptation without a pledge—it will in a majority of cases be too feeble to resist where a pledge has been made.” Treating “an act in itself indifferent” as an evil and then modifying one’s behavior to adhere to such an arbitrary standard “leads in too many cases to hypocrisy.” Sydenham Moore adhered to this teaching. When he learned that his overseer imbibed often, he told the man that he preferred a subaltern “who will not go off on frolics or frolic at home. And while in liquor injure & abuse my negroes.” He counseled moderation, but did not exact abstinence, and offered to keep the man on for another season.⁴²

Fanaticism invited hypocrisy not only by demanding that individuals fit themselves to the contours of another’s morality, but because fanatics were themselves disingenuous in their reforms. Democrats routinely indicted fanatics for their perceived hypocrisy. “A man who nearly [*sic*] refrains from drinking liquor, with a smack of hypocrisy [*sic*] about it, & a bloat in

⁴¹Entry for April 4, 1854, Wilcox Diaries; A *Maine Law* man, & a Republican to Hannibal Hamlin, August 3, 1856, Hamlin Family Papers (microfilm edition), Special Collections Department, Raymond H. Fogler Library, The University of Maine at Orono; Drake, *An Address, on the Doctrine and Discipline of the Democratic Party*, 9.

⁴²Author unknown, “Ought a man to pledge himself to total abstinence,” unpublished speech, 1; Sydenham Moore to Mr. James, [1860?], both in the Sydenham Moore Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

every other vice, cannot correct over a timperate [*sic*] dram drinker, who is timperet [*sic*] in all things,” groused an Indiana Democrat. Fanatics feigned moral purity simply to seize power. Our Connecticut diarist impugned Republicans’ sincerity: “they do not care a Pin for the Negroe if they can carry their point so as to Elect an anti Slavery President and get the advantage of 15 Slave States.” Their “pretended sympathy for the slave,” arraigned another Democrat, amounted to nothing more than “hypocritical pretense.”⁴³

These “philanthropists whose morbid sensibilities prefer sympathizing with ideal to relieving real misery” were, moreover, feckless reformers even when sincere. When the rank and file of fanatical movements were truly devoted, Democrats suspected, their demagogic leaders only manipulated their sentimentality to win office. According to a modern philosopher, “when we criticize someone for being fanatical or hypocritical, we are passing judgment on his mode of commitment, and at most only very indirectly on the credal content of his particular world view.” Fanaticism was a mode of conducting politics, not an ideological prescription for social order. Fanatics’ impassioned recklessness was all the more worrying to Democrats because they were simultaneously zealous and hypocritical in the pursuit of allegedly hollow goals.⁴⁴

Democrats espoused their toleration most stridently in their anticlericalism and calls for the “absolute and unqualified divorce of Church and State, religion and politics.” Democrats

⁴³[Illegible] to John G. Davis, New Port, IN, February 4, 1854, John G. Davis Papers (microfilm edition), Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; Entry for Oct. 7, 1860, Wilcox Diaries; “National Politics. Speech of Hon. David Barclay, of Pennsylvania, in the House of Representatives, August 6, 1856,” *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1855-56, 25, appendix:1086, 1088.

⁴⁴*The Agitation of Slavery. Who Commenced! And Who Can End It!! Buchanan and Fillmore Compared from the Record* (Washington: Union Office, 1856), 3. Philosopher Jay Newman differentiates fanaticism from hypocrisy, but finds that both are “dispositions” stemming from flawed commitment to a worldview, with the fanatic being overcommitted and the hypocrite undercommitted. Newman, *Fanatics and Hypocrites*, quotation on 21. See also, *Address of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown*, 13-5; John W. Forney, *Address on Religious Intolerance and Political Proscription, Delivered at Lancaster, PA., on the Evening of the 24th of September* (Washington, 1855), 22-3.

were not irreverent, and they often foregrounded their own religious beliefs. The party no longer trucked with the Deists, atheists, and iconoclasts such as Fanny Wright who had moved on Jacksonianism's fringes in the 1820s and 1830s. A Democratic organization in New York, for instance, prefaced in 1860, "we believe all power emanates from God, by whom it is entrusted to individuals and communities to be exercised by them for the general welfare." Yet, while many Democrats in the 1850s professed Christianity and respect for men of the cloth, they snarled at preachers who dared to enter politics, thereby hewing to the "republican anticlericalism" of the Jeffersonians and Jacksonians before them. Democrats had long been suspicious of religiously-inspired political beliefs, because they were perceived as exclusionary, intolerant, and violative of the rights of white men.⁴⁵

In response to nativist and anti-Catholic proscription, Democrats championed the benefits of religious and ethnic diversity for the republic. Still, not all Democrats were models of toleration. Channeling his Puritan forebears, Jonathan Wilcox exhibited a fierce condescension toward popery. He crowed that, while viewing a Catholic procession, "some few like myself did not bow down to this Idol." But many Democrats did regard toleration as conducive to social progress. Levi Woodbury believed that constitutions should be amended cautiously. But he did wish to purge New Hampshire's charter of its religious test in 1850, justifying, "I am willing, when a provision like this becomes hostile to the tolerant spirit of the age and a more enlightened public opinion, to expunge it at once from our system of government." European immigrants, furthermore, were valued for their economic and cultural contributions to the nation. Celebrating religious and ethnic difference meshed with the party's belief that the unshackled individual was

⁴⁵*Substance of the Speech of Hon. W. K. Sebastian*, 3; *Address of the National Democratic Volunteers*, 4. On Jacksonian anticlericalism, see Ashworth, "Agrarians" and "Aristocrats", 199-203; and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 136-40, 180-5, 350-60, quotation on 136.

a progressive force; as such, proscribing Catholics and immigrants would only sap the energy of the American people.⁴⁶

Democrats took bold stands in favor of religious toleration. Lewis Cass, commonly dismissed as an Old Fogy by the 1850s, proved a Young American in his belief that Americans carried their freedom of conscience abroad. “MAN HAS A RIGHT TO WORSHIP GOD UNRESTRAINED BY HUMAN LAWS,” he boomed, and he wanted the United States to enforce this principle worldwide. A newspaper seconded Cass’s expansive notions: “intolerance is all wrong and wicked by whomsoever exercised. It is the mission of this country to unloose the fetters upon religious freedom everywhere.” New York’s Catholic archbishop John Hughes thought such a notion invited fanaticism. Cass’s contention that other governments “must give way to the individual, provided that individual be an American” would lead to the defense of unpopular religious fanatics such as “Mormon[s]” and “Millerite[s]” in foreign lands. The zeal which Hughes critiqued did, nonetheless, show itself in Democrats’ promotion of America’s Catholic minority. Proclaiming, “I am a Democrat and a Catholic” in 1856, John Kelly, Congress’s lone adherent of that faith, responded to hackneyed assertions that his coreligionists were unrepugnant—Catholics always voted Democrat, he pointed out, which validated their republicanism. President Pierce named Catholic James Campbell as postmaster general and dispatched August Belmont, a foreign-born Jew, to The Hague, appointments which aroused nativist, anti-Catholic, and anti-Semitic ire.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Entry for June 11, 1860, Wilcox Diaries; Woodbury quoted in *The Whig Charge of Religious Intolerance against the New Hampshire Democracy and General Franklin Pierce* (n.p., [1852]), 6. See also, Forney, *Address on Religious Intolerance and Political Proscription*, 9-10, 38-44; and *Substance of the Speech of Hon. W. K. Sebastian*, 1-2, 6-10.

⁴⁷*Letter of the Most Rev. Archbishop Hughes, on the Madiai. Speech of Hon. Lewis Cass, on Religious Freedom Abroad. Letter of the Most Rev. Archbishop Hughes, in Reply to Hon. Lewis Cass, on Religious Toleration* (Baltimore: Murphy and Co., [1854]), Cass and Hughes quotations from 10, 21, 23; Newspaper clipping, June 16, 1854, enclosed in Lewis Cass to Horatio King, Washington, June 19, [1854], King Papers; Kelly, “Civil and

Democrats wanted to sunder church and state, not simply to protect religious minorities, but also because they believed that conforming man's law to that of God trespassed on the people's sovereignty. A Methodist clergyman evidenced his Democracy by opposing an antislavery proposal under consideration by his denomination. "The New Testament contains no particular form of Government," the Reverend Henry Slicer remonstrated, and "it has left it with the people to enact such a form as they may judge most expedient." The belief that "God has prescribed the form and principles of government, and the character of the political, municipal, and domestic institutions of men on earth," expounded Stephen A. Douglas, "would annihilate the fundamental principle upon which our political system rests [...] that the people had an inherent right to establish such Constitution and laws for the government of themselves." A self-governing people followed their own dictates, not those of a deity.⁴⁸

Religious intolerance, whether resulting from the "despotic union of church and state" or private prejudice, tarnished America's liberal reputation. While some Democrats may not have extended Christian brotherhood to papists, the party insisted, at a minimum, that the state practice toleration. The separation of church and state was sacrosanct for the party. James

Religious Liberty Defended," 1264. For negative reaction to Campbell and Belmont, including from fellow Democrats, see Benjamin H. Brewster to Lewis Cass, Philadelphia, April 25, 1851, Lewis Cass Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Forney, *Address on Religious Intolerance and Political Proscription*, 28; A. Dudley Mann to John Perkins, London, December 21, 1855; "Speech of Lemuel Scroggins, Esq.," [1855], broadside, Box 1, Folder 3; [A. Dudley Mann], "The Present Administration," draft newspaper article, [1856], Box 1, Folder 5; all in the John Perkins Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; John F. Coleman, *The Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy, 1848-1860* (Harrisburg: The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1975), 65-7; and Michael F. Holt, *Franklin Pierce* (New York: Times Books, 2010), 55.

⁴⁸*Speech of Rev. Henry Slicer*, 4; *Speech of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on the "Measures of Adjustment," Delivered in the City Hall, Chicago, October 23, 1850* (Washington: Gideon and Co., Printers, 1851), 28-30. On Slicer, see Henry Slicer to Alpheus Felch, Georgetown, D. C., October 5, 1848, Felch Papers; and Frank Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 106-7. See also, James L. Huston, "Democracy by Scripture versus Democracy by Process: A Reflection on Stephen A. Douglas and Popular Sovereignty," *Civil War History* 43, no. 3 (Sept. 1997): 189-200. Democrats did not monopolize secularism, which could take non-partisan forms. See *Sunday Legislation. Proceedings of a Public Meeting, Held in the City of Buffalo, February 13, 1858, against Closing the Canal Locks and Stopping the Mails on Sunday, and against Sunday Legislation Generally* (Buffalo, NY: Murray, Rockwell and Co., Republic and Times Office, 1858).

Buchanan, for instance, confessed, “from my soul, I abhor the practice of mingling up religion with politics.” Democrats valued freedom of conscience as “an inalienable right” and “the corner stone in the temple of our liberties.” Given the importance of religious toleration, churches and individuals, not just the state, were encouraged to be liberal. James L. Orr praised a religious school for its “generous liberality” and “toleration,” as the institution refrained from “exacting conformity” from students to denominational dictates.⁴⁹

A regime of religious toleration, furthermore, deflated fanaticism. Democrats recycled John Locke’s seventeenth-century solution to religious conflict by decreeing that one had to tolerate in order to be tolerated. “If the Law of Toleration were once so settled,” Locke pleaded, “that all Churches were obliged to lay down Toleration as the Foundation of their own Liberty; and teach that Liberty of Conscience is every mans natural Right,” then would cease the “endless Hatreds, Rapines, and Slaughters” which had heretofore marred history. The state, for Locke, was salutary in its neutrality. A Democrat in 1850 similarly hoped that the government should, “if true to republican principles, shield all in their religious tenets [...], and protect all in their pursuits and worship, however different.” R. M. T. Hunter invoked Locke and held that it was “far better to pursue the present practice; tolerate all religions, and have each church free to pursue its mission in its own way.” Otherwise, fanatics, in “unprotestantizing Protestantism itself, and returning to the practices of the darkest ages of religious bigotry and persecution,” would turn Catholics into the enemies they imagined them to be and then would move against other denominations such as Quakers. Without toleration being the precondition of their own

⁴⁹Coleman, “Antebellum Democratic Party Address,” 6; *Great Speech of the Honourable James Buchanan*, 9; *Speech of Senator Douglas, at the Democratic Celebration of the Anniversary of American Freedom, in Independence Square, Philadelphia, July 4, 1854* (n.p., [1854]), 7; Orr, *An Address Delivered before the Philosphian and Adelpian Societies*, 6-8.

religious freedom, fanatics would engender the evils they persecuted by placing the nation on the slippery slope of “sectarian jealousy.”⁵⁰

The meddling cleric, as the instigator of this discord, was the archetypal fanatic, and Democrats relished attacking him. A Know-Nothing publication complained about how one Democratic leader “flare[s] up with a fierce spirit and hot indignation to devour some black-coat who presumes to touch ever so tenderly on some political measure in his pulpit discussions.” Democrats did indeed rage against “political preacher[s],” “partizan priests,” and “Sunday political sermons.” Their contest with these “fossils of the twelfth century, dug up and stamped anew”⁵¹ was a continuation of the timeless struggle for human knowledge and liberty over “Priest craft” and “Jesuitism.” Opposition from the clergy was an endorsement of one’s Democracy. Surveying the clamor over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, one Democrat unfriendly to the Little Giant mused, “if the fools do not quit burning Douglas in efegy [*sic*] and the Priest [*sic*] do not let him alone they will make him President” and “will learn me to love him.” “The Democracy of this country has always been opposed in every important crisis by the clergy,” declaimed another Democrat, as “every quarter of a century [...], they get frightened from their propriety, seize all the thunders of Sinai, and hurl them upon the Democratic party.” Such denunciation signaled that the party marched on the side of progress.⁵²

⁵⁰Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 23-8, 31-6, 51-5, quotations on 33, 51; *The Whig Charge of Religious Intolerance*, 7; “Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” in James P. Hambleton, ed., *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise, with a History of the Political Campaign in Virginia in 1855. To Which is Added a Review of the Position of Parties in the Union, and a Statement of the Political Issues: Distinguishing Them on the Eve of the Presidential Campaign of 1856* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1856), 77-84, quotations on 79, 82.

⁵¹[F. R. Anspach], *The Sons of the Sires; A History of the Rise, Progress, and Destiny of the American Party, and Its Probable Influence on the Next Presidential Election. To Which is Added a Review of the Letter of the Hon. Henry A. Wise, against the Know-Nothings. By an American* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1855), 219; *Infidelity and Abolitionism*, 6; Loring, *A Speech Delivered at Webster, Mass.*, 9; Horatio Seymour to Stephen A. Douglas, Utica, April 10, 1856, Douglas Papers; Lovejoy, *The True Democracy*, 12.

⁵²Thomas A. Glover to R. M. T. Hunter, New York, [NY], June 23, 1855, in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter,” 165; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 10, 1854; Leland R. [?] to John G. Davis, Greencastle, IN, April

Party leaders in the 1850s publicly baited ecclesiastics. They thereby emulated Andrew Jackson, who had berated clerics in the White House for their involvement in the Eaton Affair. Douglas turned clerical opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act into a debate on the involvement of preachers in politics. He elided the moral issue of slavery's expansion by denying the clergy's right to speak on political matters in the first place. Douglas accused them of false philanthropy, charging that their opposition did not stem from antislavery conviction, but from fear that popular sovereignty diminished their pretensions to "divinely-constituted power." Granting the clergy political authority risked transforming the state into a moral machinery, with "the representatives of the people converted into machines in the hands of an all-controlling priesthood." Although he had been an early ally of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Douglas later exulted over having defied "the Mormon prophet," who had announced "that it was the decree of heaven" that the Little Giant should suffer electoral defeat. Douglas's constituents, however, "did not acknowledge the authority of the prophet" and exercised their democratic prerogative by reelecting him. Buchanan gave a subtler response to a group of divines seeking his repentance for Bleeding Kansas. After thanking them for praying for his administration, the president retorted that "genuine philanthropy" required that they look to their own meddling, not his sins, as the source of "sectional excitement."⁵³

23, 1854, John Givan Davis Papers (microfilm edition), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison; Lovejoy, *The True Democracy*, 10.

⁵³Mark R. Cheatham, *Andrew Jackson, Southerner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 122; *Letter of Senator Douglas, Vindicating His Character and His Position on the Nebraska Bill against the Assaults Contained in the Proceedings of a Public Meeting Composed of Twenty-Five Clergymen of Chicago* (Washington, D. C.: The Sentinel Office, 1854), quotations on 9; "Reply to a Memorial of Citizens of Connecticut on Kansas," August 15, 1857, in *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908-11), 10:122. See also, George Miller to Stephen A. Douglas, Nauvoo, December 17, 1845; Brigham Young to [Stephen A. Douglas, Nauvoo, December 17, 1845]; Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards to Stephen A. Douglas, Great Salt Lake City, July 20, 1849; Brigham Young to Stephen A. Douglas, Great Salt Lake City, April 29, 1854, all in the Douglas Papers; and Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 104-10.

Grassroots Democrats also vented their anticlericalism. Jephtha Garrigus, a staunch old Jacksonian in Indiana, complained to a representative that “they have elected a chaplain To both houses” of Congress, which he deemed “a very wrong act,” and rebuked, “pay for your own preaching if you Want to have it.” An army officer in Utah Territory juxtaposed Brigham Young’s opulent palace, stable, horses, and gardens, akin to those of an Oriental despot, with the “greater portion of the masses [who] are ignorant, deluded, well meaning fanatical people,” degraded by “shrewd, unprincipled” Mormon theocrats. Democrats’ relationship with the clergy was one of eternal enmity. One Democrat praised Douglas’s stance on Kansas-Nebraska and related that he “expected the opposition of these *Black coated clergymen* when I first saw the bill, but I consider their opposition fortunate for I never knew them right in my life on any political subject.” “The truth is,” he concluded, “I never had a very great respect for that class of our citizens any way.”⁵⁴

National Diversity or Fanatical Uniformity

The cleric suffered from a narrowness of vision which unsuited him for leadership of a heterogeneous and unfolding empire of liberty. So too did his ally, the sectionalist, falter as a steward of American exceptionalism. According to Democrats, religious fanatics could not see beyond the horizons of their brittle morality, while sectionalists could not escape their provinciality. Both failed to appreciate America’s diverse nationhood, the source of its world-historical destiny. National statesmanship meant cherishing the country’s unparalleled panoply of human progress, geographical unfolding, and cultural intermingling. Thus did Democratic

⁵⁴Jephtha Garrigus to John G. Davis, Gallatin, IN, January 2, 1854, Davis Papers, Indianapolis; [Parmenas Taylor Turnley] to Stephen A. Douglas, Great Salt Lake City, UT, October 16, 1858; D. P. Rhodes to Stephen A. Douglas, Ohio City, March 27, 1854, both in the Douglas Papers. See also, Thomas F. Carpenter to [Stephen A. Douglas], Providence, April 15, 1854, Douglas Papers.

vice presidential candidate John C. Breckinridge receive praise in 1856 as “a statesman of the most enlarged and comprehensive policy; the friend of freedom and of the oppressed everywhere.” Senator Andrew Pickens Butler offered a different assessment of his Republican colleague Charles Sumner when he reproached, “I had known many who came into the Senate of the United States, reeking with prejudices from home, who afterwards had the courage to lift themselves above the temporary influences which had controlled them.” Sumner’s intolerant opposition to slavery, born of chauvinistic sectionalism, compromised the national scope of his statesmanship, leading Butler to add rhetorical blows to the physical ones from which Sumner was then convalescing. Butler sneered, “I supposed that a man who had read history could not be a bigot.”⁵⁵

Democrats’ toleration prompted them to conceptualize American identity in expansive terms. With its membership a microcosm of the nation, the Democracy claimed that only it could incubate this eclectic nationalism. Fanatics, in contrast, would straiten diversity into stifling uniformity by using state power to exact adherence to moral and sectional visions. Democrats’ regard for the autonomous individual and their acquiescence in his varied manifestations led them to condone competing socioeconomic regimes and jarring ethnic, religious, and regional folkways. The unloosed, tolerated individual was not only intrinsic to social progress, but also to harmonious national expansion. Democrats equated American nationality with diversity, articulating a unique, loose-fitting nationalism, inculcated not by the nation-state, but by their party. The Democracy cultivated the national loyalty of white men by

⁵⁵*Letter of an Adopted Catholic, Addressed to the President of the Kentucky Democratic Association of Washington City, on Temporal Allegiance to the Pope, and the Relations of the Catholic Church and Catholics, Both Native and Adopted, to the System of Domestic Slavery and Its Agitation in the United States* (n.p., [1856]), 8; “Mr. Brooks and Mr. Sumner. Speech of Hon. A. P. Butler, of South Carolina, in the Senate, June 12, 1856,” *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1855-56, 25, appendix:626.

promising that, while it controlled the government, the nation would be one that tolerated their diversity and maintained their equality across the continent.

Governor Henry A. Wise of Virginia always thumped his chest when professing his Unionism; yet, like any conscientious slaveholder, he qualified that his was a conditional allegiance. Wise distinguished between two types of nationalism: “*Nationality* in opposition to democracy or State rights I oppose; I oppose all that sort of *federal nationality* which would *consolidate us into one centralized position.*” He preferred, instead, “the *nationality of democracy*, [...] which maintains State rights and State equality,” a nationality that “I honor and cherish and glory in!” Democrats, especially those anxious over vested interests such as slavery or toleration for their church, rejected state consolidation and the uniformity which accompanied it, but they did not dispense with nationality. Even slaveholders could “cherish and glory in” an overarching national identity, properly defined, which for Democrats meant social and cultural diversity.⁵⁶

Licensing social and cultural variation was Democrats’ prescription for orderly national expansion. Democrats updated James Madison’s reworking of republican theory, by which he opted for the geographically broadcast and internally discordant republic over the prevailing wisdom that republics ought to be geographically compact and internally harmonious. Democrats in the 1850s agreed that antagonistic interests checked despotism, and they projected this notion onto a continental canvas unimagined by Madison. Through conquest, annexation, and purchase, Democrats provided space into which all interests could flow. Self-governing individuals and communities would develop along their own trajectories, buffered from the

⁵⁶*Letter of Governor Wise, of Virginia, on the Senatorial Election and the Kansas Policy of the Administration* (Washington, D. C., 1857), 6-7.

tampering of others and themselves unable to overreach, a blueprint of social order amidst expansion which historian Robert H. Wiebe refers to as “parallelism.”⁵⁷ The Democratic governor of California, a state owing its existence to his party’s gleeful employment of martial power to enlarge national boundaries, advised that “the only way to secure the peace and tranquility of the republic, is for each to abstain from intermeddling with the affairs of its neighbor.” Toleration was requisite among individuals and among sections; according to a New York Democrat, “the free exercise of the rights of citizens in other sections of the Union is necessary for the preservation of our own.” Tolerating diversity ensured the “unlimited extension” of Democrats’ “benign system of federative self-government,” enlarging what Franklin Pierce praised as “a confederation so vast and so varied, both in numbers and in territorial extent, in habits and in interests” and what Robert Toombs called “our widely extended Republic.”⁵⁸

The “concentration and centralization of power” was particularly sinister “in a country so vast and diversified in its sectional interest as ours,” a southern Democrat observed. A consolidated state atrophied individual initiative. It also effaced differences among white men and among sections, ushering in fanatical uniformity. Stephen Douglas interpreted an

⁵⁷James Madison, “The Federalist No. 10,” November 22, 1787, in Publius [pseud., Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay], *The Federalist Papers* (1787-88; repr., New York: Bantam Classic, 2003), 50-8. According to Wiebe, “parallelism also accounted for a degree of mutual tolerance in a culture that had no other way to deal with conflicting truths.” Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (1984; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 287-8. See also, Major L. Wilson’s discussion of “federative freedom” in *Space, Time, and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict, 1815-1861* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 6-12.

⁵⁸John B. Weller, *Inaugural Address* (n.p., [1858]), 13; *Speech of General Aaron Ward, at the Great Democratic Mass Meeting, at White Plains, N. Y., on September 16, 1856* (New York: J. W. Bell, Daily News Job Office, [1856]), 8; Franklin Pierce, “First Annual Message,” December 5, 1853, in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1896-99), 5:222-4, quotations on 224; *A Lecture Delivered in the Tremont Temple, Boston, Massachusetts, on the 24th January, 1856, by R. Toombs. Slavery—Its Constitutional Status—Its Influence on the African Race and Society* (n.p., [1856]), 9.

antislavery rival's dictum that the nation must "become all one thing, or all the other" to mean that "there should be uniformity in the local institutions and domestic regulations of the different States of this Union." "Uniformity in local and domestic affairs would be destructive of State rights, of State sovereignty, of personal liberty and personal freedom," Douglas warned, because "uniformity is the parent of despotism the world over."⁵⁹ A Democrat in Arkansas defended immigration by recommending diversity as "the best security against those spasmodic and periodical returns of fanaticism which convulse the peace and menace the stability of the Union." "The greater the diversity of interests confided to the care of the Union," he reasoned, "the less danger is there of its subversion by any one of them." When one intolerant *ism* gained the ascendancy, it would use the government to extinguish distinctions among white men, debauching the United States into a "consolidated empire." Democrats' baroque republic, splayed over a vast expanse, guaranteed that no one interest tyrannized the others.⁶⁰

Democrats countenanced the expansion of slavery to forestall despotic uniformity and to promote the economic diversification necessary to the nation's well-being. The federal government did not need to turn the territories into a preserve for either slavery or freedom. It was "*humbug*," dismissed a Massachusetts Democrat, to approach territorial settlement as "a sort of proclaimed steeple-chase [...] between the Northern and the Southern States." Territorial popular sovereignty would defuse controversy, especially if fraught decisions were never actually made, thereby holding the antagonism between freedom and slavery in abeyance and hindering the onset of hated uniformity. National economic progress, moreover, depended on

⁵⁹*Inaugural Address of Governor John A. Winston*, 3; "Speech of Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, June 16, 1858"; "Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, Chicago, July 9, 1858," both in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. Robert W. Johannsen (1965; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14, 28-31.

⁶⁰*Substance of the Speech of Hon. W. K. Sebastian*, 13; "Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, Chicago, July 9, 1858," 30-1.

regional economic specialization. A Minnesota Democrat urged his fellow northerners to forgo attacking the South, because “commercial prosperity” required “variety in unity, combining north, south, east and west, consisting of free white labor where it flourishes in temperate climates, and forced dark labor in the tropics.”⁶¹

Democrats contended that only their party comprised the institutional framework capable of fostering national diversity, because, by the late 1850s, only their membership approximated the nation itself. A delegate surveying the 1856 national convention gushed over “this vast assemblage, from all—not sections; there are no sections (cheers)—but latitudes and longitudes (applause) of the republic.” The Whigs and Know-Nothings, on the contrary, splintered sectionally over slavery, while the Republican party was born exclusively northern, innovations which for Democrats indicated a burgeoning “spirit of sectional hate” and a tendency to “organize political parties on geographical lines.”⁶²

Democrats conflated their party with the nation whenever northern and southern Democrats interacted, a ritual that, toward the decade’s end, only they could effect. The Democracy’s national ideology depended on intersectional comingling. Because delegates “from the cold regions of the North, others from the sultry clime of the South, some from the borders of the broad Atlantic, and others from the distant shores of the Pacific” drafted the party’s 1856 platform, it contained “no religious bigotry—no hypocritical negro-fanaticism.” A

⁶¹Caleb Cushing, *Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall, Boston, October 27, 1857. Also, Speech Delivered in City Hall, Newburyport, October 31, 1857* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, 1857), 13-4; Robertson, *The South and the Democratic Party*, 9-11. Wiebe argues that the Kansas-Nebraska Act destroyed parallelism by forcing Americans to choose slavery or freedom. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 353-75. See also, Wilson, *Space, Time, and Freedom*, 178-84.

⁶²*Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in Cincinnati, June 2-6, 1856. Reported for the Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati: Enquirer Steam Print, 1856), 36; “Extract. A Picture of Disunion. From a Speech Delivered at a Mass Meeting of the Democracy of Indiana. Held on the Battle Ground of Tippecanoe, September, 1856,” in *Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson*, 1:525; *Speech of Senator Douglas, at the Democratic Celebration of the Anniversary of American Freedom*, 1. See also, Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 317-27.

Whig pamphlet joked that “it is really too bad to have these Southerners prowling about New England, over-hearing the Democracy there as they spread themselves on the subject of slavery,” hinting that northern Democrats said different things to northern and southern audiences. Yet slave-state Democrats did regularly canvass the Free States. A Republican later complained that the Democracy “has sent through the whole North, stumping in its cause, Senator Benjamin, of Louisiana, a Disunionist, Senator Toombs, of Georgia, a Disunionist, Mr. Alexander H. Stephens, of Georgia, a Disunionist.” Democrats were quite proud to monopolize the endorsements of such prominent southerners.⁶³

One southerner “prowling about New England” assured Yankees that he “promulgate[d] the same political sentiments which I proclaim to my own honored constituency in South Carolina.” He elaborated, “I am here to demonstrate the great fact that the Democratic party—differing from all other parties in that respect—is national in its principles, and its members, whether hailing from the North or South, speaking amidst the frigid hills of New England or on the sunny plains of the South, can safely publish the same doctrines.” Northern Democrats boasted likewise. A partisan noticed that the Little Giant’s speeches in Memphis and New Orleans “breathed the same Democracy, that he gave to the People of Illinois,” as “he did not speak to suit two Localities, but he proclaimed the same doctrine that will go all over the nation.”⁶⁴

Democrats could “everywhere speak the same language,” because they reduced nationality to a constituent element translatable throughout the Union—the autonomous, white

⁶³*Address of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown*, 7; *Frank. Pierce and His Abolition Allies* (n.p., Daily American Telegraph, [1852]), 16; *An Address Delivered by Hon. William D. Kelley, at Spring Garden Hall, Philadelphia, on September 9th, 1856* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Morning Times, [1856]), 13.

⁶⁴“Mr. Orr’s Speech in Phoenix Hall,” 10; A. C. Scott to John G. Davis, Shreveport, LA, January 1, 1859, Davis Papers, Indianapolis.

male. Stripped of regional identity, white men were interchangeable, which made the party's proselytizers fungible on the stump. The individual was the locus of American nationality, around which emanated concentric loyalties—to family, community, religion, state, section, and, ultimately, the nation. Akin to the party's doctrines, which were geographically unmoored, it did not matter whether a white man was a southerner or a northerner, a slaveholder or a Roman Catholic—all possessed the same rights and, ideally, tolerated one another.⁶⁵

Democrats did not hold regionalism and nationalism in antagonism. Like all Americans, Democrats were geographical chauvinists, with competition among the sections, or what one Democrat called “generous rivals,” ranging from good-natured to deadly serious. A Missourian relayed to a friend that “we here [in St. Louis] think it the center of the universe. Standing as you soon would first here, you would find it a better point to *radiate from* than Massachusetts.” A Supreme Court justice, meanwhile, advised against placing Ohio and Kentucky in the same judicial circuit, justifying, “the people of Ky, near to the Ohio river, have a prejudice to their neighbours on the other side amounting to *aversion*.” Historian David M. Potter cautions against reducing the Civil War to a trade-off between nationalism and sectionalism. Antebellum Americans held multiple loyalties, and national allegiance could draw strength from parochialism. Democrats in particular directed local fealty toward national ends. Henry Wise, for instance, reassured Democrats in Indiana that he would “know no sections in administering the powers and duties of our Federative system; that as a Virginian, as an American, as a

⁶⁵*Great Speech of the Honourable James Buchanan*, 14. On identity formation below the level of the nation-state and its relationship to national allegiance, see Guntram H. Herb and David H. Kaplan, eds., *Nested Identities: Nationalism, Territory, and Scale* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999).

Democrat,” and “as a Southern man and a slaveholder,” he would shield all Americans against “inequality” and “injustice.” Of course, he expected the same in return.⁶⁶

By respecting the equality of individuals, despite their geographical variation, the Democracy funneled white men’s loyalty through the stratifications of household, community, state, and section to the nation. Governor Joseph A. Wright of Indiana used an address before an agricultural society both to promote flax cultivation and to theorize on American identity. A nation with “almost all varieties of soil, climate, and productions” was home to “citizens of every kind of pursuit and occupation,” Wright noted. This diversity strengthened the United States, provided that equality and individual rights were accorded. Ensuring that the “individual man is respected and admired” made him “feel that upon *him* rests a portion of the responsibilities of life.” Regard for the individual strengthened the nation by making him the unit of progress in his community, with the result that, “by the form and structure of our government, the little local communities at home, from school districts to townships, counties, and State, are all made, as it were, part and parcel of the machinery that moves and regulates the action of our republic.” “The strength and beauty of our form of Government” derived from the recognition that diverse individuals were the nation’s sovereigns at all levels of government.⁶⁷

⁶⁶*Great Speech of the Honourable James Buchanan*, 3; William S. Allen to Caleb Cushing, St. Louis, April 3, 1854; John Catron to Caleb Cushing, March 25, [1854], both in the Caleb Cushing Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; David M. Potter, “The Historian’s Use of Nationalism and Vice Versa,” in *The South and the Sectional Conflict* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 34-83; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, completed and ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976), 6-17; “Letter from Henry A. Wise,” Wise to Austin H. Brown, Richmond, VA, February 15, 1858, in *Popular Sovereignty. Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention, Held at Indianapolis, Indiana, February 23d, 1858, with the Letters of Gov. Henry A. Wise, of Va.; Gov. Robert J. Walker; Hon. John W. Forney, and Others; and the Speeches of Hon. S. D. Johnston, of Kansas; Hon. H. B. Payne of Ohio, and Others* (Indianapolis: Cameron and M’Neely, Printers, 1858), 11.

⁶⁷*An Address Delivered by Gov. Joseph A. Wright*, 10-5. See also, Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society*, 281-90.

Democrats made their party and its principles, not the state, responsible for generating national sentiment. James Buchanan complimented Wright's discourse, in which "the principles of the Democratic party are traced back to their fountain." With its partisan ideology, long consisting of states' rights, constitutional "strict construction," and, more recently, territorial popular sovereignty, the Democracy worked toward a political order that balanced individual and state equality with nationality. According to an Ohioan, "our fathers established a Union of States diverse in local institutions, and separately sovereign, but nevertheless compacted into one Nation for the defence and the welfare of all." Other countries privy to America's feat, claimed New York's Elijah Ward, "naturally desire the benefits of a government that give[s] such evidence of prosperity and stability, affords such protection to person and property, and leaves the people in such unrestricted enjoyment of social and political liberty." Individuals could safely subscribe to this vision of nationality, as it was sponsored by a party which promised that nationalism need not subsume individualism or localism.⁶⁸

Democratic nationalism skirted two extremes, whereby the United States consisted of no more than an artificial patchwork or an equally contrived *völkisch* reduction. Some defenders of slavery, particularly adherents of John C. Calhoun, imagined the Union as an arena of jostling factions, in which minorities, specifically the Slave States, wielded vetoes over national policy. Most Democrats spurned this model, as it inhibited the development of what one proslavery northerner called "an all-embracing, an all-cherishing nationality." Yet, in articulating an "all-embracing" nationality, Democrats did not melt down heterogeneity in the crucible of European nationalism. American identity, as Democrats understood it, was not based on traditional

⁶⁸James Buchanan to Joseph A. Wright, London, December 8, 1854, Joseph A. Wright Correspondence and Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; Pugh, *Oration Delivered before the Triennial Convention of the Alpha Delta Phi*, 11; "Speech of General E. Ward," 4.

signifiers of nineteenth-century nationhood such as common descent, bounded territory, or shared culture, religion, and ethnicity.⁶⁹

At the same time, Democratic nationality, despite its looseness, posited a normative vision that gently swaddled Americans of all sections. Some historians portray national parties as non-ideological due to the compromises requisite in placating a diverse membership. Only sectional parties, according to this view, adhered to an ideology, as they sought to reforge the nation in the image of their region. But Democrats did limn a Good Society. “We shall present the glorious spectacle,” regaled Marylander Reverdy Johnson, “of an enlightened people, harmonious and powerful in our very contrasts, living under State governments adequate to all our local wants, and under a general government subjected to all the restraints which freedom requires.” Referring to the impasse over slavery, Johnson claimed that, “in this very difference, will be found the best elements of our prosperity and strength.” R. M. T. Hunter, after painting a portrait of national tranquility, opined to a northern audience, “and upon what reposed this grand scheme of human happiness? It rested on the faith felt by our people that they would continue to live under the Constitution, and the equal laws which it enjoined, in the confidence they reposed in the sense of justice and mutual affection of each other.” Mutual affection amidst diversity,

⁶⁹Robertson, *The South and the Democratic Party*, 3; “A Disquisition on Government”; “A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States,” both in *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Ross M. Lence (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 3-284. The place of the United States in the literature on nationalism and nation-states is ambiguous at best. While American nationalism often seems to jar with models of European nationalism, the perpetuation of its anomalous status also stems in part from assumptions of American exceptionalism on the part of American scholars. David M. Potter defines American nationalism before the Civil War in terms of categories such as culture and ethnicity that are similar to European models. Lloyd Kramer, by focusing on the cultural construction of nationalism, finds convergence between the United States and Europe, while still allowing for variation. Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 6-17; Lloyd Kramer, *Nationalism in Europe and America: Politics, Cultures, and Identities since 1775* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011). On the distinctiveness of American nationalism, see John M. Murrin, “A Roof without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity,” in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 333-48. For a general commentary on the problem, see Peter J. Parish, “An Exception to Most of the Rules: What Made American Nationalism Different in the Mid-nineteenth Century?” *Prologue: Quarterly of the National Archives* 27, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 219-29.

balanced between the poles of Calhounite atomization and fanatical uniformity, was the mean where rested the happy republic, the envy of the world.⁷⁰

Nationalism nurtured by an antistatist party, as opposed to being fostered by a centralized nation-state, accounts for both the exceptionalism and fragility of the American Union before the Civil War. The Democracy guaranteed white men the ability to develop their individuality and cultivate their nationality independent of the government. Democrats would contain the state but facilitate nationalism—what President Pierce defined as “the minimum of Federal government compatible with the maintenance of national unity.” American nationality was not based on shared ethnicity or culture, although it did possess racial and gender criteria, in that the constituent national actor was the white male citizen. A nationalism born of diversity was unique and remarkably inclusive. This nationality was, nonetheless, bluntly exclusionary. Even though Democrats railed against arbitrary uniformity, they circumscribed their own understanding of the boundaries of national belonging with impermeable demarcations of race, gender, and, of course, partisanship.⁷¹

Conservative Mastery or Fanatical Degradation

Faced with the fanatical ambition to homogenize white men’s diversity into a fabricated and narrow nationality, Democrats took comfort in the “sober second thought of the people,”

⁷⁰[Reverdy Johnson], *Remarks on Popular Sovereignty, as Maintained and Denied Respectively by Judge Douglas, and Attorney-General Black. By a Southern Citizen* (Baltimore: Murphy and Co. Printers and Publishers, 1859), 48; *The Democratic Demonstration at Poughkeepsie. Speech of Hon. R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia* (n.p., [1856]), 14-5. Eric Foner goes so far as to argue that “the very diversity of American society has inhibited the formation of ideological parties,” except for the sectional parties preceding the Civil War. He fails to appreciate that the Democratic party crafted a partisan ideology premised on national diversity. Foner, “Politics, Ideology, and the Origins of the American Civil War,” in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 34-53, quotation on 34.

⁷¹Pierce, “First Annual Message,” 224.

who, upon due reflection, would not capitulate to the “delirium tremens of fanaticism.”

Democrats applauded not only the people’s talent for democratic self-governance, but also their innate conservatism. The nation’s silent majority would rebuke fanatics. Democrats only had to “confidently await the calm and dispassionate judgment of the American people.” “I do not believe that fanaticism is to be rampant, in this enlightened day,” ruminated a Maine Democrat, as “the second sober thought of the people will take the place of the unnatural excitement which, seems to pass, over the political and social circles, as a whirlwind, only to deform and make hateful.” Because of America’s reliably republican citizenry, Democratic principles had already “weathered many a storm,” and “the isms of the day” would prove transitory.⁷²

The people could be trusted, because when left to their own pursuits, white men made safe the republic. Democrats’ vaunted individual was not a theoretical abstraction, but an historically-contingent raced and gendered being. In sanctifying individual rights, Democrats were thereby safeguarding a specific gender and racial order. The Democracy took a holistic view of white male autonomy. Individuals were political sovereigns and democratic equals in public because they were masters at home. The concept of *mastery* rooted political legitimacy in the governance of non-white and female household dependents. Fanaticism could thus corrode the political autonomy of the white male individual by undermining household hierarchy, leading to his *degradation* at home and, consequently, in the political sphere. Individual degradation, moreover, presaged the declension of the republic. To ensure the racial and gender exclusivity

⁷²Joseph R. Chandler to John Perkins, Philadelphia, August 14, 1855, Perkins Papers; *Speech of the Hon. Horatio Seymour*, 4; *Letter from William H. English*, 3; George M. Leeman to Charles G. Bellamy, Cape Neddick, March 23, 1855, Charles G. Bellamy Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

of the body politic, Democrats empowered white men to dominate non-white and female dependents, making individual mastery the conservative bulwark of the white man's republic.⁷³

An ominous undercurrent of violence pulsed behind even mundane transactions in the 1850s Senate. In 1856 Alabamian Clement Claiborne Clay launched a tirade against John P. Hale of New Hampshire. Hale would not join him in debate, Clay charged, nor would he meet him in a violent test of honor. Instead, Senator Hale "soils the carpet upon which he treads" and "skulks behind petticoats, on the plea of non-combatancy, for protection." Clay was impugning Hale's manhood. Yet more than cowardice accounted for the unmanliness that riled Clay; it was Hale's political beliefs which invalidated his masculinity. Another southern Democrat explained that Hale "has a tender conscience" and that Republicans had been emotionally swayed by the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Hale's mawkish proclivities and his antislavery politics dovetailed. He was an effeminate fanatic, while Clay and fellow Democrats were manly conservatives. Hale's politics, particularly his concern for enslaved Americans, led to "his self-abasement and humiliation," his "debasement or degradation."⁷⁴

Hale's unmanliness was attributable to fanatical degradation, a term that, despite its ubiquity in antebellum politics, possessed a precise meaning in the culture of the white man's

⁷³On household mastery, see Nancy Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Household in the Delta, 1861-1875* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 117-60; and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). The lack of clearly demarcated public and private spheres in the South, Kenneth S. Greenberg finds, led to a seamlessness between how southern men conducted themselves as masters of dependents upon plantations and as statesmen in public. Focusing more on honor culture and public behavior, however, he does not ground mastery in the physical relations of the household. Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985).

⁷⁴For the exchange among Senators Clay and Hale and remarks by Judah P. Benjamin, see *Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin, of Louisiana, on the Kansas Question. Delivered in the Senate, May 3, 1856* (Washington: The Union Office, 1856), 11, 15, 25-7.

republic. Degradation was the forfeiture of one's manhood and autonomy, both in domestic life and in politics. Fanatical political traits, such as undue passion, zealous reformism, or blind obedience to a party, leader, or cause, signaled a dearth of manly independence and republican virtue. One could, for example, be "enslaved by party necessity." The man possessing "native dignity of original manhood," Clay had imparted earlier to students at the University of Alabama, is "not the slave of passion, or prejudice, or self-interest, or party, or public opinion." The notion of being "enslaved" to one's politics indicates the stakes of degradation. Fanatics discarded their manhood *and* their whiteness. The political degradation of a statesman and the racial degradation of a white man were reciprocal.⁷⁵

Fanatics were degraded men. Their politics emasculated them, whether because, in their overzealous "one-ideativeness," they ignored "great national principles" or because they succumbed to "misplaced and sickly sentiment." Rather than strengthening the Union, fanatics chased "a will-o'-the-wisp, an intangibility, a theory." Fanatical politicians acted like impassioned women—"fanaticism, with her loins girt about, and shod with sandals, will, like Peter the Hermit, march at the head of her ardent legions, to rescue this holy land of Nebraska from the grasp of the infidel slaveholder."⁷⁶ An 1856 pamphlet noted that the Republican presidential candidate would "be wafted to the White House, on the prayers of the devout, the tears and smiles of woman, and the sympathies of the humane." Unmanly fanatics seduced other white men to the same fate, "whining with all the pathos of the sentimental lady's sonnet to the

⁷⁵*Speech of Richard W. Walker, Esq., on the Presidential Election, Delivered at Huntsville, ALA. On Thursday, the 28th of August, 1856* (Florence, AL: Gazette Office, 1856), 15; Clay, *The Love of Truth*, 20-6.

⁷⁶Dickinson, "Speech on the Maine Law Question," "Speech on the Acquisition of Territory, and the Formation of Governments for the Territories.—The Doctrine of 'Popular Sovereignty' Proposed and Defended. Delivered in the Senate of the United States, January 12, 1848"; "Speech upon the Issues and Candidates of the Presidential Campaign. Delivered in Tammany Hall, New York, August 19, 1848"; "Speech Delivered at Delhi, Delaware County, N. Y., at a Meeting of the 'Hardshell' or National Democracy of the County, September 29, 1854," all in *Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson*, 1:234, 277, 494, 498.

dying frog, in the hope of cheating unsuspecting people into prostituting their privileges as electors to their purposes.”⁷⁷

After emasculating themselves, fanatics betrayed the norms of the white man’s republic by enslaving other white men to their moral *diktats*. According to Thomas L. Clingman, “being equally cowardly, mean, and malicious,” the opponents of slavery “intensely hate whatever is honorable and manly in the human character, and nothing would be more gratifying to them than to see the southern men and women whom they have so long vilified degraded to the level of the negroes.” White men nationwide faced similar peril. A southern Democrat noted that nativism “tends to degrade the naturalized citizen.” A northern Democrat saw a threat to both slaveholders and white immigrants, with Republicans and Know-Nothings each “unit[ing] to place a class of persons in a condition of pupilage.”⁷⁸

Fanatics targeted white men’s autonomy at its source by obtruding into the home and slighting household mastery. Opponents infuriated by Vice President Dallas’s tie-breaking vote in favor of the Tariff of 1846 had the temerity to assault his manly form and physical home by “burning him in effigy, and insulting the ladies of his family by placards upon his door.”⁷⁹

Democrats believed that questions such as temperance, religion, and slaveholding fell under the

⁷⁷Lovejoy, *The True Democracy*, 4; Dickinson, “Speech upon the Issues and Candidates of the Presidential Campaign,” 280. New England writers reevaluated their manhood in light of popular views that southerners were more masculine. They began to eschew sentimentality, because, according to John Stauffer, “moral certainty was also gendered: it meant an adherence to principle, and tended toward emasculation.” Stauffer, “Embattled Manhood and New England Writers, 1860-1870,” in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, ed. Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120-39, quotation on 133.

⁷⁸*Address of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman*, 10; *Letter from Daniel Chandler, Esq.*, 5; *Speech of the Hon. Horatio Seymour*, 5.

⁷⁹Democratic Committee of Publication, *Life of George Mifflin Dallas, Vice President of the United States*, 1844, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Times and Keystone Job Office, 1847), 15. See also, George M. Dallas to Sophia Dallas, July 30, 1846, in “The Mystery of the Dallas Papers. Part I,” ed. Roy F. Nichols, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 73, no. 3 (July 1949): 386; and John M. Belohlavek, *George Mifflin Dallas: Jacksonian Patrician* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 114.

purview of the household head. The Know-Nothing party, however, “under pretext of sanctimonious purity invades the private domicil, the home that is every man’s castle.” In Massachusetts, “the sanctity of the domestic hearth is violated” by the Know-Nothing legislature with infringements upon “freedom of conscience.” Penalties against Catholics, charged a Pennsylvania Democrat, would discourage men from marrying them, allowing Know-Nothings to “set themselves up to control the most sacred relation of society.” Samuel Tilden warned that a proposed temperance law in New York “invades the rightful domain of the individual judgment and conscience, and takes a step backward toward that barbarian age when the wages of labor, the prices of commodities, a man’s food and clothing, were dictated to him by a government calling itself paternal.” Democrats had no qualms with paternalism, provided its subjects were African Americans and women, not white men.⁸⁰

Democrats sought to preserve a seemingly pre-bourgeois conception of the household in the face of “this meddling philanthropy.” They envisioned a hierarchical, organic family unit under the tutelage of a white head of household. At the same time that they sought to conserve a patriarchal household order, they did not countenance a white man as the object of paternalism and were sure to extricate him from the relations of household dependency through which his rights had been curtailed in the colonial and early republican eras. The patriarchal order they hearkened back to was, accordingly, a modern innovation in that it aligned with the demands of *Herrenvolk* democracy. For Democrats, at least in theory, white men should never have to submit to relations of dependency, which were emphatically raced and gendered.

⁸⁰Hallett et al., *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men*, 4; Loring, *A Speech Delivered at Webster, Mass.*, 4, 9; Forney, *Address on Religious Intolerance and Political Proscription*, 16; “Coercive Temperance,” 1855, in *The Writings and Speeches of Samuel J. Tilden*, ed. John Bigelow (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1885), 1:283.

As a site of economic production, as opposed to a privatized, feminized space, the household formed the basis of a man's public mastery. Fanaticism undermined this family structure and, consequently, white men's political power. Virginia conservative Muscoe R. H. Garnett blamed an impersonal manufacturing economy and fanatical ideologies for domestic chaos in the Free States. Fanaticism, Garnett found, empowered women, "destroys the unity of married life," and "divide[s] the household into separate interests." Separate public and private spheres, with women reigning in the domestic realm, impinged on male dominion. Fanatics' "socialist philanthropy," additionally, abolished gender hierarchy in marriage as well as parental authority, with the state usurping the patriarch as caretaker of children. Northern fanaticism could also destabilize plantation households. Slaveholders subsumed enslaved laborers into their domestic ideal. Alabama senator Benjamin Fitzpatrick, for instance, grouped the "negro children" on his plantation near Wetumpka in his "family" and wrote his absent wife that "the boys all send love to you" and "so do all the negroes." Abolitionism, by attacking slavery, represented one more fanatical assault on domestic hierarchy. All household heads, in the Free States and in the Slave States, had a common interest in resisting fanaticism in order to preserve their household mastery.⁸¹

⁸¹[Garnett], *The Union, Past and Future*, 22-9; Benjamin Fitzpatrick to Aurelia Fitzpatrick, At Home, March 9, 1856; Benjamin Fitzpatrick to Aurelia Fitzpatrick, Oak Grove, March 11, 1856, both in the Fitzpatrick Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery. See also, "Speech of General Lewis Cass," 4. On the familial metaphor which rested at the core of slaveholder paternalism, see McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, 215-25; and Willie Lee Rose, "The Domestication of Domestic Slavery," in *Slavery and Freedom*, ed. William W. Freehling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 18-36. Democrats did not base their opposition to legislation on subjects such as temperance and religion on a conception of "public" and "private" spheres. According to Elizabeth R. Varon, "although the Democrats sought to maintain a strict boundary between the private and public spheres and resented attempts to politicize domestic life, the Whigs invested the family—and women in particular—with the distinct political function of forming the stable American character on which national well-being depended." Yet, the Democracy as a party did not ascribe to the ideology of separate spheres. Their emphasis on mastery showed that Democrats adhered to the pre-bourgeois corporate household of the Free States and the plantation household of the Slave States, in which a sharp division between public and private realms did not exist. The household head derived his mastery in public from domestic patriarchy, revealing that the household was not completely cordoned off from the public realm. When Democrats protested against fanatical legislation affecting the household, it was not because this was a "private" realm, but because such measures undermined the domestic

The *isms* weakened domestic hierarchy and, moreover, encouraged attacks against the household and violent mutiny from within. Lewis Cass fretted over the “pseudo reformers [who] are entering our domestic circles, and striving to break up our family organizations.” In Portage County, Ohio, “eighteen thousand ‘freeman’ assembled to listen to the Champion of Negro Worshipers (S.P. Chase).” The meeting raised money to purchase fugitive slaves, “two young wenches that were about being returned to Slavery.” Even worse than encouraging runaways, the logical outcome of antislavery fanaticism was warfare upon the institution. In the Virginia House of Delegates, a Democrat lambasted the “hireling emissaries” of fanaticism who were “circulating incendiary documents, breathing into the ear of the slave sentiments whose aim is insurrection, rapine, and murder.” Republicans, claimed Rufus W. Peckham of New York, “would be delighted with a servile war in the South.” At the start of the Civil War, another member of the Peckham clan tried to dissuade Wheeler H. Peckham from joining the military, protesting that he was “not for warring against women & children nor against institutions that are guaranteed by the constitution of my country.”⁸²

basis of household masters’ claims to political sovereignty. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 82. On how political parties advanced competing conceptions of the family, with Democrats defending the patriarchal family, see Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12-38; Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), see 97-114 on the Democratic party; and Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 221-3. On the “corporate patriarchal family” in the Free States, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 18-59, quotation on 57; on the domestic ideology which legitimated separate spheres in the bourgeois family, see Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966): 151-74.

⁸²“Nebraska and Kansas. Speech of Hon. Lewis Cass, of Michigan, in the Senate, February 20, 1854,” *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1853-54, 23, appendix:276; E. B. Tyler to Stephen A. Douglas, Ravenna, Portage Co., [OH], August 19, 1856, Douglas Papers; *Speech of James L. Kemper*, 20; Rufus W. Peckham [Sr.] to Wheeler H. Peckham, Albany, January 4, 1860; [?] Peckham to Wheeler H. Peckham, Milwaukee, May 22, 1861, both in the Peckham Family Papers.

Democrats vowed to protect white men as the masters of their small worlds, an aspiration which resonated with individuals ranging from slaveholders to immigrants. John Y. Mason's son resolved to leave his patronage position after the 1849 accession of a Whig presidential administration. He told his father, "I will resign this slave's position, & settle at days-neck on a portion of your farm say 50 or 100 acres, with one or two good negroes." Rather than submit to the degradation of being beholden to Whigs, this patronage slave would transform himself into a master of chattel slaves. Slaveholding was not the only way to demonstrate mastery, even if it was the most elegant antithesis to political enslavement. A Virginian in Missouri reported on the state's population of "German Emigrants." Germans in Missouri "do very well until they get too *fat, saucy & 40 acres of land*, then they become 'Lords of creation,' [and] whip their *wives*." "If not kind husbands," at least "they always vote the right way." The Pennsylvania political operative John W. Forney explained that immigrants merely wanted to escape "persecution" and "worship God as did our fathers of old, in their hour of travail, 'under their own vine and fig-tree, with none to molest or make them afraid.'" Democrats assumed that Germans in Missouri, and the foreign-born nationwide, "vote[d] the right way" by supporting the party that gave them license to be "Lords of creation" reposing under their "own vine and fig-tree."⁸³

The contest between degradation and mastery transcended law and politics. Mastery entailed more than the absence of legal restraints—it required cultural space in which each man could regulate his own morality. Temperance pledges, antislavery sentimentality, and religious persecution outside of the state, in addition to invasive laws, all led to mental degradation. The opponents of territorial popular sovereignty "contend that the American people shall not exercise

⁸³L. E. Mason to John Y. Mason, Washington, April 9, 1849, Mason Papers; H. Stevenson to John Letcher, Union, MO, May 8, 1854, John Letcher Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Forney, *Address on Religious Intolerance and Political Proscription*, 15; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*.

this right; that their minds shall be enslaved.” “The separation, absolute and complete, of Church and State” was liberating, as it “unfetter[s] the conscience by removing an odious code of restrictions upon its exercise.” Know-Nothing oaths were another such restriction. Converts to the order were admonished, “you ‘know nothing,’ and let it be your stern resolution through life to ‘Know Nothing.’” Hearing this, opponents judged that “no good citizen, who has any respect for himself, after becoming acquainted with its objects and character,” which included blind obedience, “can belong to that Order.” Stephen Douglas poked fun at Know-Nothings’ willful ignorance: “*they did not know* that the obligations and principles of their society were at war with the genius of our whole republican system.”⁸⁴

The untrammelled mind, in contrast, was a mind of mastery, equipping each man to be his own moralist. “The mind habituated to patient and correct thinking—developing thereby its nerve and muscle grappling the realities of life in its given orbit, and gaining the mastery, challenges our admiration,” effused Judge A. A. Coleman of Alabama. He continued: “the ardent restless spirit of our people has but little communion with the abject prostration of intellect which makes men crouch before his fellow submitting his reason and conscience to the *will* of another. All is here congenial to independence of thought. No intellectual Procrustian bed, the adaptation to which requires the mind to be malleable.” The unyoked mind, free to choose the moral code with which to regulate oneself and one’s household, anteceded mastery, while a “malleable” mind made a man ripe for degradation.⁸⁵

⁸⁴“Extract of a Speech of Hon. John B. Weller, of California, in the United States Senate, February 13, 1854,” in *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories. The Democratic Record* (Baltimore: Murphy and Co., [1860]), 18; *Substance of the Speech of Hon. W. K. Sebastian*, 2; *The Ritual of the Order of Know Nothings, with the Initiation Oaths Taken by James Pollock, Now Governor of Pennsylvania* (n.p., n.d.), 3, 6; *Speech of Senator Douglas, at the Democratic Celebration of the Anniversary of American Freedom*, 7. See also, “Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” 77-8, 81.

⁸⁵Coleman, “Address on Change in Boyhood Home,” 15-8. See also, Clay, *The Love of Truth*, 20-6.

Politically and mentally autonomous men exerted a conservative force in society. New York's Horatio Seymour explained the connection between Democratic political philosophy and manhood. The devolution of political power "not only secures good government for each locality, but it also brings home to each individual a sense of his rights and responsibilities; it elevates his character as a man." "The principle of local and distributed jurisdiction," Seymour thrilled, "not only makes good government, but it also makes good manhood." Political agency honed individual masculinity and made white men the antidote to fanaticism and consolidation: "he learns that the performance of his duty as a citizen is the best corrective for the evils of society, and is not led to place a vague, unfounded dependence upon legislative wisdom or inspirations." Another Democratic governor challenged his state's legislators to rely on "individual enterprise" for internal improvements: "let us, as individuals, arouse our slumbering energies, gird on our manhood and strength, and by individual labor and individual contribution, link together the different sections of our State." Democratic individualism disempowered the state, undercut fanaticism, secured the household, and cultivated white manhood.⁸⁶

Democrats both chuckled in condescension and recoiled with horror at the prospect of anyone other than white men engaging in politics. Alabama Democrat Matthew Powers Blue learned of such an occurrence from his brother in New York City: "Miss Lucy Stone, Miss Antoinette Brown, Mrs. Bloomer and all the other notorious Infidels, Abolishonists [*sic*] and Bloomers, held a sort of preparatory meeting at Our Establishment last night, to the 'Grand Woman's Rights convention' to come off at the Tabernacle to-day." None other than "W^m Lloyd Garrison (the old slick headed thief) presided over the meeting." The women's transgression of

⁸⁶*Speech of the Hon. Horatio Seymour*, 2; Burton, "Inaugural Address," 86. See also, *Inaugural Address of Governor John A. Winston*, 5-6, 8.

gender roles troubled Albert Blue. “The husbands of a good many of them sat in the ‘back-ground’ and sanctioned everything that was done and said,” while Blue “thought that those who had children had better be at home attending to them.” Due to her involvement in matters political, Lucy Stone he deemed “very little above a common strumpet.” “To me it was a very disgusting sight,” he concluded, as “they looked like so many fools sitting around the table voting.”⁸⁷

These “disgusting” political sights followed the debasement of white men. Democrats wanted to protect the white male individual, because his personal degradation prefaced the degradation of the white man’s republic. The Jacksonian republic rested on a fragile correlation whereby white male mastery and political legitimacy stemmed from the hard exclusion of all others. For Democrats, female and non-white political agency and male degradation were symptomatic of one another. As Blue noted, women in politics shunted their husbands into the background or, worse yet, confined them to domestic tasks such as caring for children. Keeping women and African Americans enmeshed in the household and out of politics was the precondition for white men’s individual political power and for the racial and gender exclusivity of the white man’s republic.

Politics was a male preserve for Democrats. Speaking at a women’s academy jubilee, Daniel Dickinson bemoaned those “ambitious and clamorous few,” dissatisfied with their socially prescribed roles, who were “preparing their minds and adjusting their costume for making more hasty and enlarged strides in pursuit of their *lost rights*.” Caleb Cushing interrupted remarks in Newburyport, Massachusetts to observe that “some ladies have honored me with their presence here to-night.” He returned the compliment by informing them that

⁸⁷Albert W. Blue to [Matthew P. Blue], New York City, September 6, 1853, Matthew P. Blue Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

“good taste forbids me to address them specially” and marveling that “dry” legal topics interested them. Democrats rhetorically forced women out of the political sphere, and they could do so with derision. A congressional veteran offered advice to a new senator—he should not be disappointed if “the lobbies may not be crowd[ed] with ladies” when he spoke. Women only visited if the heavyweights Webster and Calhoun performed, and then they attended Congress purely as a social occasion. Some women agreed that their gender precluded politics. Charlotte Nantz confided to Congressman William H. English that “I am happy that the heavy responsibility of legislation rests not on shoulders so weak as womans.”⁸⁸

Fanatics, meanwhile, seemed to welcome women into politics. “What tender women!” exclaimed a Democratic newspaper, after reporting that “women were present and took part” at an “abolition, anti-Nebraska meeting at Boston” led by Garrison. Although cultural conventions such as the cult of domesticity limited the formal political agency of women across the partisan spectrum, the Democratic party was the most vociferously opposed to their participation, a reflection of its male supremacist identity. For Democrats, politically involved women could only be fanatics beyond the pale of political legitimacy. The daughter of abolitionist Gerrit Smith, for instance, shared her father’s radicalism, as evidenced by her “full Bloomer costume.” The Whig and Republican parties, historians have shown, were more receptive to female participation, and evangelical and antislavery reformism depended upon women’s mobilization, which occasionally approximated political equality. Democrats were reacting to changed

⁸⁸“Remarks at the Oxford Academy Jubilee. Held at Oxford, Chenango County, N. Y., August 1st and 2^d, 1854,” in *Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson*, 1:475; Cushing, *Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall*, 31; James B. Hunt to Alpheus Felch, Pontiac, January 24, 1848, Felch Papers; Charlotte Nantz to William H. English, Corydon, June 21, 1854, William Hayden English Family Papers, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis.

circumstances—the gradual acceptance of women’s political agency by the fanatical opposition.⁸⁹

Antislavery petitions generated by women particularly perturbed Democrats, fusing as they did feminine political agency and abolitionist agitation. William Lowndes Yancey fumed that “our representatives were daily and constantly insulted by the most insulting petitions from women, and children, and preachers and men, to take from us our clearly defined constitutional rights.” Petitions were a surreptitious means to infiltrate politics, and northern Democrats were expected to resist antislavery appeals “from men, women and children, [which] poured into Congress, session after session.” An Indianan writing to Congressman John Givan Davis apologized, “I do not wish you to think me a womans rights woman.” A Virginian submitting a petition on behalf of a widow who lost her husband in John Brown’s raid similarly wanted to avoid association with fanatical women. Addressing Governor Wise, she reassured him that she did “not covet the reputation of the *strong minded* women of the North.” Wise handed the remonstrance off to his wife.⁹⁰

⁸⁹*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 7, Feb. 18, 1854; Jean Harvey Baker, “Public Women and Partisan Politics, 1840-1860,” in *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-nineteenth-century American Political History*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel A. Sheldon (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 64-81; Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *The American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (June 1984): 620-35; Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery*, 12-38; Michael McGerr, “Political Style and Women’s Power, 1830-1930,” *The Journal of American History* 77, no. 3 (Dec. 1990): 864-9; John M. Sacher, “‘The Ladies Are Moving Everywhere’: Louisiana Women and Antebellum Politics,” *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 42, no. 4 (Autumn 2001): 439-57; Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood.” On women in the antislavery movement and in the Whig, Republican, and Constitutional Union parties, see Millard Fillmore to Wilhelmine Smith, Buffalo, October 17, 1860; William Russell Smith to Wilhelmine Smith, January 12, [1861], both in the Easby-Smith Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*; and Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, especially 71-102. Varon finds that the parties did eventually converge on the need to politically mobilize women. On women and the Democratic party, see Susan Graham, “‘A Warm Politition and Devotedly Attached to the Democratic Party’: Catharine Read Williams, Politics, and Literature in Antebellum America,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 30, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 253-78.

⁹⁰*Speech of the Hon. William L. Yancey, of Alabama, Delivered in the National Democratic Convention, Charleston, April 28th, 1860. With the Protest of the Alabama Delegation* (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Co., Print., [1860]), 4-5; James Buchanan quoted in R. G. Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan. Late Minister to England and Formerly Minister to Russia, Senator and Representative in Congress, and Secretary of State:*

Democrats similarly reserved the republic for white men by making clear that African Americans did not belong in formal political spaces. James Buchanan, serving as minister to the Court of St James's, described the opening of Parliament to his niece, recounting that "what struck me most forcibly was the appearance in the Diplomatic Box of a full blooded black negro as the Representative of his Imperial Majesty of Hayti." Fanatics received blame for opening the political sphere to African Americans. A Democrat in Illinois complained about the "rank abolitionist" who ran the local post office—the man "called an indignation meeting in November last because I would not let a negro have the use of the school house to give a lecture against the motives of the democratic party and abuse its *leading men*." A correspondent of Stephen Douglas, after visiting Brazil, commented in 1848 on the novelty of there being "no distinction, political nor social, between the black and the white" and predicted that the country would become "the abode of a mongrel race." He further related to Douglas that "I have seen in the Imperial Senate [?] woolly headed Senator, and a fair Portuguese maiden," implying both debased politics and illicit sexuality.⁹¹

Democrats repeatedly employed Frederick Douglass as a metaphor for black men's political and sexual infiltration of the white body politic. Debating Abraham Lincoln in 1858, Stephen Douglas claimed that the last time he spoke in Freeport, Illinois he had glimpsed a carriage driven by a white man, with Frederick Douglass sitting inside with the man's wife. Douglas chastised "Black Republicans" for believing "that the negro ought to be on a social

Including the Most Important of His State Papers (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856), 378; Mrs. M. E. Small to John G. Davis, Perryville, IN, February 21, 1860, Davis Papers, Madison; Portia L. Baldwin to Henry A. Wise, Winchester, December 17, 1859, Wise Family Papers, 1777-1973, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. See also, Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*, 47-62; and Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁹¹James Buchanan to Harriet Lane, London, February 1, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan*, 10:29; T. C. Wetmore to Stephen A. Douglas, DeKalb, February 27, 1856; Levi D. [illegible] to Stephen A. Douglas, *U. S. Steamer Alleghany*, at sea, Lat: 19° S Lon: 30° W, November 1, 1848, both in the Douglas Papers.

equality with your wives and daughters, and ride in a carriage with your wife, whilst you drive the team.” The white fanatic who had invited Douglass to the rally welcomed his own degradation, his household mastery usurped by a black man now sexually proximal to his wife. Stephen placed Frederick’s carriage “on the outside of the crowd,” consigning him to political liminality. Degraded fanatics, however, would invite Douglass and other African Americans to move from the margins into the political sphere proper.⁹²

The racial amalgamation portended by Frederick Douglass’s political incursion exemplified the adulteration of the republic’s racial and gender purity that would ensue with the political mixing of men and women, African Americans and whites. Democrats screamed about “wanton orgies of fanaticism” and intimated sexual impropriety when they fussed over the composition of fanatical meetings, which made no “distinction of sex, color, sect, or party.” Horace Greeley was charged with having “assisted at public meetings of blacks and whites in the city of New York, where both God and the Constitution have been reviled” and with supporting “woman’s rights” and “free love.” Political cartoons portrayed the 1856 and 1860 Republican presidential candidates pandering to their diverse fanatical constituencies (see figs. 2 and 3). Along with fanatics crying for “an equal division of Property” and racial equality, a white woman is depicted inviting John C. Frémont to “our Free Love association, where the shackles of marriage are not tolerated & perfect freedom exist [*sic*] in love matters.” Playing on the candidate’s name, she tempts, “you will, be sure to Enjoy yourself for we are all Freemounters.” This scandalous woman is standing near a black man, a fellow fanatic, who is demanding black racial supremacy. Inclusive politics, Democrats cried, meant interracial sex. Placing black and

⁹²“Mr. Douglas’s Reply, Second Joint Debate, Freeport, August 27, 1858,” in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, 92-3.

white political actors together led to amalgamation, an erosion of the strict equivalency of whiteness and mastery in the white man's republic.⁹³

Non-white political actors disconcerted Democrats because they had learned to approach the equation of mastery and degradation in zero-sum terms. Democrats determined to preserve the *Herrenvolk* democracy bequeathed to them by Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson. Echoing the sentiments which inspired an earlier generation of Democrats to pursue Indian Removal, an Arkansas Democrat in 1855 wondered, "what millions of civilized people will it require to fill the void which their extermination must make," referring to what he assumed to be the inevitable disappearance of western Indians. His solution was for European immigrants to settle the West, thereby giving the foreign-born a stake in *Herrenvolk* democracy. The tradeoff between the rights of Native Americans and of naturalized ones was absolute.⁹⁴

Democrats were consequently unable to conceptualize a middle ground between white men's political monopoly and their utter degradation. Any challenge to slavery and white supremacy marked one as a fanatical proponent of racial equality, of "negro-fanaticism," "woollyism," "negrophilism," and, consequently, of white degradation. The "Black Republican party" bore a fitting name, "because, while it is devoted to the elevation of the negroes, it ignores, disregards, and contemns the rights of white men." According to a Catholic immigrant in the Democratic party, the "Abolition Know-nothing party" favored "enslaving and disfranchising the *Irishman*, the *Dutchman*, and all persons born in foreign countries, and freeing the *negro* and enfranchising him." Abolishing black slavery meant "*white slavery*."⁹⁵

⁹³*Proceedings of the Celebration of the Fourth of July, 1856*, 13; *Infidelity and Abolitionism*, 3, 5.

⁹⁴*Substance of the Speech of Hon. W. K. Sebastian*, 9.

⁹⁵*Address of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown*, 7; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 28, 1854; Cushing, *Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall*, 44; *Address of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman*, 10; *Letter of an Adopted Catholic*, 6.

The republic rested on the shoulders of white men. Secure as a master of himself and his household, the individual's maintenance of gender and racial hierarchies at home cauterized the boundaries of the body politic. Equal white men had to tolerate each other's moral choices in order to be tolerated. When a white man trespassed against another, an opening was created for their dependents to seize political power. Henry Wise suggested to northerners that "we let each other's property and peace and political privileges alone, and attend to the conservation of our own interests respectively at home." Deriving political legitimacy from their household dominance, white men entered public life on a common footing. "When we happen to meet in the common Territories, to make new homes and neighborhoods there," Wise propounded, "we propose to go together to the polls as equals, justly respecting each other's rights." Individuals produced not only political autonomy in their households, but also political equality, making American democracy an egalitarian fraternity of masters.⁹⁶

Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter laughed that Federalists had once believed that Jeffersonian individualism would usher in "the destruction of the necessary establishments of the Government, an era of radicalism, a sort of wild, Democratic saturnalia." The republic did not descend to this nadir under Jefferson, nor had it under Jackson. Nor would it under Pierce and Buchanan, because in the 1850s the Democracy leavened its progressivism with conservatism. A Tennessean designated the Democracy "the party of conservatism," and praised it for "advocating a wise progress in the science of free government" and for "conserving the great principles which lie at the foundation of our system." The party was simultaneously progressive and conservative, because the individual at the heart of Democratic ideology was the agent of

⁹⁶Wise, *The Lecompton Question*, 2-3.

both progress and preservation. Autonomous white men policing racial and gender borders at home provided a stable foundation for the orderly advancement of a white man's republic. The double burden borne by the individual was an innovation in American political thought.⁹⁷

The Democracy began its career as a self-proclaimed progressive advocate of white male democracy. Alarmed by the precariousness of the racial equilibrium in the 1850s, Democrats retreated from the goal of expanding democracy to that of conserving it exclusively for white men. Democrats viewed "the Slavery agitation" as a distraction from white men's political progress at home and abroad. William M. Corry, a staunch proponent of aiding European revolutionaries, took pride in being more concerned with politics in "Europe where the white man's case was up for hearing & judgment" than with the "negro question" which consumed even fellow Democrats. Another northern Democrat admitted that, all else equal, improving the situation of African Americans was desirable. But Democrats had to consider existing social conditions. "We should always remember," he pleaded, "that ours is not an African, or mixed civilization, but that of the white man—the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon in America." Democrats craved progress, which they defined as the expansion of democratic equality and individual rights. They were, however, unable to conceptualize limitless extension.⁹⁸

Spreading rights broadcast would attenuate those already won, potentially reviving the gradation of rights to which white men had submitted themselves before Jackson sanctified their inherent equality. This concern vitiated the "humanity, morality and religion" that would otherwise have been visited upon African Americans. "Conservative men of the Union" were

⁹⁷*Address of R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia, before the Democratic Association of Richmond, 5-6; Letter of Hon. G. W. Jones, of Tennessee, to His Constituents* (n.p., [1856]), 2.

⁹⁸William M. Corry to Joseph Holt, Cincinnati, March 1, 1852; quotation from William M. Corry to [Joseph Holt], Cincinnati, September 2, 1856, both in the Joseph Holt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Drake, *An Address, on the Doctrine and Discipline of the Democratic Party*, 6-8.

advised to look to “*Red republicans*” in France, “who sought the impracticable in government, and lost all they had of freedom by demanding universal equality and individual personal sovereignty.” Fanatical abolitionists in the United States were a homegrown corollary of fanatical socialists in Europe—both attacked private property, which in America included “property in man,” and both pushed abstract equality too far. White men in America already enjoyed equality and sovereignty, but these political rights were endangered by “the black republicans of our day,” who would “deprive all white men of national ‘liberty regulated by law,’ if they cannot bring about their radical theory of universal individual equality which is to elevate the slave to fraternity with his master.”⁹⁹

In the 1850s Democrats turned liberal individualism, often considered a revolutionary force in the modern era, into a conservative pillar of the status quo. To repel the fanaticism besetting the republic, Democrats did not elect to curtail the individual they had previously unloosed or the democratic process through which he acted. European and American conservatives had long distrusted democracy and individualism; Democrats remained loyal to both. Democrats also diverged from traditional conservatives in not reifying a powerful state or mythologizing a primordial, essentializing nationalism to overawe the people. They instead took the unprecedented step of making individual rights, democratic self-governance, and the minimalist state the props of social order. In one respect, Democrats in the 1850s simply perpetuated their ancient faith. “Democracy is based upon eternal principles, and is limited to no season, age, or nation,” rhapsodized a campaign pamphlet, continuing, “it is the conservator of

⁹⁹Drake, *An Address, on the Doctrine and Discipline of the Democratic Party*, 6-8; Hallett et al., *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men*, 5; Hunter, *The Democratic Demonstration at Poughkeepsie*, 6-10, quotation on 7.

humanity, in its progressive steps, in its pauses, every where, and its risings and settings are only apparent, like those of the ever-shining sun.”¹⁰⁰

Democrats did not have to be original; rather, they found conservatism preexisting within the traditions from which they drew. It required only a change of emphasis to bend their ideas to conservative ends. Democrats took the abstract individual of liberal social contract theory and made him a tangible, raced and gendered entity. Yet the liberal individual had never been a neutral construct; he had always been a raced and gendered being, a fact compromising equality in any political system based on liberal consent theory.¹⁰¹ The social contract, which permitted political society to emerge out of the state of nature and sanctioned a government that defined the rights of all citizens, was a revolutionary notion in the seventeenth century. Yet for all its radical potential, it was still a means for maintaining social order. Theorists such as Hobbes and Locke resorted to contract, not to obliterate society into atomized individuals, but to create a consensual regime that stanching social unrest and restrained religious fanaticism. Democrats in the 1850s also feared that fanaticism would make life in their republic “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short,” and they intensified their commitment to the limited state and liberal individualism to neuter fanatical reform, protect slavery and white supremacy, and solidify a social order in which political legitimacy rested solely with white men.¹⁰² In the process, they turned “liberalism” into

¹⁰⁰*Plain Facts and Considerations*, 26.

¹⁰¹Ruth H. Bloch, “The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” *Signs* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1987): 37-58; Laura F. Edwards, “The Contradictions of Democracy in American Institutions and Practices,” in *Re-imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland, 1750-1850*, ed. Joanna Innes and Mark Philp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 40-56; Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Dis-Covering the Subject of the ‘Great Constitutional Discussion,’ 1786-1789,” *The Journal of American History* 79, no. 3 (Dec. 1992): 841-73.

¹⁰²Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (1651; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 76; Don Herzog, *Happy Slaves: A Critique of Consent Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989).

a “conservative” philosophy, yielding a synthesis that continues to characterize American conservatism.

CHAPTER 3: RESISTING REALIGNMENT:
DEMOCRATS RESPOND TO PARTISAN AND RACIAL DISORDER, 1854-1855

We have it here that the Nebraska Bill has passed the House. I hope so, with all my heart, and that all the good may come from it that its friends desire. [...] The passage of the Bill will satisfy the people, and a calm will follow.

—Correspondent to Attorney General Caleb Cushing, 1854

We have fallen upon times that try men's common sense, if not their souls. Old parties have been breaking up, new parties are being formed.

—Democracy of Boston and Suffolk, Massachusetts, 1855¹

As they gazed across the political landscape in the middle of the decade, Democrats resembled naturalists surveying an unfamiliar environment. Political taxonomists catalogued a bewildering array of evolving partisan hybrids. Party leaders received reports of “States Rights Nebraska Whig[s],” “Free Soilish Whigs,” “Democratic Know Nothing[s],” and “union Democrat[s].” “Temperance Democrats,” “regular Abolition Whig[s],” “*pseudo* democrats,” “*abolition know-nothings*,” and “whig quasi abolitionism” roamed the nation’s hinterlands. A man with memories of the early republic recollected that, in his day, there were “none of your hard-shells soft shells, Old Hunkers & Barn burners.” These mutations were products of divisive issues that beset the two-party system, confused party distinctions, and intensified the partisan realignment in 1854 and 1855. This political ferment both frustrated and catalyzed Democrats’ efforts to articulate a national, conservative ideology in the 1850s.²

¹Henry J. Wilde to Caleb Cushing, Boston, March 4, 1853[1854], Caleb Cushing Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; B. F. Hallett, James Cheever, Silas Peirce, Stephen D. Massey, and Benjamin J. Gerrish (Committee), *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men against Northern Fusion and Sectionalism. From the Democracy of Boston and Suffolk. Adopted by the Ward and County Committees, in Convention, October, 1855* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, [1855]), 3.

²Thomas C. Reynolds to Caleb Cushing, St. Louis, MO, June 21, 1854, Cushing Papers; “Names of active Pierce democrats who joined the Know Nothing Order,” [1854], Edmund Burke Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of

Even before the furor over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Democrats were preoccupied with splinting themselves together after the exit of Free Soilers in 1848 and the opposition of southern states' rights Democrats to the Compromise of 1850. President Pierce only exacerbated the fractures after he inherited the party in its "disorganized state" upon his 1853 inauguration. His conciliatory patronage policy, intended "to reconcile, by a division of office, the different so-called segments of the Democratic party," united Democrats only in shared anger. Dispensing patronage to Free-Soil Democrats miffed the party's "Hards," who had remained steadfast in 1848 and later championed the Compromise of 1850. Bitterness also resulted when he rewarded states' rights southerners who had opposed the Compromise. One senator marveled at the level of alienation the Pierce administration had achieved—"it is very remarkable that it has neither northern, southern, or western support." "The disorganization of both parties here is complete," he fumed, and "the administration is divided & held in general contempt."³

The Kansas-Nebraska Act, introduced in January and passed in May 1854, only upended politics further. Senator Stephen A. Douglas and the president made the bill a test of party loyalty, one which many Democrats failed. Disagreements over the measure interacted with

Congress, Washington, D. C.; Lewis Cass to Samuel Beardsley, Washington, December 13, 1853, Lewis Cass Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; S. T. Ensey to Joseph A. Wright, Annapolis, February 24, 1854, Joseph A. Wright Correspondence and Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; W. H. Collum to William H. English, Jeffersonville, July 24, 1854, William Hayden English Family Papers, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; John Abbott to [Caleb Cushing], Lewiston Falls, ME, February 24, 1854, Cushing Papers; Hallett et al., *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men*, 3; *The Territorial Slavery Question. Non-Intervention Principle. Position of the National Democracy* (n.p., [1854?]), 12; Grant Thorburn to Horatio King, Winsted, CT, March 6, 1855, Horatio King Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³Lewis Cass to Franklin Pierce, Detroit, August 30, 1853, Cass Papers; *Speech of Hon. John Perkins, Jr., of Louisiana, on the Results of Two Years' Democratic Rule in the Country* (n.p., [1855]), 26; Robert Toombs to Crawford, Washington, D. C., April 26, 1854, Robert Toombs Correspondence, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; Michael F. Holt, *Franklin Pierce* (New York: Times Books, 2010), 66-71. For anger over Pierce's free-soil appointments, see Edmund Burke to Stephen A. Douglas, Newport, NH, January 9, 1854; and Horatio Seymour Jr. to Stephen A. Douglas, Buffalo, April 14, 1854, both in the Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Illinois.

preexisting cleavages. Democratic Hards, for instance, embraced the measure to “test the sincerity of the late Free Soil Democrats whom Gen. Pierce has taken to his bosom” and to impugn the partisanship of the “Softs,” those regular Democrats more receptive to reintegrating erstwhile Free Soilers. Benjamin F. Hallett, a Massachusetts Hard, viewed the bill as a solution to the “hypocrisy [*sic*] of pretending to be democrats and acting out free soilism.” He implored, “make this *the* test I say.” Secretary of State William L. Marcy, a leader of the New York Softshells, received panicked updates from back home, where Democrats were “in a fog” about “what this Nebraska business means.” New York’s Hardshells, led by Daniel Dickinson, were moving against the Softs and Free-Soil Democrats by forcing partisans to acquiesce in the Kansas-Nebraska Act and its invalidation of the Missouri Compromise. Attorney General Caleb Cushing, meanwhile, monitored the Democracy’s travails in Missouri, where the old Jacksonian Thomas Hart Benton opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in his anti-Slave Power insurgency against the “true Democracy of Missouri.” “Bentonism” was added to the already formidable inventory of *isms*.⁴

⁴Quotation from Edmund Burke to Stephen A. Douglas, Newport, NH, January 9, 1854; quotation from B. F. Hallett to Stephen A. Douglas, Boston, March 10, 1854, both in the Douglas Papers; L. B. Shepard to William L. Marcy, New York, January 18, 1854; quotation from G. W. Newell to William L. Marcy, Albany, January 25, 1854; J. P. Jones to William L. Marcy, Monticello, February 7, 1854; Isaac Butts to Abel French, Rochester, February 8, 1854; John Van Buren to William L. Marcy, New York, February 12, 1854; Horatio Seymour to William L. Marcy, Albany, February 21, 1854, all in the William L. Marcy Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; William S. Allen to Caleb Cushing, St. Louis, quotation from February 3, 20, March 25, 1854; N. Ranney to Caleb Cushing, St. Louis, February 10, 1854; quotation from Samuel Treat to Caleb Cushing, St. Louis, March 25, 1854, Thomas C. Reynolds to Caleb Cushing, St. Louis, MO, June 21, 1854, all in the Cushing Papers. See also, Daniel S. Dickinson to Edmund Burke, Binghamton, March 23, 1854, Burke Papers; and *Review of the Administration of General Pierce. Anti-Nebraska, Anti-Administration and Anti-Rum Platform: Speech of Hon. James E. Cooley, at a Meeting of the Democracy, Assembled on Saturday, Nov. 4th, 1854, at the Village of Patchogue, in Suffolk CO, L. I.* (New York: John F. Trow, Printer, 1854). For the Kansas-Nebraska Act as stemming from southern states’ rights Democrats’ desire to enforce orthodoxy upon Free Soilers, see Roy F. Nichols, “The Kansas-Nebraska Act: A Century of Historiography,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 43, no. 2 (Sept. 1956): 197-212; as stemming from northern Hardshell Hunkers’ efforts to proscribe Free Soilers, see Michael F. Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 97-104.

Many antislavery Democrats bolted to the anti-Nebraska coalitions sprouting throughout the Free States. These parties were not alone in gulling Democrats. A Michigander reported that “a new party, the Know Nothings, has sprung into existence and appears to carry every thing before it.” The addition of nativism and anti-Catholicism to the acrimony over slavery’s extension “produces a queer state of things.” Temperance also assumed new prominence as advocates mounted political campaigns in the Free States. Southerners looked askance at this political burgeoning in the North. A Georgian predicted that the “Whigs, Anti Nebraska Democrats, Free Soilers & Abolitionists, will unite, and endeavour to crush out what remains of democracy in the Free States.” It was not long, however, before the realignment wracked the southern Democracy. A Missourian ascertained that “the new element introduced into our politics, the ‘Know Nothings,’ disturbs all calculations,” while an opponent of the Democracy in the Deep South told his Democratic nephew that he detected a “strong Native American sentiment prevailing” and noticed that “it is not confined to Whigs or Democrats.”⁵

Although the composition of their opposition varied by section and even by state, Democrats formulated a consistent ideological response by addressing fanaticism, which they isolated as the common denominator of antislavery, temperance, and nativism. Democrats proved that they remained a national party by deploying similar rhetoric throughout the country, regardless of local partisan configurations. The realignment’s causes and the inevitability of its outcome—a new two-party system pitting Democrats against Republicans—continue to provoke debate. Historians who emphasize ideological contestation on the eve of the Civil War usually

⁵Robert McClelland to Alpheus Felch, Washington, July 5, 1854, Alpheus Felch Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; William Barton Wade Dent to Herschel V. Johnson, House of Representatives, June 13, 1854, Herschel V. Johnson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; Thomas C. Reynolds to Caleb Cushing, St. Louis, MO, July 22, 1854, Cushing Papers; A. M. Sanford to John W. A. Sanford, Glennville, December 19, 1854, John W. A. Sanford Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

argue for the ease of the Republican ascendancy over the Know-Nothings, as slavery was the overriding ideological concern driving politics.⁶ Those historians who examine ethnic and religious determinants of partisanship instead conclude that antislavery sentiment was not foreordained to eclipse nativism and temperance as the basis for opposition to the Democracy.⁷ Most Democrats in the 1850s did regard antislavery fanaticism as ringleader of the *isms*, agreeing with Virginian R. M. T. Hunter that slavery was the “question which more than any other disturbs the harmony of the Union.”⁸ In the midst of its dislocations, however, Democrats could not anticipate the realignment’s outcome and had to take both antislavery and nativist opposition seriously. They did so by blending them into a fanatical ideological impulse against which they counterpoised their conservatism.

Attorney General Cushing, speaking for the Pierce administration, cracked the whip of regularity from Washington by forbidding fusion between “democrats and freesoilers” back home in Massachusetts. “Backslidings” and “defections,” Cushing warned, “may prejudice or embarrass the onward progress of the republic.” Yet all too often, the “party harness did not fit very tightly, and was readily abandoned,” one Democrat judged. The orthodox recoiled when

⁶Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 24-54; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (1970; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), especially 226-60; Bruce Levine, *Half Slave and Half Free: The Roots of Civil War*, 1992, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), especially 200-4; Bruce Levine, “‘The Vital Element of the Republican Party’: Antislavery, Nativism, and Abraham Lincoln,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 4 (Dec. 2011): 481-505; Michael J. McManus, *Political Abolitionism in Wisconsin, 1840-1861* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1998), especially 99-114; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), especially 130-44, 153-6.

⁷William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), especially 99-102, 439-48; Michael F. Holt, “Another Look at the Election of 1856,” in *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s*, ed. Michael J. Birkner (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1996), 37-67; Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (1978; repr., New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983), especially 155-81; Joel H. Silbey, “‘The Undisguised Connection’: Know Nothings into Republicans: New York as a Test Case,” in *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 127-65.

⁸*Address of R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia, before the Democratic Association of Richmond, October 1, 1852* (Washington, D. C.: Congressional Globe Office, 1853), 10.

“recreant Democrats” entered “Fusion” movements with fanatics, because realignment opened the political sphere to African Americans. Democrats compared partisan irregularity to racial mixture, with the buckling of traditional parties presaging the breaching of the republic’s racial and gender cordons. Fanatics’ political ideology degraded white men by circumscribing their self-determination and, correspondingly, politically bolstered African Americans. Fusion with new fanatical coalitions was thus another means by which white men degraded themselves and their race. Democrats analogized political fusion to racial amalgamation, as both led to racial turbidity in the white man’s republic.⁹

Partisan boundaries *were* racial boundaries, and Democrats hoped to make inviolable the latter by policing the former. Democrats unloosed metaphors of interracial sex to forestall partisan “amalgamation.” Observing the first phase of the realignment in 1848, a Virginian proudly concluded that it was Whigs, not Democrats, who were more likely to join the “Amalgamation Abolitionists.” Democrats manifested revulsion when less loyal partisans fused with fanatics, such as when one renegade “threw himself into the arms of Black Republicanism” or when another consorted with a “secret conclave” of Know-Nothings, “with its heterogeneous materials.” Joining a “Hivmaphrodite [*sic*] party” such as the Know-Nothings was no better than “an act of prostitution and treason.” Democrats worried that the realignment’s “strange amalgamation & general confusion” would not confine itself to the parties, but would spread to society’s racial and gender hierarchies as well.¹⁰

⁹“Gen. Cushing’s Letter,” Caleb Cushing to R. Frothingham Jr., Washington, October 29, 1853, (*Annapolis City State Capitol Gazette*, November 19, 1853, clipping enclosed in O. H. Browne to Caleb Cushing, Millersville, Anne Arundel, Co., MD, February 2, 1854, Cushing Papers; Robert McClelland to Alpheus Felch, Washington, February 19, 1855, Felch Papers; Samuel S. Cox to [Stephen A. Douglas], Columbus, March 24, 1854, Douglas Papers. This was Cushing’s famous “ukase.” See John M. Belohlavek, *Broken Glass: Caleb Cushing and the Shattering of the Union* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2005), 248-51.

¹⁰John Y. Mason to Lewis Cass, Washington, September 25, 1848, Cass Papers; “Names of active Pierce democrats who joined the Know Nothing Order,” Burke Papers; *Letter from Daniel Chandler, Esq. on the Principles of the*

Democrats, in the Free States and in the Slave States, turned to the politics of slavery and race to argue that only their party would preserve the mastery, liberty, and democratic equality of individual white men, as well as the racial exclusivity of their republic. In Indiana's state elections in 1854, Democrats faced an anti-Nebraska movement, Know-Nothings, a temperance effort, and a politically assertive clergy. Virginia Democrats faced the Know-Nothings in their 1855 gubernatorial canvass. In both elections, Democrats relied on similar arguments, because they were defending the rights of white men against a nationwide conspiracy of fanatics endeavoring to undermine democracy and white supremacy. Although reacting to unique partisan alignments in each state, Indiana and Virginia Democrats imagined a common fanatical enemy and assembled a national ideology in response.

"A Conglomeration of Antagonisms" in Indiana

Indiana Democrats were unsure what form their opposition would take in 1854. The Kansas-Nebraska Act upset state politics, while temperance and nativism also obliterated partisan delineations. What the state's leading Democratic newspaper observed of temperance was true of nativism and antislavery as well—the topic did “not accommodate itself to existing party organizations.” All three movements had the potential to entice Democrats away from their party. Democrats tapped into and updated their inherited beliefs to respond to these new foes and preserve their party identity. By treating their diverse opponents as variations on the same fanatical theme, they turned the election into an ideological confrontation between the

Know Nothing Party (n.p., [1855]), 3; Lewis E. Harvie to R. M. T. Hunter, March 17, 1855, in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter, 1826-1876,” ed. Charles Henry Ambler, vol. 2 of *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1916* (Washington, 1918), 162-3; J. O. Barnes to [Caleb Cushing], Boston, November 4, 1854, Cushing Papers.

conservative guarantors of self-government and the fanatics who would disempower white men, empower the state, and invite African Americans into politics.¹¹

Multiple fanatical impulses vied to poach Democrats from their party. The opposition planned to wage a “guerilla [sic] fight—adapting their issues to the particular locality—and its whims and isms.” Temperance was the first *ism* to emerge, even before the Kansas-Nebraska Act roiled the nation. “The issue next election,” one Democrat assumed, “will be the Maine Law.” In late 1853 temperance forces organized. They held a state convention in Indianapolis in January where they called for legislation, resembling Maine’s 1853 statute, “prohibiting the manufacture and sale, as a beverage, of intoxicating drinks.” Although Democrats assumed that “we are likely to have some confusion in our Party in consequence of the agitation of the temperance question,” it was not clear how it would impact political alignments. Temperance was variously deemed the campaign’s defining issue, a purely local affair, or a disingenuous “whig trap to catch Democrats,” an attempt to “resuscitate [sic] the almost expiring Whig party.”¹²

Temperance donned more sinister vestments when the state’s Methodist clergy mobilized behind it. “The Methodist church [...] especially the clergy have embarked,” announced one

¹¹(*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 11, 1854. For an overview of the canvass, see Roger H. Van Bolt, “Fusion Out of Confusion, 1854,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 49, no. 4 (Dec. 1953): 353-90. On antebellum Indiana politics, see Kenneth M. Stampp, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1949), 1-30.

¹²Quotations from Scott Noel to John G. Davis, Rockville, March 8, 1854; [Illegible] to John G. Davis, New Port, IN, February 4, 1854; A. L. Roache to John G. Davis, Indianapolis, February 13, 1854, all in the John G. Davis Papers (microfilm edition), Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; L. G. Matthews to William H. English, New Albany, IN, December 26, 1853; B. P. Douglass to William H. English, Corydon, IN, April 4, 1854, both in the English Family Papers; and “Resolutions Adopted by the State Temperance Convention,” *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 16, 1854. See also, Scott Noel to John G. Davis, Rockville, January 11, 1854; H. B. Pickett to John G. Davis, Groveland, Putnam Co., IN, May 31, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; E. D. Logan to William H. English, Kossuth, IN, February 8, 1854, English Family Papers; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 11, 14, 25, Feb. 2, May 9, 1854; and Van Bolt, “Fusion Out of Confusion,” 354-7.

Democrat. The Church's politicization allowed Democrats to indulge instinctive anti-clericalism. Opposition to legislated temperance dovetailed nicely with the revulsion Democrats felt when a cleric "enters into political contests" and "wield[s] his Maker's name for his own purposes and designs." Temperance was a manifestation of the timeless "struggle for the people against the encroachments of the clergy on their rights." In this context, Democrats praised a pamphlet reprinting Stephen Douglas's chastisement of clerics opposed to the Kansas-Nebraska Act and one suggested circulating "a few *Bushels* of those to great advantage."¹³

A shadowy informant, anxious over reprisal should his correspondence come to light, betrayed inside knowledge to Indiana congressman John G. Davis about the "*mysterious under current*, that is said to have dispersed itself throughout this state." "It is found in every *township* in this congressional district," and, he continued, "if you *knew* its strenght [*sic*] it would *astonish* you, & if you knew the number of *Democrats* connected with it, it would *startle* you." Davis was told to "beware of invoking to your aid *Irish votes*." The Know-Nothings had made their sudden and melodramatic appearance, further muddying Indiana politics and, as in the rest of the nation, catching Democrats unaware.¹⁴

Along with slavery and sectionalism, these polarizing cultural disputes came to the forefront during the realignment. The Know-Nothings' native-born and Protestant chauvinism prompted many Democrats to ideologically manacle them to temperance reformers and the

¹³Quotations from David McClure to William H. English, New Frankfurt, May 1, 1854, English Family Papers; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 6, 1854; and William P. Bryant to John G. Davis, Rockville, July 19, 1854, Davis Papers, Indianapolis. See also, B. H. Cornwell to John G. Davis, Terre Haute, April 26, 1854; [Illegible] to John G. Davis, New Port, IN, February 4, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; S. T. Plate to William H. English, Cannelton, October 20, 1854, English Family Papers; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 16, June 30; July 1, 3, 29, Aug. 10, 1854; *Letter of Senator Douglas, Vindicating His Character and His Position on the Nebraska Bill against the Assaults Contained in the Proceedings of a Public Meeting Composed of Twenty-Five Clergymen of Chicago* (Washington, D. C.: The Sentinel Office, 1854); and Van Bolt, "Fusion Out of Confusion," 365-7, 384-5.

¹⁴Knownothing (Union Democrat) to John G. Davis, Greencastle, IN, August 21, 1854; quotation from D. to John G. Davis, Putnam Co., August 24, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 23, 24, June 29, July 22, Aug. 16, 23, 29, 1854. Van Bolt, "Fusion Out of Confusion," 359-60, 378-9.

politicized clergy. These topics shared a newfound salience with the demise of the Whig party. During the second party system, ethnocultural and moral concerns had been auxiliaries to positions on political economy as determinants of party loyalty. That Democrats now feared these issues would divide their party revealed that they did not conform to established party lines. Nativism, like temperance, could cut across parties, attracting Democrats receptive to one or more of the “one ‘Idea’” reforms. Democrats at the local, state, and national levels had to integrate these issues into their political worldview to keep their party intact.¹⁵

To this “conglomeration of antagonisms,” Stephen Douglas added a combustible federal question. Many Indiana Democrats, like their compatriots in other free states, were leery of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Indianans generally favored a homestead bill to spur westward expansion, and Hoosier Democrats did not relish backing a measure that would force white settlers to compete with slavery. Democratic congressman John G. Davis and William H. English, running for reelection, received conflicting reports of the bill’s popularity back home. In Davis’s seventh congressional district, for instance, Absalom Sappenfield confirmed that “Democrats in his neighborhood are for the bill,” while Peter Swain “says he is opposed to the bill and all his neighbours.” One supporter cautioned English against voting for the bill, as midwesterners would not tolerate an “additional foot of Slave Territory to come into the Union.” Davis, on the other hand, heard that the bill enjoyed enough popularity to “make it, in a short

¹⁵[Illegible] to John G. Davis, New Port, IN, February 4, 1854, Davis Papers, Indianapolis. It was the prominence of these issues and the form they took, not the questions themselves, that were new. Democrats had contended with temperance and nativism before. The state Democratic paper explained that “the Know-Nothings are neither more nor less than the remnants of the defunct Native American party. Those who did not know enough in years past to let well enough alone, but *agitated* themselves into a political grave, out of which they are now resurrected, alas no wiser than before.” *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, quotation from May 24, July 19, 1854. Nicole Etcheson finds that temperance divided midwesterners along sectional lines, with those having southern roots opposed to the reform. Nativism, in contrast, conformed to partisan lines, with Democrats more receptive to the foreign-born. Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest: Upland Southerners and the Political Culture of the Old Northwest, 1787-1861* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 84-90, 102-7.

time, a party test.” Such contrary assessments indicate that Indiana Democrats were far from unanimous.¹⁶

Ruminating Democrats also had to consider the practical ramifications of party factionalism. National divisions spilled into the state, with Governor Joseph A. Wright aligned with the president and Senator Jesse Bright, disgruntled over Pierce’s patronage disbursement, leading the state’s Hards. Davis worked closely with Wright, while English was Bright’s confidant. Both factions eventually converged on the issue, as did most of the state’s Democratic congressmen, including Davis and English.¹⁷ Disgruntled Democrats could, nonetheless, use the measure to upset rivals. Dr. William R. Nofsinger was rumored to oppose Kansas-Nebraska in order to unseat Davis. Men like Nofsinger, critics claimed, would take any position for the sake of ambition: “if he can get a party strong enough will make no difference what you call it, anti Nebraska anti Liquor Whig abolition or prohibition he would take the track.”¹⁸

¹⁶Charles Wigely to John G. Davis, Toronto, IN, February 17, 1854; quotation from A. L. Roache to [John G. Davis], Indianapolis, February 18, 1854; Samuel Magill to John G. Davis, Rockville, IN, March 20, 1854; George W. Hanchett[?] to John G. Davis, Sullivan, March 21, 1854; W. Akers to John G. Davis, Rockville, March 22, 1854; quotation from Samuel A. Fisher to [John G. Davis], Rockville, April 4, 1854, all in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; quotation from I. B. A. Archer to William H. English, Louisville & St. Louis Mail Line, February 23, 1854; quotation from E. C. Sugg to William H. English, Troy, January 1, 1855, both in the English Family Papers; John Hunt to Joseph A. Wright, Cambridge City, IN, July 22, 27, 1854, Wright Correspondence and Papers; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 26, 27, Aug. 4, 9, 1854; Stampf, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War*, 4, 9.

¹⁷Daniel A. Farley to John G. Davis, Winamac, IN, January 21, 1854; Charles Wigely to John G. Davis, Toronto, IN, February 17, 1854; A. L. Roache to [John G. Davis], Indianapolis, February 18, 1854; John S. Jennings to John G. Davis, Greencastle, IN, February 23, 1854; A. L. Roache to John G. Davis, New York, March 27, 1854; F. T. Brown to John G. Davis, Spencer, IN, May 9, 1854; Joseph A. Wright to [John G. Davis], Indianapolis, IN, May 29, 1854; William P. Bryant to John G. Davis, Rockville, July 19, 1854, all in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; Jesse D. Bright to William H. English, Washington, September 2, 1850; Jesse D. Bright to William H. English, Senate Chamber, August 22, 1852, both in the English Family Papers; Jesse D. Bright to William L. Marcy, January 23, 1854, Marcy Papers; Van Bolt, “Fusion Out of Confusion,” 361-6, 368-75.

¹⁸B. H. Cornwell to John G. Davis, Terre Haute, March 3, 1854; [?] Noel to John G. Davis, Rockville, IN, March 21, 1854; Samuel A. Fisher to [John G. Davis], Rockville, April 4, 1854; Jephtha Garrigus to [John G. Davis], Gallatin, IN, April 10, 1854; W. R. Nofsinger to [John G. Davis], Rockville, April 14, 1854; John M. Wadding to John G. Davis, Annapolis, IN, April 24, 1854; quotation from Scott Noel to John G. Davis, Rockville, May 29, 1854; James Wright to [John G. Davis], Rockville, IN, May 26, 1854; Joseph A. Wright to John G. Davis, Indianapolis, IN, June 1, 1854; William P. Bryant to John G. Davis, Rockville, July 19, 1854; John G. Davis to Dr. W. R. Nofsinger,

Some wondered if Governor Wright, sympathetic to temperance and the Methodist Church, and with his power based in the more antislavery northern part of the state, would become a rallying point for insurgents. Wright agreed with Davis that, as a political measure, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was “ill advised.” But he also conceded that the underlying “principle is right.” The previous year, Wright had delivered a disquisition on political economy to an agricultural society in Livonia. Singing a paean to localism, he praised “the great truth that, under our government, man, *in his individual capacity*, is entrusted with rights and privileges which, when properly used, enable him to aid in advancing the welfare of the community in which he lives.” Wright found in the Kansas-Nebraska Act a similar “great principle, and this is the right of the people, every where, North & South, to make their own form & structure of government.” He approved the bill despite the political risk, because it complemented his Democracy. Still, attuned to the political climate, he advised Davis to “make no speech on the Nebraska Bill.”¹⁹

Wright’s endorsement stemmed from his “westernism.” According to Wright and other Indiana Democrats, midwesterners uniquely understood the value of the Union, situated as they were in a region that blurred sectional distinctions. Upland southerners, whose folkways and political culture oriented them toward southern society, settled much of the lower Old Northwest.

Early in 1854 Wright paid an official visit to Governor Lazarus Powell of Kentucky. Later in the

Washington City, July 20, 1854, all in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 8, 10, 25, 28, Aug. 4, 5, 1854.

¹⁹William P. Bryant to John G. Davis, Rockville, July 19, 1854; Joseph A. Wright to [John G. Davis], Indianapolis, IN, quotation from February 10, quotation from April 10, May 8, 1854; Joseph A. Wright to John G. Davis, Indianapolis, IN, quotation from March 18, 27, 1854, all in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; S. T. Ensey to Joseph A. Wright, Annapolis, February 24, 1854; John Hunt to Joseph A. Wright, Cambridge City, IN, July 22, July 27, 1854, all in the Wright Correspondence and Papers; *An Address Delivered by Gov. Joseph A. Wright, on the 6th Day of October, 1853, at Livonia, Washington County, Indiana, to the District Agricultural Society, Composed of the Counties of Washington and Orange* (Indianapolis: Austin H. Brown and Co., Printers, 1854), 13; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 31, June 30, 1854; “Letter from Governor Wright,” *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 23, 1854; Van Bolt, “Fusion Out of Confusion,” 370, 374.

year, he once again crossed the Ohio River, this time to marry a Kentuckian. Midwesterners, economically and culturally tied to the Upper South, boasted of their intimate ties to the Slave States. They ritualistically enacted this fraternity when they campaigned with southerners. Prominent Mississippi Valley Democrats, including Ohio's George E. Pugh and Governor Powell and John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, for example, were the advertised guests at a "Grand Rally" in Indianapolis.²⁰

The doctrine of popular sovereignty intersected with Wright's midwestern brand of Unionism. "Indiana, as a central State, has always maintained a high conservative position" on slavery, he reflected. When visiting Kentucky, he extolled "the great center and heart of this nation," which already "theoretically and practically carry out the doctrine of non-intervention, each State attending to its own municipal affairs." Kansas-Nebraska was the means by which the entire country could adopt western values through refusing to pass judgment on slavery, replicating on a national scale the amiable relations existing between the Lower North and Upper South in the Midwest. In 1856, when the violence of Bleeding Kansas exposed the limits of this forbearance, Wright publicly refused to intercede. He rebuked those enlisting his aid in favor of antislavery settlers: "Indiana, as a state, has wisely selected her own domestic policy. She is willing to give her neighbor the same right, and to suppose them capable of choosing and deciding for themselves."²¹

"Some tenderfooted democrats," like those who encouraged Wright to support temperance and oppose Kanas-Nebraska, wanted to co-opt the new issues to stanch desertions

²⁰*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 4, quotation from Feb. 11, 25, March 4, quotation from Aug. 21, 22, 1854.

²¹"Letter from Governor Wright"; "Governor Wright's Response," *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, March 4, 1854; *Letters from Governor Joseph A. Wright, to James H. Lane and Others, of Kansas, and the State Officers of Michigan, on the Kansas Difficulties* (Indianapolis: Elder and Harkness, Printers, [1856]), 2. For the influence of upland southerners on midwestern political culture, see Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest*, especially 108-26, on popular sovereignty, see 120-26.

from the party. Alarmed over how many Democrats were “diseased with reference to a new secret association,” one partisan panicked, “the safe course for all Democrats every [sic] where is to go into this no nothing association.” Another wanted to “engraft the Temperance platform, with the glorious principles of Democracy.” The elevation of Kansas-Nebraska into party dogma, many warned, would drive even more Democrats out of the party and into a new free soil movement. An attack on Methodists troubled a Democrat in Jeffersonville. He urged English to “take occasion to repudiate the sentiments avowed by Robinson in regard to the Methodist Clergy,” in order to placate Democrats of that confession. Many resisted taking a definitive stand on these disputes, as defections would inevitably result. As one Democrat elegantly summarized their plight: “Politicks here are in a Snarl.”²²

The Party of “Slavery, Drunkenness, & Infidelity”

One foe of Democracy imposed order on the snarl by dividing the state into two coalitions. “The friends of the Nebraska bill go for the Extension of Slavery—against religion & Temperance,” he conjectured, while “the Anti Nebraska Party, go, against Slavery [...], against Drunkenness, & for the Protection of Religion.” The Democracy was the party of “*Slavery Drunkenness, & Infidelity*.” This description may have possessed literal truth—the opposition charged that one of the party’s “Nebraska & Anti Maine Law” legislative candidates had been “drunk in Indianapolis the greater part of the Session of 52 & 3, lying on benches on the public streets so stupid that he was not capable of attending any of his Legislative duties.” This

²²E. D. Logan to William H. English, Kossuth, June 1, 1854; A. Basse to William H. English, Laurel, IN, July 13, 1854; W. H. Collum to William H. English, Jeffersonville, July 24, 1854, all in the English Family Papers; S. T. Ensey to Joseph A. Wright, Annapolis, February 24, 1854, Wright Correspondence and Papers; W. R. Nofsinger to [John G. Davis], Rockville, April 14, 1854; William P. Bryant to John G. Davis, Rockville, July 19, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; Mildred C. Stoler, “The Democratic Element in the New Republican Party in Indiana,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 36, no. 3 (Sept. 1940): 185-6.

rendering also demarcated the canvass in ideological terms. The Democracy permitted territorial slavery, respected imbibers' prerogative, and buffered the state from the church. Democrats would have agreed with this description, although they would have positively framed their stance as one that fostered self-government and safeguarded white male mastery against ideological fanaticism.²³

Bemused Democrats watched as the *isms* parasitically fed off each other. "The opponents of the Nebraska bill are busy secretly and stealthily circulating petitions," discovered one Democrat. The petitions were "found either in the hands of open abolitionists or rampant Whigs." The venue for circulating these petitions, moreover, was "the county 'Temperance Convention.'" A Democrat anticipated that an opposition candidate would be a "*Methodist Preacher*" who "of course would take the Anti Nebraska" position. Some adversaries brandished even more impressive fanatical credentials. One editor was "a violent opponent of President Pierce, and the administration[,] a strong advocate for the repeal of the Nebraska bill, A main [*sic*] Law advocate, a strong abolitionist," and, for good measure, was "also Native American[,] a violent opponent to Catholicism."²⁴

Democrats themselves linked the fanatics by charging against them *en echelon* in their platforms. This knitting together of the *isms* was a textual representation of how Democrats ideologically merged their enemies. At Clinton Township in Cass County, "resolutions were

²³John Hunt to Joseph A. Wright, Cambridge City, IN, July 22, 27, 1854; Lewis Clark to Joseph A. Wright, Washington, Daviess County, IN, August 15, 1854, all in the Wright Correspondence and Papers. Van Bolt notes that the *isms* did unite in opposition to the Democracy, but he does not explore the ideological basis of their cooperation. Van Bolt, "Fusion Out of Confusion," 375-84. See also, Thomas E. Rodgers, "Liberty, Will, and Violence: The Political Ideology of the Democrats of West-central Indiana during the Civil War," *Indiana Magazine of History* 92 (June 1996): 133-59.

²⁴Jno. [?]. Robinson to William H. English, Indianapolis, February 24, 1854; E. C. Sugg to William H. English, Troy, Perry County, IN, July, 20, 1854; W. H. Collum to William H. English, Jeffersonville, July 24, 1854, all in the English Family Papers. See also, F. T. Brown to John G. Davis, Spencer, IN, December 21, 1854, Davis Papers, Indianapolis.

passed against the Maine law, and deprecating the interference of the clergy in their *ecclesiastical capacity* in our political affairs.” “No blending of Church and State by Law Power,” seconded Jefferson Township in Boone County. The Democracy of Posey Township, Fayette County, expressed itself in favor of “leaving the slavery question, as well as other great moral and political questions, to be decided by the citizens who settle such Territories.” Know-Nothings received condemnation from the Democrats of the first congressional district, because “it is anti-Democratic and anti-Republican to proscribe any man on account of his religious opinions or the place of his nativity.”²⁵

The opposition aided Democrats by unifying themselves when they met in convention in Indianapolis in July and formed the “People’s party.” Similar movements occurred across the Free States as critics of the Kansas-Nebraska Act mobilized and allied with other elements. These coalitions were the genesis of the Republican party. Indiana Democrats denounced “the specious humbug of a ‘People’s Convention,’” because “the people were not there.” In attendance at “the Ism Convention” were “disaffected Democrats, Freesoil Whigs, Maine Law men, Know Nothings, Freesoilers and Bible Burning Garri[sonian]-Abolitionists,” all sanctified by “clergymen who were on the stand, sitting in the prominent places.” Democrats theorized as to what fueled this “Medley Convention.” For some, the answer was simple: hatred of Democracy. One delegate “admitted that the Convention *was* an Abolition Convention.” “They had come here,” he cheered, “to abolish the Democratic platform and all who stood upon it.”²⁶

²⁵*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 12, 19, July 17, 20, 1854. For the state party platform see *Sentinel*, May 26, 1854.

²⁶*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 28, 31, 1854. The party did not use the name “Republican” in the 1850s, due to the importance of appealing to more than just those Indianans opposed to slavery. The party was also not as staunchly antislavery as other Republicans throughout the nation. Stamp, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War*, 21-6; Stoler, “The Democratic Element in the New Republican Party in Indiana,” 185-207; Emma Lou Thornbrough, “The Race Issue in Indiana Politics during the Civil War,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 47, no. 2 (June 1951): 166-7.

While Democrats agreed that cynical opposition to their party and its principles conjoined the groups, many isolated opposition to slavery and the Kansas-Nebraska Act as the unifying element of the People's party. By the summer, with the state Democratic party committed to the bill, Democrats began to trumpet its animating principle—popular sovereignty—thereby redefining the election as one between the champions and denigrators of self-government. Editorials in the party's state organ had initially offered only a tepid defense of the Kansas-Nebraska Act by rebutting its critics' arguments that it abrogated the Missouri Compromise. The Compromise of 1850 had already superseded the Missouri restriction, and antislavery forces had never regarded that Compromise as sacred anyway, quibbled the *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*. The paper eventually turned onto the ideological offensive by transforming the debate into one over the “the right of the people of the States to govern themselves.”²⁷

Local party conventions and individual Democrats folded the Kansas-Nebraska Act into their belief system by interpreting it as an expression of republican self-government. Popular sovereignty transcended slavery and touched upon “the fundamental principles underlying the structure of our political edifice.” A Democrat addressing a gathering in Shelbyville “contended that it was democratic doctrine to leave all matters in the hands of the people instead of dictators.” Democratic conventions traced the principle back to the American Revolution and crowned Kansas-Nebraska as the culmination of an historical progression under Democratic rule. Individual Democrats also contributed to the construction of this ideology when, along with Governor Wright, they mulled over the Kansas-Nebraska Act in light of their cherished assumptions. The old Jacksonian Jephtha Garrigus affirmed that “it certainly will be right to let the people decide wheather thay [*sic*] will have slaves or not.” One Democrat recounted to Davis

²⁷Compare the editorials in the *Indiana Daily State Sentinel* for Jan. 13, 14, Feb. 10, 14, 15, with those of May 13 and July 4 (quotation), 1854.

how he fought back against the “Abolitionist[s] [who] are raving about the Nebraska question.” “I take the ground to leave it to the Citizens of the Territory to decide.” “They call the Bill a democratic measure,” he concluded, which it was owing to its appropriation by individual Democrats.²⁸

With the dispute over Kansas-Nebraska ennobled into a contest over democratic self-government, Democrats viewed the opponents of the measure as united with the other *isms* in contempt of the people. For a party pledged “to resist all aggressions upon the doctrine of self government,” this rivalry was not new—fanaticism was naught but the ancient nemesis Federalism. “Aristocracy is the innate and inexorable enemy and active antagonist of republicanism,” according to the state Democratic convention, “and has [...] always attempted and been willing to coalesce with any faction, to wed with any popular heresy, and to court any *ism* or vagrant party organization.” The irascible Jephtha Garrigus vowed “to assist in giving to Tories one more defeat” in 1854. He promised Davis that “if I am abel [*sic*] I am bound to take the stump this summer,” because “whilst I live I am bound to fite [*sic*] whiggery let it come In what shape it will.” The names had changed, but Democrats in Indiana were continuing Jefferson and Jackson’s struggle against the contemners of the people.²⁹

Following this logic, Democrats presented their opposition to temperance as a defense of popular democracy. Many Indiana Democrats sympathized with temperance, and some sought legislation on the topic. The party, therefore, could not risk alienating its own abstainers. Democrats had hoped to avoid having candidates take sides by recommending a separate

²⁸*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, quotation from May 20, May 23, quotation from July 3, 1854; Jephtha Garrigus to John G. Davis, Gallatin, IN, March 3, 1854; R. S. H. to John G. Davis, Portland Mills, February 13, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis.

²⁹*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 12, 25, 1854; Jephtha Garrigus to E. M. Chamberlin, Gallatin, IN, July 12, 1854; Jephtha Garrigus to John G. Davis, Gallatin, IN, March 3, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis.

referendum. An innocuously non-binding referendum would have allowed pro-temperance Democrats to register their preference and still vote for the party's regular nominees, even if tipplers. When the state temperance convention opted to call on Indianans to vote only for candidates who expressly favored a prohibitory law, Democrats postured as the sole party with faith in the people. Democrats chastised temperance advocates, "we were not aware that the people are so utterly dependent—that they cannot vote upon a simple question of this sort." "We have a better opinion of the people generally," they plumed.³⁰

Democrats also turned prohibitory temperance legislation into an attack on individual autonomy. Temperance itself was a laudable cause, but the imposition on Indianans through governmental mechanisms was coercive of individual morality. The Jennings County convention clarified, "That while we are in favor of the cause of Temperance as a great moral question and would encourage it by reasonable legislation yet we deprecate the course pursued by some to make this great moral a political one." In a typical conservative critique of one-idea fanaticism, Democrats believed that legislating on what many admitted was a "moral and social evil" could "result in the infliction of greater ones." Even teetotaling Democrats blanched at the governmental despotism inherent in a "law which will sanction the entry of private residences of our citizens, and invade the sacred precincts of home life."³¹

Know-Nothings and the clergy came in for similar criticism. Know-Nothings were "illiberal," "anti-republican and Anti-American." Their intended political proscription would substitute unequal classes for the equality of republican citizenship, while their dictation as to

³⁰*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Jan. 11, 25, quotations from Feb. 9, 24, 1854. For a similar argument, see Thomas M. Drake, *An Address, on the Doctrine and Discipline of the Democratic Party; and the Heresy of the Maine Liquor Law and Free Soilism, or Other Side Issues Being Incorporated into Its Creed. Delivered in Zanesville, Ohio, prior to the Late Election* (Zanesville, OH: E. C. Church, Printer, 1853), 21-3.

³¹*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 23, 25, Aug. 5, 1854. See also, Leland R. [?] to John G. Davis, Greencastle, IN, April 23, 1854, John Givan Davis Papers (microfilm edition), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison.

who was suitable for office was “preventive of a free and true expression of the voice of the people at the ballot-box.” The clergy also insulted democracy—“No minister has a right to dictate to the members of his church how they shall vote,” Democrats lectured. A correspondent told English that “the principle of non-intervention on the subject of Slavery, embraced in the Nebraska bill is decidedly popular with us at present.” He wondered, however, “how long it may continue so, should the Methodist ministry, in their sovereign care for the welfare [of] mankind, think fit to make a crusade against it.” The “sovereign care” the clerics sought to exercise jarred with the sovereignty of the people.³²

The Northern Politics of Slavery and Race

Those individuals “benumbed and degraded by the unhallowed influence of superstitious priest craft” were neither self-governing as republicans nor as men. When fanaticism degraded men, they forfeited not only their individual manhood, but also their whiteness, both prerequisites of political legitimacy in the white man’s republic. White men’s disempowerment redounded to the benefit of black political actors. Novel fanatical political movements, moreover, arising out of the confusion of the partisan realignment, suggested to Democrats the racial mixture that would flourish once fanatics broke down partisan boundaries. Indiana Democrats deployed the politics of slavery and race to impugn fanatics as unsound on white supremacy and to keep their own shaky associates from leaving the party and aiding fanatics in making permeable the racial borders of the republic.³³

³²*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 24, July 18, 20, 22, 29, 1854; B. P. Douglass to William H. English, Corydon, IN, April 4, 1854, English Family Papers.

³³David McClure to William H. English, New Frankfurt, May 1, 1854, English Family Papers. On racism in Indiana and the Midwest, see George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (1971; repr., Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 133-5; and Thornbrough, “The Race Issue in Indiana Politics,” 165-88. Etcheson attributes racism in the Midwest to the mores

By opposing the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Democrats courted condemnation from their own party as abolitionists. Political instinct in the Slave States led partisans to regularly disparage one another as unreliable protectors of slavery. This “politics of slavery” was the default transcript of southern politics. In an antebellum precursor to the twentieth-century southernization of American politics, northern Democrats also practiced the politics of slavery, skewering other parties and even fellow Democrats as insufficiently accommodating of the South—in short, as nothing more than antislavery fanatics and racial egalitarians. Suspect proslavery credentials could prove fatal for free-state Democrats. Indianaans relied on their own *northern* politics of slavery to discourage departures and to ostracize those who did enlist in the opposition.³⁴

Amidst the messiness of their state’s partisan realignment, Indiana Democrats fretted over “deserters.” The party dealt harshly with those who flirted with the opposition. J. W. Peaslee, James Ritchey, Jacob P. Chapman, and Lucian Barbour, for instance, were excommunicated by the Democracy of the sixth congressional district for “their political treasons” and “for their union with the enemies of the Democratic party.” The fourth congressional district passed over its usual nominee, because he had “been for some time past tending towards his ancient and our present political enemies—especially the Abolitionists and

of upland southerners who settled the region. Thomas E. Rodgers does not discuss racism at length, nor does he treat it as a fundamental component of Indiana Democrats’ ideology during the Civil War. Etcheson, *The Emerging Midwest*, 94-102; Rodgers, “Liberty, Will, and Violence,” 153-6.

³⁴William J. Cooper Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). On the twentieth-century southernization of national politics, see Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000); and Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

Free Soilers.” Kansas-Nebraska and popular sovereignty, much as Stephen Douglas intended at the national level, became a party test in Indiana.³⁵

One Indiana Democrat predicted that Douglas’s “wholesale denunciation of the opponents of this bill as ‘abolitionists’ and ‘nigger’ sympathizers will avail him but little,” as “people are not to be frightened from their propriety by such epithets now-a-days.” Yet its very pervasiveness attested to the resonance of this opprobrium before the Indiana electorate. In the minds of Democrats, a slight distance separated a skeptic of their policies from a rabid abolitionist. Eschewing nuance, they described “anti-Nebraska meetings” as having “assumed, a deep abolition type.” Democrat Peter Swain, who claimed that his neighborhood opposed Kansas-Nebraska, “talks very much like an abolitionist.” Another group of Democrats complained about “our Abolition P.M.” and demanded the postmaster’s removal “as soon as possible.”³⁶

Democrats also deployed the politics of slavery in the mutual recrimination of factional infighting. J. O. Jones, a Democrat who rejected Kansas-Nebraska, later revealed that Congressman John G. Davis “*was at heart against the measure.*” Davis only backed the bill to secure reelection. Jones thus took umbrage at Davis’s “unblushing effrontery in denouncing as Abolitionists, Sectionalists, and Disunionists, all who now entertain the same opinions he formerly did.” Davis, however, had experienced firsthand the danger of leaving himself vulnerable to the politics of slavery. Dr. Nofsinger, who considered running against Davis and the Kansas-Nebraska Act, reminded the congressman that “a few years ago they denounced you as a free soiler, because you were opposed to some of the features of the fugitive slave law.”

³⁵*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 19, Aug. 2, 3, 1854.

³⁶J. B. Norman to William H. English, New Albany, February 8, 1854, English Family Papers; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, May 9, 1854; Scott Noel to John G. Davis, Rockville, April 27, 1854; R. S. Staunton to [John G. Davis], Portland Mills, October 21, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis.

Now, Nofsinger griped, the party was using the latest proslavery measure to “test each man’s democracy.” Davis had learned the offensive potential of the politics of slavery, and in 1854 his party was “denouncing every body as abolitionists” who did not support Kansas-Nebraska.³⁷

The politics of slavery and race pervaded the culture of the entire northern Democracy. An Illinois Democrat told Douglas to expect opposition to Kansas-Nebraska from “whigs and free soilers and some of the democrats.” In evaluating a potential congressional candidate, he worried that “the People have an impression that he is half an abolitionist” and that the man’s “family are the rankest abolitionist I know of.” “One of his brothers,” for example, was “smart in a negro speech.” Such suspicion weakened one’s electoral prospects, leading Democrats to lob similar accusations even at their intraparty rivals. Caleb Cushing, who refused to countenance fusion in Massachusetts, found himself charged with complicity in President Pierce’s appointment of Free Soilers. A fellow Democrat branded this pedigreed Doughface “an Abolition agitator.” It was not uncommon for even New England Democrats to have to prove themselves before their party, as Edmund Burke in New Hampshire did when he vouched, “I have never been an abolitionist or Wilmot provisoist.”³⁸

Although their political culture primed them to advance prosouthern policies, northern Democrats did not recognize theirs as a proslavery party. Rather, their course reflected a unique ability to disinterestedly mediate between the sections. Jephtha Garrigus appropriated the

³⁷John G. Davis, *His Opinions upon the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise; His Opinions upon the Fugitive Slave Law. Choice Extracts from His Correspondence. Remarks by J. O. Jones* (Terre Haute, IN: Western Star Print, [1856?]), quotations on 2, 6; W. R. Nofsinger to [John G. Davis], Rockville, April 14, 1854, Davis Papers, Indianapolis. See also, John G. Davis, “To the People of the 7th Congressional District of Indiana,” *Daily Terre-Haute (IN) Journal—Extra*, [1856]; J. O. Jones to John G. Davis, Terre Haute, December 23, 1855; and John G. Davis to [J. O. Jones], Rockville, December 28, 1855, all in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis.

³⁸Murray McConnel to Stephen A. Douglas, Jacksonville, IL, January 28, 1854, Douglas Papers; *Speech of Benjamin Barstow, of Salem, on the Abolition Propensities of Caleb Cushing. Delivered at the Massachusetts National Democratic Convention, Held at Boston, Sept. 22, 1853* (Boston: Office of the National Democrat, 1853), 11; Edmund Burke, *To the Democratic Members of the Legislature of the State of New-Hampshire* (Newport, NH: Carleton and Harvey, Printers, [1852?]), 2.

castigation “Doughface,” exclaiming, “I am a northern man with southern Principels [*sic*].” “I do not believe the north have any right to meddle with the subject of Slavery,” he pontificated, and “the South have just as much right to go north and steal horses, as the north have to go south and steal Negroes.” In an exchange between Congressmen Joshua R. Giddings and Samuel S. Cox, both from neighboring Ohio, the Republican presented Cox with a dilemma. He could either condone reopening the international slave trade, proving his was a “pro-slavery party,” or he could demur, risking retribution from fellow Democrats. Cox skirted the snare by responding that his “party is neither a pro-slavery party nor an anti-slavery party.” The Democracy, instead, “leaves that subject to the people to deal with as they may think proper.” Democrats were, nevertheless, decidedly in favor of white supremacy, and Cox concluded the debate with the charge that Giddings favored “negro equality with the white man.”³⁹

Fanaticism would engender this equality, because fanatics failed to recognize white men’s exclusive claim to self-governance. All varieties of fanaticism, not just the antislavery strain, degraded white manhood and political equality. Indiana Democrats drew from southern *Herrenvolk* democracy to argue that *all* white men were equal, because *all* non-white persons were inferior. Know-Nothings, however, “seem to take it for granted that an Irishman or a German is a new species of human creation in the United States.” Former congressman W. W. Wick reassured English that the preservation of white male mastery would resonate with German-Americans. Antislavery Germans would cooperate with the Democracy, because, although “they abhor the Nebraska bill,” they “still more abhor to have their whiskey and lager

³⁹Jeptha Garrigus to John G. Davis, Gallatin, IN, February 25, 1854, Davis Papers, Indianapolis; *Ohio Politics. Cox after Giddings* (n.p.: Lemuel Towers, [1859?]), 2, 3.

beer stopped.” Democrats solidified a bond among white men by advancing the goal of self-determination, whether in regard to alcohol consumption or territorial slavery.⁴⁰

Once the popular sovereignty of white men was vitiated, it was but a short step to the elevation of black political actors. An article reprinted in the *Sentinel* compared the fanatical denial of white men’s ability to govern African Americans in the territories with Know-Nothings’ efforts to “reduce to the condition of a degraded caste, hundreds and thousands of their white fellow citizens.” The movements shared an impulse: “the two manias of the day are aiming to raise with one hand the negro, and with the other to strike down men of the same race as ourselves.” Once the idea took hold that white territorial settlers could not be trusted to govern African Americans and that immigrants were incapable of governing themselves, then Americans would be ready to send Frederick Douglass to Congress. This denouement made sense to Democrats, as a delicate, albeit ironclad, inverse relationship existed between white men’s democratic equality and the subordination of everyone else.⁴¹

Fanatics upset this precarious equilibrium, because Democrats assumed that the aspersion of white men’s capacity for self-government automatically resulted in the enfranchisement of African Americans. Democrats received warnings of “Yankee tramping lecturers” traversing Indiana at the behest of the opposition. These “emissaries from this land of Blue Laws, intolerance, and abolition fanaticism [who] are now perambulating” the state presumed to instruct Indianans, as “they regard the people of Indiana as little children, incapable of making laws themselves.” Just as fanatics would deprive white men in Kansas of the right to set their own racial policies, condescending fanatics were dictating to white Indianans. Many of these

⁴⁰*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 22, 1854; W. W. Wick to William H. English, Indianapolis, June 5, 1854, English Family Papers.

⁴¹*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 24, 1854.

political missionaries hailed from Connecticut, “one of the States which are held up to the people of Indiana as models.” In that state, African Americans could vote, while illiterate white men were disfranchised. The same would happen in Indiana if the People’s party won the election—Hoosiers would watch helpless as “an honest white man whose education has been neglected must stand back whilst Cuffee walks up and casts his vote.”⁴²

It was not just fanatics’ ideology and policies that degraded white men. For Democrats, the partisan realignment itself bespoke a breakdown of gender and racial order, one which fanatics encouraged. By enticing members away from the Democracy, fanatics weakened the party of white supremacy. In consenting to fusion, white men ascribed to fanatics’ racial doctrines, violated racial boundaries, and forfeited their whiteness, becoming, in effect, racially-mixed or black men. The hapless William Nofsinger, who finally received a “nomination of the fusion convention,” was dubbed “DR. NOFFSINGER, the *mongrel* candidate for Treasurer of State.” “The *white nigger* Hull,” meanwhile, “addressed a large crowd at the Court House,” where he attacked good Democrats such as William Wick and the editors of the *Sentinel*. When Congressman English ran for reelection in 1856, he charged that a Republican not only “talked flippantly about ‘*letting the Union slide*,’” but also admitted that “he was not prepared to decide whether the negro or the white was the superior race; that whichever was the superior would, in time, absorb the other.” This Republican “left the solution of the question to be determined by time—thus seeming to contemplate and approve the horrible doctrine of amalgamation.”⁴³

Democrats resorted to the trope of racial amalgamation to convey their horror over the effects of eroded party loyalty. Fusion was a political transgression tantamount to the most taboo

⁴²*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 1, 6, 17, 1854; for a similar argument, see Feb. 28, 1854.

⁴³*Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 4, Sept. 23, 1854; *Letter from William H. English, of Indiana, in Response to a Nomination for Reëlection to Congress, Tendered to him by the Democracy of the Second Congressional District* ([Washington, D. C.]: Office of the Congressional Globe, [1856]), 2.

form of racial mixture—interracial sex. An Indianan lamented the “defection” of fellow Democrats who joined antislavery politicians; he designated the resulting “Fusion Ticket” the “mongrel Ticket.” Because fanatics enabled black political actors and were themselves men denuded of whiteness, “fusion” with them yielded biracial politics. The state People’s party convention was referred to as the “Speckled” or “spotted” convention, while an “Abolition Mongrel Convention” met in the sixth congressional district. The campaign wearied Senator Jesse Bright. He told his colleague Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia that he would rather be attending to their joint land speculation than dealing with “the mongrel mixed up political Canvass going on here now.” With their condemnations of racially intermingled politics, Democrats forecast the actual racial amalgamation that would follow fanatics’ success. In Indiana, the politics of slavery was about more than placating the South in order to foster harmony within the Democracy and the Union. It was about perpetuating the white man’s republic at home.⁴⁴

Virginia and the South

An exultant supporter congratulated English on his reelection “in spite of disintegrated Whigery Know nothing ism Free Soil ism Main [*sic*] Liquor Law ism and vilest Abolitionism.” Most Indiana Democrats could not gloat, as the opposition triumphed in Indiana and throughout the Free States in the fall of 1854. In a near electoral eclipse, the northern Democracy lost more than two-thirds of its House seats, including that of John G. Davis. Thomas A. Hendricks, who also failed in his reelection bid, offered Davis lukewarm comfort: “Our defeat is so general and

⁴⁴E. C. Sugg to William H. English, Troy, January 1, 1855, English Family Papers; F. P. Stark to John G. Davis, New Berry, Greene Co., IN, July 27, 1854, Davis Papers, Indianapolis; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 18, Aug. 4, 1854; Jesse D. Bright to R. M. T. Hunter, Madison, IN, September 2, 1854, in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter,” 159.

overwhelming that we have no cause for personal mortification.” Democrats next turned to the Slave States to blunt the fanaticism rampant in the North. Lewis Cass, surveying the damage, surmised that the Democracy faced “a new element of difficulty” in “the strange party, which has swept the West, and I suspect is about to sweep the South.” Still, Cass rallied, “my faith in our old party principles is as strong as ever, and I am full of confidence, that the Democracy will again resume its ascendancy.”⁴⁵

National attention riveted on Virginia, where one observer agreed with Cass that “the Know Nothings I fear are to be troublesome.” Virginia’s 1855 campaign began as the Free States’ fall elections ended. The gubernatorial race in particular pitted Democrats against a vibrant Know-Nothing party that had emerged out of the ruin of Virginia Whiggery. The May election was the first in the Slave States in 1855, and many Americans treated it as a trial run for the rest of the South and for the 1856 presidential race. The contest became a national referendum on conservatism and fanaticism. Like their peers in Indiana, Virginia Democrats used the canvass to ideologically distinguish themselves from a new foe. Before their national audience, they approached the struggle as one with ramifications for white men in the Slave States and in the Free States. As the state’s leading Democratic newspaper put it, “the Democratic party of the Union look to the Democracy of Virginia [...] to arrest the tide of fanaticism and corruption which threatens to overwhelm the country.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵E. C. Sugg to William H. English, Troy, January 1, 1855, English Family Papers; Thomas A. Hendricks to John G. Davis, Shelbyville, October 15, 1854, Davis Papers, Madison; Lewis Cass to Edmund Burke, Washington, December 7, 1854, Burke Papers; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, completed and ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976), 175.

⁴⁶H. Martz to John Letcher, Rockingham City, VA, November 10, 1854, John Letcher Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; “Alliance in the North against the Democracy of Virginia,” *Richmond Enquirer*, Dec. 13, 1854, clipping in Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook of Ellen Wright Wise, 1840-1896, Henry A. Wise Papers (microfilm), Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The Old Dominion occupied a venerable place in the national party's creation myth. The state was the home of Jefferson and Madison and their 1798 Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, which were invoked in the Democracy's national platforms in the 1850s. The coordination between Martin Van Buren's Albany Regency and Thomas F. Ritchie's Richmond Junto in the 1820s, moreover, had cemented a New York-Virginia axis as the backbone of the coalition that propelled Andrew Jackson into power and solidified as the *National Democracy*. In his original articulation of this bisectional alliance, Van Buren limned for his southern counterpart a union of "the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North," a partnership that mitigated the centrifugal effects of slavery and sectionalism. Although byzantine factionalism enervated the Empire State Democracy by the 1850s, Virginia maintained a reliable party. Given Virginia's historical and political preeminence within the Democracy and the Union, and the deference shown it as the arbiter of southern political opinion, a Democrat looking ahead to the election could only gasp, "think of the calamity of loosing [*sic*] the old dominion."⁴⁷

Factionalism afflicted the Virginia Democracy, without crippling it. States' rights Democrats took their cues from Senator Robert Mercer Taliaferro Hunter, a protégé of Calhoun. Hunter's gadfly was Henry A. Wise, a maverick reformer who was the Democracy's gubernatorial candidate in 1855. Hunter dryly acknowledged to Wise that his "impulsive nature

⁴⁷"Democratic Platform of 1852," and "Democratic Platform of 1856," in *National Party Platforms, 1840-1964*, ed. Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 17, 25; Van Buren quoted in Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 1990, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 87; R. K. Meade to R. M. T. Hunter, Petersburg, February 10, 1855, Douglas Papers. For an overview of the second party system in Virginia, see William G. Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion: Virginia and the Second Party System, 1824-1861* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996); on party politics in 1850s Virginia, see William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003). On Virginia's place in the nation and in the South, see William F. Samford to Matthew P. Blue, Oak Bowery, Chambers County, AL, August 14, 1854, Matthew P. Blue Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; Isaac Edward Holmes to R. M. T. Hunter, Charleston, [SC], June 8, 1855, in "Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter," 164-5; Daniel W. Crofts, "Late Antebellum Virginia Reconsidered," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 107, no. 3 (Summer 1999): 253-86; and Frances Leigh Williams, "The Heritage and Preparation of a Statesman: John Young Mason, 1799-1859," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 75, no. 3 (July 1967): 305-30.

and the energy with which you pursue whatever you have in view” had the potential to spark animosity between them. Wise’s nomination, with the acquiescence of Hunter’s clique, thereby signaled that, at least temporarily, Virginia Democrats had turned their gaze from states’ rights, proslavery “particularism” toward a national orientation. A fellow states’ rights Democrat stressed to Hunter the necessity for action, for “if we [...] beat this movement in Virginia I feel that our institutions will be sound.” More than slavery or control of the state party was at stake; so too was leadership of the Slave States and of the National Democracy. Hunter must recognize that “to get the South straight Know Nothingism must be overcome.” This adviser instructed Hunter, “you had better take your part in this canvass, at least in a National point of view.” The election was not Virginians’ alone.⁴⁸

Despite Hunter’s exertions, and undoubtedly to his chagrin, Henry A. Wise was the embodiment of the campaign. He drew on his gubernatorial victory for the rest of the decade to craft a reputation as an intersectional harmonizer, often at the expense of states’ rights and proslavery orthodoxy. Both leaders, in fact, while being routinely touted for the presidency

⁴⁸R. M. T. Hunter to Henry A. Wise, Washington, D. C., January 12, 1853, Henry A. Wise Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; Lewis E. Harvie to R. M. T. Hunter, March 5, 17, 1855, in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter,” 161-3. On “particularism,” see Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*, 225-61. On the Hunter-Wise rivalry, see George Booker to R. M. T. Hunter, Baltimore, [MD], June 7, 1852; A. D. Banks to R. M. T. Hunter, Petersburg, [VA], November 23, 1855; James A. Seddon to R. M. T. Hunter, St. James, LA, December 3, 1855, all in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter,” 144-5, 171, 172-4; Roger A. Pryor to [R. M. T. Hunter], Richmond, December 7, 1856; Roger A. Pryor to R. M. T. Hunter, Richmond, December 9, 1856; Henry A. Wise to R. M. T. Hunter, Richmond, VA, February 27, 1856, all in the Hunter Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; and *Letter of Governor Wise, of Virginia, on the Senatorial Election and the Kansas Policy of the Administration* (Washington, D. C., 1857). On Hunter, see William S. Hitchcock, “Southern Moderates and Secession: Senator Robert M. T. Hunter’s Call for Union,” *The Journal of American History* 59, no. 4 (March 1973): 871-84; for a contrasting view, see R. Randall Moore, “Robert M. T. Hunter and the Crisis of the Union, 1860-1861,” *Southern Historian* 13 (Spring 1992): 25-35. Wise defies definitive political categorization. He was variously a Jacksonian, states’ rights Whig, staunch nationalist and sectional compromiser, secessionist, and extralegal revolutionary. He did, however, often strike a national pose and deliberately distanced himself from more radical states’ rights elements within the Democratic party. See Craig M. Simpson, *A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985). See also the work of Clement Eaton, “Henry A. Wise: A Study in Virginia Leadership, 1850-1861,” *West Virginia History* 3 (1942): 187-204; “Henry A. Wise, A Liberal of the Old South,” *The Journal of Southern History* 7, no. 4 (Nov. 1941): 482-94; and “Henry A. Wise and the Virginia Fire Eaters of 1856,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 21, no. 4 (March 1935): 495-512.

themselves, were experienced seekers after that southern chimera—the “sound and reliable Northern or free State men” who would “keep down the slavery agitation.” Hunter had entertained the possibility of running on a ticket with Stephen A. Douglas in 1852. Wise, that same year, swung Virginia’s delegation at the Baltimore convention behind his close friend James Buchanan. Three years later, as he followed the gubernatorial race from his diplomatic post in London, Buchanan related that he was “most anxious about the result of the Virginia election; and this both for the cause and the man who represents it.”⁴⁹

Contemporaries regarded the gubernatorial election as a turning point in southern—and national—politics, as it would decide whether Know-Nothingism could bloom outside of its northern hothouses or if it was an invasive species ill-suited to southern climes. If the party could take Virginia, it could spread farther south and become the national successor to the Whigs. Virginia Democrats moved to prevent this by painting Know-Nothings as untrustworthy stewards of slavery, prompting several historians to conclude that Democrats primarily wielded the politics of slavery against their opponents. Yet Wise and his party derided Know-Nothingism as far more than “abolitionism in disguise.” The American party, even in the South, was avowedly nativist and anti-Catholic. Virginia Democrats, like those in Indiana, responded by framing the election as a plebiscite on the rights of white male citizens, regardless of religion, ethnicity, or nativity. Even when they did excoriate the party for its shakiness on slavery, theirs was not a uniquely southern strategy, as northerners depended upon similar ploys to fight

⁴⁹James A. Seddon to R. M. T. Hunter, Richmond, [VA], February 7, 1852; quotation from Edmund W. Hubard to R. M. T. Hunter, Saratoga, [VA], May 8, 1852, both in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter,” 136-39, 140-2; quotation from James Buchanan to William L. Marcy, Legation of the United States, London, June 8, 1855, in *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908-11), 9:357; Henry A. Wise to Franklin Pierce, Only, near Onancock, Accomack Co., VA, June 22, 1852, copy, typescript, Wise Family Papers, 1777-1973, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 347.

fanaticism. Virginia Democrats, along with southerners following the Old Dominion's lead, refined their party's national and conservative ideology as they assailed Know-Nothingism on grounds that would reverberate among white men throughout the republic.⁵⁰

The Politics of Slavery in Virginia

Know-Nothing political culture alarmed established parties. The party originated as a secret order in the urban North, its cognomen stemming from early adherents' declamations of ignorance concerning their organization. The movement shocked Whigs and Democrats by electing candidates who never publicly campaigned. "Sam," the party's personification as Uncle Sam's youthful nephew, "sprung forth fully armed" onto the political landscape, "like Minerva from the brain of Jove." Although much of their mystery had dissipated by 1855 in their institutionalization as a political party, Know-Nothings still struck many traditional partisans as aberrant and subversive of the two-party system. Democrats reacted to Sam's southern foray by falling back on the politics of slavery. Know-Nothings were more than a simple stalking horse for abolitionists, Democrats realized. The organization muddled partisan and racial peripheries

⁵⁰"The Abolitionism of Know-Nothingism," *Richmond Enquirer*, June 3, 1855, clipping in Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook of Ellen Wright Wise. On the politics of slavery as southern Democrats' strategy against the Know-Nothings, see Cooper, *The South and the Politics of Slavery*, 362-9. On the centrality of the politics of slavery in 1850s Virginia, see Link, *Roots of Secession*. William W. Freehling explores other issues during the 1855 Virginia election, but emphasizes the politics of slavery as the primary reason for the Know-Nothings' defeat. Craig Simpson explores Wise's multiple thrusts against the Know-Nothings, including attacking their nativism and alleged antislavery views. Thorough treatments of the 1855 election are those by Simpson, Philip Morrison Rice, and John David Bladdek. Rice does not see nativism as central to the campaign. A host of issues, including slavery, were prominent and confused party lines. Bladdek, meanwhile, argues that Democrats attacked the Know-Nothings on nativism, deploying an ideology that encompassed more than the politics of slavery. Clement Eaton cites Wise's opposition to Know-Nothings' religious intolerance as evidence of his liberalism. Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*, vol. 2 of *The Road to Disunion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85-96; Simpson, *A Good Southerner*, 106-22; Rice, "The Know-Nothing Party in Virginia, 1854-1856," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 55, no. 1 (Jan. 1947): 61-75; and "The Know-Nothing Party in Virginia, 1854-1856 (Concluded)," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 55, no. 2 (April 1947): 159-67; Bladdek, "'Virginia Is Middle Ground': The Know Nothing Party and the Virginia Gubernatorial Election of 1855," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 106 no. 1 (Winter 1998), 35-70; Eaton, "Henry A. Wise, A Liberal of the Old South," 490-1.

in the South and provided a template for enslaved southerners to resist their bondage. Know-Nothing fanaticism, in short, facilitated black political agency in the white man's republic.⁵¹

Virginia Democrats railed against the Know-Nothings' connections with antislavery fanatics in the Free States. Thus did Democrats apply to a new antagonist those charges previously leveled at Whigs under the politics of slavery. Attachment to unreliable northerners could spell a party's doom in the South. Southern Know-Nothings' northern affiliates consequently came under scrutiny. The American party was "born among the abolition and corruption of the North," where the party was "turning out of office the conservative men, and placing in their stead the rankest Freesoilers." Know-Nothingism and antislavery shared a geographical and ideological provenance. As Wise screamed at Know-Nothings heckling him during a speech in Washington, D. C., "you have joined in the war of the Abolitionists on the institutions of Virginia." As an Alabama Democrat summarized the campaigns against Know-Nothings in 1855 and 1856, "last year it was 'Sam & Sambo'—This year it is 'Sambo & Sam.'"⁵²

⁵¹"Speech of James B. Clay, Delivered at the Union Meeting in Mason County, Kentucky," in *Old Line Whigs for Buchanan and Breckinridge: Letters from Hon. James Alfred Pearce, and Hon. Thomas G. Pratt, to the Whigs of Maryland. Speeches of Hon. J. W. Crisfield, of Maryland, and Hon. James B. Clay, of Kentucky* (n.p., [1856]), 13; Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiv. On Know-Nothing political culture, see Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism," *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 2 (Sept. 1973): 309-31; and Mark E. Neely Jr., "Apotheosis of a Ruffian: The Murder of Bill Pool and American Political Culture," in *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-nineteenth-century American Political History*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel A. Sheldon (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 36-63.

⁵²"Reasons Why I Am a Democrat and Not a Know Nothing," reprinted in James P. Hambleton, ed., *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise, with a History of the Political Campaign in Virginia in 1855. To Which is Added a Review of the Position of Parties in the Union, and a Statement of the Political Issues: Distinguishing Them on the Eve of the Presidential Campaign of 1856* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1856), 206, 213; "Speech of Mr. Wise on Know Nothingism," newspaper clipping in Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook of Ellen Wright Wise; William F. Samford to Matthew P. Blue, Tuskegee, AL, August 10, 1856, Blue Family Papers. For northerners on the union of "Sam" and "Sambo," see Simon K. Wolfe to William H. English, Corydon, April 12, 1856; and [?] [?] Newkirk to William H. English, New Albany, July 19, 1856, both in the English Family Papers.

Know-Nothings exacerbated the uncertainty of the realignment, and Democrats, in turn, rendered fusion with that upstart party as racial amalgamation. According to Democratic newspapers, the Know-Nothing ticket, cutting across parties and composed of disreputable Whigs and “fishy Democrats,” was an “amalgamation ticket.” As in Indiana, Democrats treated party blending as racial adulteration. Speculating on the nature of “old Sam’s children,” the *Richmond Enquirer* offered various alternatives: “an abortion,” a “premature” birth that “won’t live,” or, alternately, “it will be black, others think it will be mulatto.” It could even “be white on one side of its face, and black on the other,” with the ability to “turn one side or the other North, or South, as it suits.” Sam’s progeny would, regardless, be a monstrous birth. The Know-Nothings’ “hybrid ticket” was a “mermaid ticket,” a reference to P. T. Barnum’s zoological oddity. Political fusion with Know-Nothings confounded the lines separating races and even species. These appeals resonated in a culture preoccupied with racial taxonomy and turning increasingly to scientifically quantifiable signifiers of race.

Democrats used this imagery to forestall defections, with the result that the “Democratic papers of the State manifest a zeal and ability in their assaults on the mongrel ticket.” The portended amalgamation was not merely metaphorical. The North offered a negative referent, as Massachusetts Know-Nothings “have taken the first step toward practical amalgamation by placing negro and white children in their common schools upon terms of equality.” The presence of the “*foul, demoralizing, debasing, filthy thing, that has got into Virginia pastures from the Northern pig-sty*” would, incidentally, purify the party. It would peel off unreliable Democrats and other “impure ingredients that before had an accidental place in the Democratic mass,” yielding a “pure lump of genuine Democracy, cleansed and refined.” On one side would

stand ideologically unalloyed and racially unsullied Democracy, while on the other would be a party with “no cohesive power at the South but an amalgamating hatred of Democracy.”⁵³

Know-Nothings imperiled white supremacy even more overtly by sanctioning black politics. The organization’s secrecy and rituals, what one Mississippian mocked as “the signs, and grips, and passwords, and squalls, and oaths, and flag-fribble of the order,” struck many as illegitimate. Indianans had already noticed this unrepugnant behavior. Hoosiers believed that “our enemies are working in the dark” and that “our defeat was owing to the secret conclave & the methodist church they all met in cornfields & Reveires [*sic*, Reveries] on monday night before the Election.” Know-Nothings were “modern Jacobins” who fomented revolution in secret; they were “those who strike in the dark.” A Democrat in Madison Court House, Virginia kept Congressman Paulus Powell “apprize[d] [...] of their contemplated movements.” Democrats had discovered that Know-Nothings planned a nocturnal nominating convention in Charlottesville. Politics conducted surreptitiously suggested illicit goals and an unrepugnant reticence regarding public scrutiny. These practices possessed even more disconcerting implications in the South. It was at night, for example, that Know-Nothings cavorted with antislavery politicians.⁵⁴

Southerners had long dreaded clandestine gatherings as preludes to servile insurrection. Historians have recently been hard at work expanding the borders of “the political” in antebellum

⁵³*Richmond Enquirer, Lynchburg Republican, Richmond Examiner* reprinted in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 165-6, 251, 352, 428; James Lawson Kemper, “For Buchanan vs. Fillmore,” [1856], manuscript speech, 15, James Lawson Kemper Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

⁵⁴*Know Nothingism Unveiled. Letter of Judge A. B. Longstreet, of Mississippi* ([Washington, D. C.]: Office of the Congressional Globe, [1855]), 8; Ezra Read to John G. Davis, Terre Haute, IN, December 16, 1854; R. S. Staunton to [John G. Davis], Portland Mills, October 21, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 16, 29, 1854; James L. Kemper to Paulus Powell, Madison C. H., March 26, 1855, Paulus Powell Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; *Letter of Hon. G. W. Jones, of Tennessee, to His Constituents* (n.p., [1856]), 14; “Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 75-7. See also, Robert McClelland to Alpheus Felch, Washington, July 5, 1854, Felch Papers.

America by uncovering the often overlooked ways in which African Americans, including enslaved southerners, engaged in politics notwithstanding their formal exclusion from the political sphere. White southerners were fully aware of at least some of the covert means by which slaves pursued political goals. Behind the stated view that slavery abnegated political and civil agency, slaveholders understood their “property” as political actors and were uncomfortable when white and black politics converged.⁵⁵

Enslaved southerners plotting revolution served as models for Know-Nothings. Where Indianans worried that white fanatics would admit black political actors into the republic, Virginians directly equated the fanatical political style with black politics. Because Know-Nothings “exist somewhere in the dark,” Wise explained, “their blows can’t be guarded against, for they strike, not like freemen, bold, bravely for rights.” Know-Nothings did not carry themselves like republican freemen; instead, they acted like subversive slaves. According to a Tennessee Democrat, Know-Nothings recruited “converts in your secret hiding places, in your dark cellars, in your unfrequented garrets, in your caves, or the lonely glens of the mountain.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵On the decisive impact of black political agency on party politics in 1850s Virginia, see Link, *Roots of Secession*. On black political agency, see Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), especially 93-116; Spencer R. Crew, “‘When the Victims of Oppression Stand Up Manfully for Themselves’: The Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and the Role of African Americans in Obstructing Its Enforcement,” in *Congress and the Crisis of the 1850s*, ed. Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 120-42; Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13-61; William W. Freehling, *The South vs. the South: How Anti-Confederate Southerners Shaped the Course of the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 25-32; Richard Newman, “Protest in Black and White: The Formation and Transformation of an African American Political Community during the Early Republic”; and David Waldstreicher, “Why Thomas Jefferson and African Americans Wore Their Politics on Their Sleeves: Dress and Mobilization between American Revolutions,” both in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 79-103, 180-204.

⁵⁶*Religious Liberty. Equality of Civil Rights among Native and Naturalized Citizens. The Virginia Campaign of 1855. Governor Wise’s Letter on Know-Nothingism, and His Speech at Alexandria* (n.p., [1855]), 25; *Speech of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, on Know Nothingism, at Gallatin, July 4th, 1855* (Nashville: J. F. Morgan, Fine Job and Book Printer, 1855), 6.

When Democrats referred to a Know-Nothing as a “secret agitator, muffling his face, and treading the dark alley to the back door of his midnight conventicle” in order to “gather recruits by whispers” and indulge his “desire to retire in secret, and by secret means to propagate a political thought, or word, or deed,” the dire parallel was not lost on tremulous slaveholders.⁵⁷

Know-Nothings acted like slaves. But enslaved southerners, it was feared, also emulated Know-Nothings. Democrats nurtured a suspicion of “Know-Nothingism being productive of a spirit of imitation among our slave population.” Slaveholders received warnings of “blacks, who are forming themselves into similar societies, and banding together under solemn oaths of secrecy.” Slaveholders fantasized about vicious white men, especially mendicant Yankees, skulking about the countryside sowing insurrection. In 1855 both northern and indigenous Know-Nothing “emissaries” could be found “nightly prowling about our doors.” Several Louisianans congratulated a former Democratic congressman for exposing that Know-Nothings furthered the “disguised movements of Abolitionist [*sic*] of the North who [...] are *secretly* and insidiously working a ‘subterranean passage’ to undermine the cherished institutions of the South.” Whether Know-Nothings took their cues from slaves, or whether slaves followed the Know-Nothing script, the consonance between white and black politics, practiced beyond the ken of formal institutions, under cover of night, and outside the oversight of responsible white men, risked fired barns and slit throats. Wise privately expressed his trepidation to a northern ally over the thought of “Sam with a dark lantern among the negroes.”⁵⁸

⁵⁷“Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” 89; Longstreet, *Know Nothingism Unveiled*, 4; Wise, *Religious Liberty*, 2.

⁵⁸*Light for the People! Read! The Know-Nothing Delusion Exposed! The Warning Voice of the Great Men of the Nation! Opinions of Distinguished Democrats* (Montgomery, AL: Advertiser Office, n.d.), 28-9; “Letter from Henry A. Wise,” July 1, 1855, *Richmond Enquirer*, reprinted in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 431; William L. Knox et al. to John Perkins Jr., Parish of Carroll, LA, June 5, 1855, John Perkins Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Henry A. Wise to George W. Jones, Only, near Onancock, VA, July 27, 1855, typescript, Wise Family Papers, 1777-1973; Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant*, 92; Simpson, *A Good Southerner*, 112.

The Politics of Religious Liberty in Virginia

A Kentuckian impressed with the new party cautioned his relative John Letcher in Virginia against engaging the Know-Nothings, lest Letcher hazard his reelection to Congress. “As you dont know any thing about them,” he admonished, “*let them alone.*” Before his gubernatorial nomination in December 1854, Henry Wise hypothesized that he could avoid conflict with the American party, as he was “a native, a protestant, [...] This may satisfy them.” These Democrats, however, chose to challenge the Know-Nothings, “to strike so fast and thick at ‘Sam’ that he was kept on the defensive all the time.” Wise “would make no committals to or compromises with any sect or party organization except that of the good old Democratic party.” He also refused to permit waffling by fellow Democrats, asking “*is it not time that candidates for Congress as well as for the Govr^s. place were called on to declare whether they are tainted with Know Nothingism or not, whether they are contented with Democracy.*” Much like Indianans had done with the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Wise turned anti-nativism into a test of ideological fidelity for his party.⁵⁹

Although Know-Nothings endangered slavery and invited servile insurrection, Virginia Democrats made the party’s nativism and anti-Catholicism the fulcrum of the campaign. Before his nomination, Wise released a lengthy encyclical condemning the order. Many southern Know-Nothings resented their characterization as intolerant, proscriptive bigots. One critic

⁵⁹R. P. Letcher to John Letcher, Frankfort, March 29, 1855, Letcher Papers; Henry A. Wise to George Booker, Onancock, VA, August 14, 1854; Henry A. Wise to George W. Jones, Only, near Onancock, VA, June 29, 1855, typescript; Henry A. Wise to [?], Only, near Onancock, VA, December 17, 1854, all in the Wise Family Papers, 1777-1973. See also, John Letcher to John Brooks, Lexington, VA, May 25, 1855, Letcher Papers; and Henry A. Wise to [Caleb Cushing], Onancock, VA, September 6, 1854, Cushing Papers. Democrats had to defend Wise’s own party loyalty. Early in his career, he broke with Andrew Jackson and took a sabbatical as a states-rights’ Whig. Supporters assured voters, however, that he had long since returned to the fold and that his partisan tergiversations were dictated by a consistent dedication to Democratic principles. See H. Martz to John Letcher, Rockingham City, VA, November 10, 1854, Letcher Papers; and “The Political Career and Party Service of Henry A. Wise,” *Richmond Enquirer*, Dec. 15, 1854, clipping in Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook of Ellen Wright Wise. On defections from the Democratic party, see Lewis E. Harvie to R. M. T. Hunter, March 17, 1855, in “Correspondence of Robert M. T. Hunter,” 162-3.

called Wise “a thorough Know-Nothing, so far as a knowledge of the principles of that order are concerned.” While Democrats certainly exaggerated the principles of the American party, they were also instinctively bristling at political handicaps imposed on fellow white men. Wise and his party took the American party’s animus toward Catholics and the foreign-born at face value.⁶⁰ At the same time, Democrats laughed over the Know-Nothings’ imagined crisis, as Virginia lacked a significant immigrant and Catholic population. These groups comprised a smaller percentage of Virginia’s population than those of Indiana and other free states. Democrats did not betray the sincerity of their anti-nativism with this argument. By continuing to contend for the rights of these groups, despite their slight presence in the state, Democrats unfolded an ideology that appealed to white men nationwide.⁶¹

Virginia Democrats emphasized Know-Nothings’ hostility toward religious liberty, the separation of church and state, and immigration, in order to present the party as “against Americanism itself.” “Imposing civil incapacitations on account of religious opinions” amounted to an unconstitutional and un-American violation of the separation of church and state, which was a legacy of the Founders, some of whom were Catholic and foreign-born. Know-

⁶⁰*Religious Liberty. Equality of Civil Rights among Native and Naturalized Citizens. The Virginia Campaign of 1855. Governor Wise’s Letter on Know-Nothingism, and His Speech at Alexandria* (n.p., [1855]); [F. R. Anspach], *The Sons of the Sires; A History of the Rise, Progress, and Destiny of the American Party, and Its Probable Influence on the Next Presidential Election. To Which is Added a Review of the Letter of the Hon. Henry A. Wise, against the Know-Nothings. By an American* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1855), 202. For the Virginia Know-Nothings’ 1855 platform, see Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 254-5. For southern nativism, see *Reply of Hon. Kenneth Rayner to the Manifesto of Hon. Henry A. Wise* (Washington, D. C.: American Organ Office, 1855); Susan Piet to Charles James Faulkner, February 12, 1855, Faulkner Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; Bladek, “Virginia Is Middle Ground,” 37, 52-3. For the view that nativism was not crucial to southern Know-Nothingism, see Erik B. Alexander, “‘The Democracy Must Prepare for Battle’: Know-Nothingism in Alabama and Southern Politics, 1851-1859,” *Southern Historian: A Journal of Southern History* 27 (Spring 2006): 23-37.

⁶¹Wise, *Religious Liberty*, 3-5. In 1850, Indiana had a foreign-born population of just under five percent, although it was growing; by 1860, it was still under ten percent. Virginia in 1850 had a foreign-born population of three percent, the vast majority living in western Virginia, with other concentrations in the cities and towns of eastern Virginia. The number of foreign-born Virginians did, however, increase rapidly in the 1850s. Shade, *Democratizing the Old Dominion*, 22, 286; Stamp, *Indiana Politics during the Civil War*, 2, 9; Van Bolt, “Fusion Out of Confusion,” 359-60.

Nothings would usher in “the worst union which could be devised, [that] of church and state” and would impinge upon the “liberty of conscience.” Virginians drew on their party’s anti-clericalism to demand official toleration for all sects. Protestants who wanted to restrict the political rights of Catholics exhibited the very narrow-mindedness which they ascribed to the Catholic Church. “How can this bigotry be subdued by bigotry,” Wise asked. Frenzied Protestants would merely “out-Jesuit the Jesuits,” he answered. Similar to other fanatics, Know-Nothings were intolerant and hypocritical in their quest to impose an exclusive, religiously-inspired agenda through the governmental apparatus.⁶²

Southern Democrats numbered among the most eloquent proponents of religious liberty in antebellum America. Former Alabama congressman Philip Phillips issued a strong exposition of Democratic anti-clericalism during his state’s 1855 elections. He indicted Know-Nothings for violating the “Separation of Church and State, [the] eternal divorce between civil and ecclesiastical jurisdiction,” which characterized America’s “model of a republican government.” A Tennessean claimed that Know-Nothingism, with its “adulterous union of Church and State,” was “nothing but mere, sheer, bigoted intolerance, and that of the most malignant type,” worthy of the ancient Puritans. Most of the Slave States held elections later in 1855, and, Phillips ventured, “the South, always conservative, always jealous of power,” would follow “Virginia, the oldest of the sisters,” which “has led the way to triumph” in preserving the “principle of religious equality and freedom.”⁶³

⁶²Wise, *Religious Liberty*, quotations on 14, 20, 24, 30; “The Nominees of the Democratic Party,” *Richmond Enquirer*, Dec. 5, 1854, clipping in Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook of Ellen Wright Wise; “Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” quotation on 74. See also, “An Appeal to the Clergy,” reprinted in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 270-2.

⁶³*Letter of Hon. P. Phillips, of Mobile, Ala., on the Religious Proscription of Catholics* (n.p., [1855]), quotations on 3, 8; *Speech of John M. Bright, Esq., against Know-Nothingism, at Flat Creek, Bedford County, September 11, 1855* (Nashville, TN: G. C. Torbett and Co., 1855), 13-4, 18. See also, *Letters of Hon. A. H. Stephens and Rev. H. H. Tucker, on Religious Liberty* (Atlanta: C. R. Hanleiter and Co., Printers, 1855).

The southern supporters of the Democracy rejected Know-Nothingism as alien to their section and its values. The American party was the leading edge of a Yankee onslaught. Wise shouted at Alabama Democrat J. L. M. Curry, “that ‘*ism*’ is the worst of all—a cunning devise [*sic*] to subject slave-holders to the sign of passive obedience & non-resistance to a Dark Lantern Priest craft oligarchy of N. England!!” The Mississippi author and Methodist preacher Augustus Baldwin Longstreet likewise spurned the American party, asserting, “the thing has no southern feature.” Its “avowed aims,” he expounded, were to attack Catholics, “oppose foreigners,” and, while “fighting under an anti-Catholic flag, they killed nobody but Democrats.” It was unfortunate, Longstreet observed, that the party was “hissing, bleating, and coughing down such men as Wise and Douglas,” thereby linking the nation’s most prominent Democrat from each section in their joint contest with the order.⁶⁴

Southern Democrats had unique reasons to resist the union of temporal and spiritual authority, as slaveholding stood foremost among the rights endangered by religious reformism. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, elite white men in the South had interpreted evangelical Protestantism as a challenge to their mastery. They converted only when evangelicalism became a tool with which to reify their dominance over household dependents. Even more menacing than a congregation curbing one’s mastery was the government doing so in the sanctimonious guise of religion. If Americans accepted that religion “forms ‘an element of our political system,’” as Know-Nothings claimed, argued Phillips, “we should soon be called upon to submit our consciences to Congressional dictation.” This warning echoed Phillips’s earlier protest against congressional dictation regarding territorial slavery, which he also opposed

⁶⁴Henry A. Wise to J. L. M. Curry, Only, near Onancock, Virginia, December 11, 1854, manuscript letter inserted between pages 8 and 9 of Curry’s personal copy of Wise, *Religious Liberty*, J. L. M. Curry Pamphlet Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; Longstreet, *Know Nothingism Unveiled*, 3, 4.

as a staunch proponent of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The national Know-Nothing party's religious intolerance and antislavery agitation were each "an invasion of the rights of the States." A Democrat speaking at a party barbecue made the connection between religious liberty and slaveholders' rights: "There is not a man in Tennessee who will say that any other State has a right to interfere with our rights of property. Then I ask, Are not our religious rights more sacred." Southerners' aversion to "religious and political fanaticism" hearkened back to the protection of slaveholding as a state right and as an inviolable right of white men.⁶⁵

There was, moreover, a distinctly Virginian reason to bid defiance to "proscription, bigotry and intolerance." After reading an address R. M. T. Hunter delivered at Petersburg, a Virginian compared the senator to Thomas Jefferson. He gushed, "if the Apostle of Liberty desired to perpetuate his fame by directing it to be inscribed on his tomb that he was the author of the 'Act for establishing Religious Freedom,' so might you rest the immortality of your name upon the delivery of this speech." Virginia Democrats wrapped themselves in the mantle of "Jefferson the Free Thinker." They lionized their states' tradition of religious disestablishment and toleration, exemplified in the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom and embodied by the Sage of Monticello. The American party's "venom of intolerance," in contrast, contradicted "the

⁶⁵*Letter of Hon. P. Phillips, of Mobile, Ala., on the Religious Proscription of Catholics*, 4; *Speech of John M. Bright, Esq.*, 14-6; "Letter of Hon. Philip Phillips," *Pennsylvanian*, Oct. 24, 1855, clipping in bound volume, Box 13, Philip Phillips Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; *Speech of Hon. P. Phillips, of Alabama, on the Territorial Bill. Delivered in the House of Representatives, April 24, 1854* (n.p.: Towers, Printers, [1854]); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 206-52; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 130-207. On postbellum southerners' attitudes toward religious reform, see Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

native generosity of the Virginia character” and tarnished the legacy of the man who founded the Democracy.⁶⁶

Virginia Democrats, and those throughout the Slave States, were happy to share Jefferson’s legacy with Irish Catholics, because Irish-Americans appeared willing to defend slavery and white supremacy. Native-born Protestants fueled fanaticism in the Free States, while “Irishmen have vindicated the Constitution and law against the fiendish clamor of raging and gnashing hell-hound mobs of native Abolitionists.” Southern Democrats praised the Irish militia regiment which helped secure the enslaved fugitive Anthony Burns from an abolitionist crowd in Boston in order to dispatch him to the South in 1854. An Old Whig in Maryland friendly to the Democracy took a pragmatic view of Catholics. Unlike northern Protestants, the Catholic Church “does not hold it to be morally or religiously wrong to hold slaves, but on the contrary, by precept and example teaches it to be religiously and morally right to hold them.” “We of the South,” he concluded, can “confidently rely for the maintenance of our Constitutional rights upon the Catholic of Massachusetts, as upon the Catholic of Louisiana [*sic*] or Maryland.” 1850s Democrats updated Van Buren and Ritchie’s alliance to include the slaveholders of the South and the Irish Catholics of the North. By defending freedom of conscience, slaveholders forged a mutually beneficial intersectional alliance.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Wise, *Religious Liberty*, 11, 22; S. Bassett French to R. M. T. Hunter, Whitby, May 12, 1855, R. M. T. Hunter Papers, The Library of Virginia, Richmond; *Richmond Enquirer* reprinted in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 28.

⁶⁷*Richmond Examiner*, April 17, 1855, reprinted in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 334-5; “Correspondence,” Thomas G. Pratt to John Walton et al., Annapolis, September 13, 1855, broadside, Box 1, Folder 4, Perkins Papers. See also, Thomas F. Carpenter to [Stephen A. Douglas], Providence, April 15, 1854, Douglas Papers; *Letter of an Adopted Catholic, Addressed to the President of the Kentucky Democratic Association of Washington City, on Temporal Allegiance to the Pope, and the Relations of the Catholic Church and Catholics, Both Native and Adopted, to the System of Domestic Slavery and Its Agitation in the United States* (n.p., [1856]); Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 45-6; Gilbert Osofsky, “Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Dilemmas of Romantic Nationalism,” *The American Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (Oct. 1975): 889-912; and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, 1991, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1999), 140-4.

The Democracy in Philip Phillips's state, rechristened the "Democratic and Anti-Know Nothing party of Alabama," turned this intersectional bargain into a partisan platform. At its January 1856 convention in Montgomery, the party reduced its platform to two essential "principles": "the perfect equality of privileges—civil, religious and political—of every citizen of our country, without reference to the place of his birth" and "the unqualified right of the people of the slave-holding States to the protection of their property in the States, [and] in the Territories." Southerners wedded a genuine concern for freedom of conscience and immigrants' rights to a defense of territorial slavery—"when efforts are made to separate these two questions, the Democratic party [...] says: We cannot compromise either proposition, but stand united upon both." This was more than a sectional *quid pro quo*—it was the distillation of a worldview prizing the self-determination of all white men.⁶⁸

Conclusion: The National Politics of Fanaticism, Slavery, and Race

Southern Democrats conjured Jefferson with care. While his legacy was useful for censuring Know-Nothings for their trespasses against the "liberty of conscience," many white southerners had no patience with the other notions of freedom attributed to Virginia's "Apostle of Liberty." Indeed, the extent to which Jefferson had fallen out of favor with Democrats, even at the North, became fodder for those eager to charge that the party had betrayed its founder's principles by catering to the Slave Power. Indianan John Pettit, for instance, speaking in favor of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, roused national ire in early 1854 when he "fearlessly" told the Senate that Jefferson's dictum that "all men are created equal" was a "self-evident lie." Pettit wanted no one to think that he was the equal of African Americans. Only a year after Hunter found himself

⁶⁸*Official Proceedings of the Democratic and Anti-Know-Nothing State Convention of Alabama, Held in the City of Montgomery, January 8th and 9th, 1856* (Montgomery: Advertiser and Gazette Book and Job Office, 1856), 8.

compared to Jefferson, he also arraigned “that cardinal political maxim, that all men were created equal” as one of “those doctrines upon which” the opponents of slavery were “agitating the public mind and seeking to subvert the social system of the South.” Invoking Jefferson served Democrats in protesting only one type of enslavement—that of white men.⁶⁹

Know-Nothings were unsound on chattel slavery, but they did promote the enslavement of white men. Fanatical Know-Nothings first degraded themselves by forfeiting their own whiteness and mastery. By their “passive obedience” to their hierarchical organization and “by their test oath [they] enslave themselves.” In Washington County in southwest Virginia, “they already boasted to have captured and bound and fettered, by oaths and pledges, a majority of the *freemen* of the county.” But they also jeopardized the republican equality of other white men by sorting the citizenry into unequal classes. “If you proscribe the Catholic for his religion,” Hunter explained, “you refuse him the equal privileges of a citizen, and stamp upon him the brand of inferiority.” Wise elaborated, “if we let foreigners be naturalized and don’t extend to them equality of privileges, we set up classes and distinctions of persons wholly opposed to Republicanism.” The civil and political inequality of white men offended Jacksonians’ egalitarian sensibilities, leading Democrat to conclude that they confronted the same “*exclusive*, if not an aristocratic feeling” that had earlier characterized Federalism.⁷⁰

Democrats cast this nullification of equal citizenship in racial terms, marking it as a threat to *Herrenvolk* democracy. Know-Nothings, Democrats ascertained, wanted to codify the

⁶⁹Wise, *Religious Liberty*, 9; “Nebraska and Kansas. Speech of Hon. John Pettit, of Indiana, in the Senate, February 20, 1854,” *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Cong., 1st sess., 1853-54, 23, appendix:214; *The Democratic Demonstration at Poughkeepsie. Speech of Hon. R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia* (n.p., [1856]), 6-7. On Jefferson’s contested legacy on the eve of the Civil War, see Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jeffersonian Image in the American Mind* (1960; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 162-209.

⁷⁰Wise, *Religious Liberty*, quotations on 7, 20, 64; *Richmond Examiner*, reprinted in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 117; “Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” 83; “Know-Nothingism an Alias of Federalism,” *Richmond Examiner*, Feb. 20, 1855, reprinted in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 54-60.

inferiority of some white men; they also evinced more solicitude for the rights of African Americans than for whites, a common complaint against fanatics. Hunter pointed to Massachusetts, controlled by Know-Nothings, during a speech in Richmond. He observed, “whilst she is so anxious to free the African slave in the South, she is engaged in a scheme to proscribe and degrade; yes, sirs, and to enslave [...] all that portion of her own white laborers who are foreign born.” Even the liberty of “the native-born laborer” was precarious, Hunter intimated. A Tennessean shared his thoughts on imposing duties without rights upon immigrants: “When war comes he shall fight our battles, but he shall not rise much above the manumitted slave in his rights.” Virginian James Lawson Kemper, campaigning in 1856, denigrated the Know-Nothing presidential candidate for alleged antislavery views. That “he who now pronounces a Dutchman unworthy of Citizenship in this country, supported a petition asking that Free-negro foreigners should be naturalized as citizens of the Union” highlighted fanatics’ undue regard for African Americans’ rights and their hostility to fellow white men.⁷¹

For Senator Hunter, the danger came from the deeper fanatical impulse of which Know-Nothingism was but one facet. Rather than connecting abolitionism and Know-Nothingism, he compared abolitionism with socialism before an audience in Poughkeepsie, New York in 1856. Abolitionists undermined property in man, while the “socialist sect” attacked private property more generally, endangering the northern free labor economy. Free white laborers in the North, Hunter explained, possessed property in their labor; invalidating property rights would subsequently leave a worker unable to “sell his labor in the highest market.” This slaveholding patrician, in his first time speaking outside the South, postured as an ally of northern free labor. Hunter’s arguments that slavery and hired labor each constituted examples of “hold[ing] property

⁷¹“Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” 87; *Speech of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, on Know Nothingism*, 13; Kemper, “For Buchanan vs. Fillmore,” 18.

in man” skirted perilously close to analogizing northern workers with slaves, a trap into which other haughty planters fell. Hunter nonetheless wove a national defense of white manhood against fanaticism by “endeavoring to show that the application of these principles would be revolutionary in any system of society.” The legislative meddling of abolitionists, Know-Nothings, and socialists would all, Hunter suggested, lead to a nationwide diminution of the liberty of white Americans.⁷²

Henry Wise was more sincere than Hunter in advancing white men’s democracy. He earned a reputation as a champion of equality by demanding the “white basis” for legislative representation during Virginia’s 1850-1851 constitutional convention. Although an Eastern Shore planter, Wise chafed at the malapportionment that diluted the power of white men west of the Blue Ridge. Western Virginians later advanced Wise for the gubernatorial nomination, according to a resident of the Shenandoah Valley, due to “the noble stand he took in the late convention in favor of the white basis.” Historian Craig M. Simpson holds that a calculating Wise bartered democracy in return for western loyalty to slavery. Wise’s career, however, testified to his reverence for the individually autonomous and democratically equal white man. Unlike Hunter’s backhanded dismissal of workingmen, Wise wished to “exalt the dignity of mechanic labor,” a profession “upon which every civilization depends.” Even his seemingly heterodox hobbies, including public education, economic diversification, and statewide internal improvements, were meant to make tangible Jacksonian equality. These convictions spurred Wise to clothe himself in homespun and barnstorm the state in 1855 for his unprecedentedly democratic campaign.⁷³

⁷²Hunter, *The Democratic Demonstration at Poughkeepsie*, 1, 6-10.

⁷³H. Martz to John Letcher, Rockingham City, VA, November 10, 1854, Letcher Papers; *Address Delivered by Gov. Henry A. Wise, in October 1856, before the Virginia Mechanics Institute of the City of Richmond* (Richmond:

Kenneth Rayner, a leader of the American party in North Carolina, called Wise's widely circulated missive a "*pronunciamento* against the so-called order of 'Know-Nothings,' not only in Virginia, but throughout the Union." Crafting a national response was indeed Wise's intention. Wise's texts were already bringing wayward Democrats back to the fold in Arkansas, and one supplicant requested additional aid from Virginia against the "political party that has very recently sprung into existence." During his canvass, Wise addressed the rest of the South and the nation as a whole, because Democrats everywhere defied the same fanatical foe. He juxtaposed Democrats' conservatism with fanaticism, which included "Unitarianism, Universalism, Fourierism, Millerism, Mormonism—all the odds and ends of isms." A northern senator reminded Wise of his "promise": "that if the sword was placed in your hands as Gov you would use it if necessary not only on the Northern fanatics but upon ones at home also." Wise concurred that enemies were "now in our camp, south, north, east and west," continuing, "I rejoice that you and thousands of other honest and earnest men approve of my remedies against them."⁷⁴

The Democrats of the Free States, where most Catholics and immigrants lived, were not alone in combating nativist fanaticism. Southerners, likewise, did not meet abolitionist

Ritchie and Dunnivant, Prs., 1857), 9; *Speech Delivered by Henry A. Wise, at the Free School Celebration, in the County of Northampton, on the Fourth of July, 1850; Dedicated to the People of Accomack and Northampton, and Now Addressed through Them to the People of the State of Virginia* (Baltimore: Bull and Tuttle, 1850); Craig Simpson, "Political Compromise and the Protection of Slavery: Henry A. Wise and the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1850-1851," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 83, no. 4 (Oct. 1975): 387-405; Rice, "The Know-Nothing Party in Virginia," 68; Simpson, *A Good Southerner*, 110-1. Freehling interprets the 1855 gubernatorial election as a showdown between a political culture of deference and a democratic political culture employed by Wise to protect slavery. Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant*, 89-93.

⁷⁴*Reply of Hon. Kenneth Rayner to the Manifesto of Hon. Henry A. Wise*, 3; J.[?] H. Moore to R. M. T. Hunter, Pine Bluffs, AR, March 7, 1856, Hunter Papers; Wise, *Religious Liberty*, 50; George W. Jones to Henry A. Wise, Dubuque, IA, July 8, 1855; Henry A. Wise to George W. Jones, Only, near Onancock, VA, July 27, 1855, typescript, both in the Wise Family Papers, 1777-1973.

fanaticism on their own. Former Virginia congressman Richard K. Meade related to Hunter that midwestern Democrats such as Stephen Douglas and Jesse Bright had offered to provide “their opinions of this party & its ultimate tendencies” and to “give their views in relation to the designs of the Know Nothings of the North.” Virginians welcomed the cooperation of northerners experienced in sparring with Know-Nothingism. As Meade counseled Hunter, “I am fearful of the result of our elections. If upon the authority of these gentlemen [...] we could show their affiliations with the abolitionists, the party would at once be driven to the wall.” The Know-Nothings’ “ultimate tendencies,” whether defined as the proscription of immigrants or of slaveholders, perturbed northerners and southerners alike.⁷⁵

Douglas went to Virginia in 1855 to share his “authority” on the topic. He told a Richmond crowd that midwestern Democrats had already grappled with fanaticism—“a combination of Abolitionists, Whigs, Know Nothings and anti-Liquor men,” united by antipathy to “the great Nebraska principle, and against the Democratic party sustaining it.” Know-Nothings in particular “substituted, in a government where the individual and the people are sovereign, a conflicting sovereignty and a different and dangerous authority.” The previous year, Douglas had visited Indianapolis to confront fanaticism. He accused slavery’s opponents of thwarting white men’s self-government by doubting the truism that “if they (the people of the Territories) can legislate for all else, why not for niggers.” Douglas delivered the refrain that he could say the same thing in the Slave States or the Free States, because Democrats “speak only the truth, and that is applicable everywhere.” The truth that Democrats peddled in Indiana and

⁷⁵R. K. Meade to R. M. T. Hunter, Petersburg, February 10, 1855, Douglas Papers.

Virginia during the realignment elections of 1854 and 1855 was that only their party could protect white men's self-government and racial supremacy.⁷⁶

Wise's election in May, Virginia diplomat A. Dudley Mann recognized, would "be every where hailed by the democracy" as "a great triumph." Democrats in other southern states took heart and hoped to "stand by the side of the proud old Commonwealth" in their contests against the new party. Across the Slave States in 1855, Know-Nothings went down to defeat. Following their success, North Carolina Democrats invited Virginia congressman Charles James Faulkner to a "Grand Anti Know Nothing Festival" in Granville County. Northerners also savored the rout of the Virginia Know-Nothings. Joseph Wright, after his party electorally recovered in 1855, bragged to his new gubernatorial counterpart, "our State is side by side with Virginia. [...] Indiana is safe for the National Democracy of 1856." He also expressed to Wise his "hope that I shall have the pleasure of witnessing your inauguration." The Democracy had achieved a decisive national victory in Virginia, and Democrats rejoiced. New Yorkers saw Tammany Hall illuminated, while Philadelphians heard one hundred guns chortle in self-congratulation. A dinner party in Dubuque, meanwhile, offered three toasts to Wise's presidential prospects. Even the embattled Franklin Pierce sighed with relief, realizing that "the result of the election in Virginia has put a new face upon the prospects of the Democratic party—the only party which carries no dark lantern & gives its time honored banner to the breeze."⁷⁷

⁷⁶"Judge Douglas in Richmond," in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 68; *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Sept. 7, 1854.

⁷⁷A. Dudley Mann to [John Perkins], Washington, May 14, 1855, Perkins Papers; Jephtha Dudley et al., Democratic Central Committee, to Joseph Holt, Frankfort, KY, June 14, 1855, Joseph Holt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Joseph Allison et al., committee, to Charles James Faulkner, Warrenton, NC, November 14, 1855, Faulkner Family Papers; Joseph A. Wright to Henry A. Wise, Indianapolis, November 24, 1855, Joseph A. Wright Papers, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; "The Virginia Election—The Democratic Victory," reprinted from the *Albany Atlas*, clipping; "Democratic Rejoicings over the Virginia Election," newspaper clipping, both in Newspaper Clippings Scrapbook of Ellen Wright Wise; George W. Jones to Henry A. Wise, Dubuque, IA, July 8,

Yet fanaticism still stalked the land. Later that year, Whig Edward Everett wished to disclose to Wise the “reasons why not only his efforts, but those of all the leading spirits of conservatism, are well nigh powerless amid the hosts of political huckstering rascals” in Massachusetts. But the Virginia election did provide a brief respite from the ravaging effects of the partisan realignment. Even as late as 1858, when the party was suffering from the sectional fissures which would eventually consume it, Senator George W. Jones of Iowa reminisced with Wise about “the wonderful triumph which elevated you to your present position & which was the death-blow to Know Nothingism in Virginia, if not in the whole South & the Union itself every where.”⁷⁸

1855, Wise Family Papers, 1777-1973; Franklin Pierce to Stephen A. Douglas, Washington, May 28, 1855, Douglas Papers. See also, E. G. W. Butler to John Perkins, Dunboyne, [LA], September 5, 1855, Perkins Papers.

⁷⁸Everett’s sentiments conveyed in [H. A. Wise] to [Henry A. Wise], Boston, September 27, 1855, Wise Family Papers, 1816-1898, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; George Wallace Jones to Henry A. Wise, Washington, D. C., December 13, 1858, Schoff Civil War Collection, Letters and Documents, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

CHAPTER 4: WELCOMING REALIGNMENT:
DEMOCRATS, OLD WHIGS, AND THE CONSERVATIVE DIASPORA IN THE 1850S

It is quite impossible that you should become Know Nothings or Free Soilers; & you have no place to go except to the Democratic party, which has now become the only true conservative party of the Country. We have differed upon several important public questions; but these have been all decided, & I know not the practical political question existing at the present moment on which we hold contrary opinions.

—James Buchanan to a Whig, 1856¹

Robert C. Winthrop shared Edward Everett's dread of fanaticism rampant in Massachusetts in 1855. Scion of a centuries-old New England conservatism, he protested vainly against the living entombment of his party in the wake of fanaticism's success. Observing the partisan realignment from Boston, the necropolis of American Whiggery, Winthrop defied the prevailing wisdom that his party was dead, grousing, "the democracy—I will do them the justice to say—never listen to these idle rumors about their danger of dying, and we might well borrow a leaf out of their book." He lectured his fellow Old Whigs on their principles, fidelity to which would prevent them from fusing with Republicans in state elections in 1855. Whigs, hailing from a "CONSTITUTIONAL PARTY" and a "party of LAW AND ORDER," would never condescend to "rush wildly into the promiscuous ranks of a one-idea party, in order to promote some grand result connected with human liberty." While wary of Republicanism, Winthrop still fell short of endorsing the Democracy. Yet his disdain for antislavery fanaticism possessed important similarities with Democrats' conservatism, which helps explain why many Old Whigs,

¹James Buchanan to William B. Reed, Legation of the United States, London, February 29, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908-11), 10:63.

including eventually even Winthrop himself, voted for, albeit often begrudgingly, Democratic candidates.²

Whigs struggled to perpetuate their party's distinct conservatism during the political disarray of the 1850s. Anxiety among Whigs as to where to cast their political lot, and among members of other parties as to what the unmoored Whigs would do, only exacerbated the realignment's uncertainty. Informing a southern correspondent of the collapse of Whiggery and the ascendancy of "a combination of Know-Nothings & Freesoilers" in Massachusetts, Edward Everett announced that "conservative men have been silenced,—or ceased to be conservative." Whigs like Everett and Winthrop faced a difficult decision in choosing a new political home. Just as Caleb Cushing forbade the fusion of Democrats and Free Soilers in Massachusetts, Winthrop refused to sanction antislavery fusion for Whigs. Some joined the Know Nothings, whether because they held nativist beliefs or because they wished to overtake that party as a vehicle for Whiggery. The most persistent clung to their party or continued it in the guise of "Opposition" parties, especially in the Upper South. Other Whigs, meanwhile, repressed memories of decades of bitter rivalry and cooperated with the Democracy.³

Democrats welcomed this political flux and sought a tactical reconciliation with Whiggery. A vigorous contest over the political center ensued as multiple parties courted former Whigs, hoping to profit from their conservative, Unionist reputation. Republicans, Know-

²*Robert C. Winthrop on Fusion* (n.p., [1855]), quotations on 1-3; Robert C. Winthrop Jr., *A Memoir of Robert C. Winthrop. Prepared for the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1897), 167-68, 170-95, 199-200, 202-9.

³Quotation from Edward Everett to William Henry Trescot, Boston, June 6, 1855[1856?]; Millard Fillmore to Edward Everett, Buffalo, July 12, 1856; Edward Everett to William Henry Trescot, Boston, December 24, 1856, all in the *Edward Everett Papers* (microfilm edition), Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston. On the continuity of southern Whiggery, see Thomas B. Alexander, "Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South, 1860-1877," *The Journal of Southern History* 27, no. 3 (Aug. 1961): 305-29; and Daniel W. Crofts, "The Southern Opposition and the Crisis of the Union," in *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-nineteenth-century American Political History*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel A. Shelden (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 85-111.

Nothings, and Democrats all craved designation as the true “conservative” party capable of purifying the Republic and preserving the Union.⁴ While much scholarship has traced the Whig diaspora into the Know-Nothing and especially the Republican parties, less attention has been paid to those who joined that party of which, as an Alabama Whig-turned-Democrat admitted, “I have all my life been a consistent, perhaps an over ardent opponent.” A considerable portion of the Whig party, both in the Slave States and in the Free States, aided the Democracy.⁵

Whigs made the leap to the Democracy at different times over mounting frustration with their faltering party. In the Slave States, they began to defect over dissatisfaction with President Zachary Taylor and with the 1852 nomination of Winfield Scott. Many Whigs did not regard Taylor’s plan for the Mexican Cession as sufficiently prosouthern and viewed Scott as a cipher for antislavery Conscience Whigs under the lead of William H. Seward. “Far better will it be for the national men of our party,” concluded one southerner, “that a *conservative Democrat* be elected” instead of Scott. A push for the Compromise of 1850 on the part of southern Whigs and northern Democrats hinted at a partisan armistice. When a new pro-Compromise Union party failed to solidify in the South, and as their party deteriorated throughout the region, southern Whigs drifted into the Democracy. In 1854 southern Whigs again broke with their northern

⁴Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (1970; repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 186-225; Michael F. Holt, “Another Look at the Election of 1856,” in *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s*, ed. Michael J. Birkner (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1996), 37-67; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2004), 42-4, 114-8; 119-23, 233-6.

⁵*Speech of Richard W. Walker, Esq., on the Presidential Election, Delivered at Huntsville, ALA. On Thursday, the 28th of August, 1856* (Florence, AL: Gazette Office, 1856), 3; Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 26, 50-2; Thomas H. O’Connor, *Lords of the Loom: The Cotton Whigs and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968), 114-31.

counterparts to pass the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the antislavery stance of northern Whiggery precluded rapprochement.⁶

The increasingly antislavery bent of their party also perturbed conservative Whigs in the Free States. Cotton Whigs, epitomized by the New England followers of Daniel Webster, and Silver Grays, following the lead of New York's Millard Fillmore, feared that discussing slavery endangered the Union and corroded intersectional amity. They preferred a public silence on the topic and prioritized Unionism over their antislavery convictions. Webster resented that “the [h]oi polloi of the Whig party, especially in the north and east, were [...] fast sinking into the slough of freesoilism and abolitionism.” Grumpy over once again being bypassed for his party's presidential nomination, he withdrew support from the Whig ticket in 1852. A Maryland Whig explained his party's crushing defeat that year: “The conservative spirit of the country was aroused, the Whig candidate was distrusted, and the Democratic party achieved an overwhelming

⁶Whig Testimony against the Election of General Scott to the Presidency of the U. S.: *Opinions of Henry Clay—Thos. G. Pratt—Geo. E. Badger, and Other Distinguished Whigs, and the Whig Press* (n.p.: C. Alexander, Printer, [1852]), quotation on 5; *A Document for All Thinking Men! The Political Letters and Writings of General Scott, Reviewed, Discussed, and Compared* (n.p., [1852]), 4-5; *Letter of Hon. Henry W. Hilliard, on the Political Issues of the Day* (Montgomery: Confederation Book and Job Office, 1858), 3-5; “Speech of Hon. Isaac D. Jones,” in *Letter from the Hon. James Alfred Pearce, United States Senator from Maryland, on the Politics of the Day. Letter from the Hon. Thomas G. Pratt, United States Senator from Maryland, to the Whigs of That State. Speech of the Hon. Isaac D. Jones, Delivered in Response to the Call of a Democratic Procession at Princess Anne, Somerset County, Md., on the Evening of Tuesday, July 15, 1856. Speech of the Hon. John W. Crisfield, Delivered at Princess Anne, Somerset County, Md., on Tuesday Evening, July 15, 1856, Responding to the Call of a Democratic Procession* (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Standard, 1856), 14-5; John L. Stephens to Daniel Webster, LaGrange, GA, August 3, 1852; Charles Fletcher to Daniel Webster, Kalorama, August 17, 1852, both in *The Papers of Daniel Webster. Series One: Correspondence*, ed. Charles M. Wiltse and Michael J. Birkner (Hanover, NH: The University Press of New England, 1974-86), 7:341-2, 344-8; Henry Slicer to Alpheus Felch, Georgetown, D. C., October 5, 1848, Alpheus Felch Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; William R. King to Philip Phillips, Senate Chamber, June 26, 1852, Philip Phillips Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Henry W. Hilliard to Nathaniel Niles, Hamilton, GA, August 13, 1851, Nathaniel Niles Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (1978; repr., New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1983), 70-2, 97-8, 118-20, 148.

triumph.” As they would in subsequent elections, wayward Whigs contributed to this Democratic victory.⁷

Like carrion birds patiently presiding over a slow death, Democrats greedily enjoyed the realignment’s effect on Whiggery. They intended to expedite its demise by eulogizing their old foe. Through mourning the death of influential Old Whigs, the Whig party, and the second party system itself, Democrats tried to convince Whigs that their party was dead, and that so too were the issues over which they had previously sparred. Whigs and Democrats could now ally as conservatives and nationalists against the new parties and their dangerous *isms*. Democrats also appealed to Whigs as fellow white men. These former antagonists shared a stake in defending the white man’s republic against fanatics who fostered female and black political agency. Democrats proclaimed that they were fellow conservatives, but Democrats and Whigs did not converge ideologically even when they coordinated politically. Their conservatism meant different things. Understanding how Democrats cooperated with Whigs further clarifies the meaning of antebellum American conservatism and Democrats’ own variant of it. Democrats resisted realignment when the question was of maintaining their own party, but they welcomed it when it came to depriving the Whigs of theirs.

Eulogizing the Second Party System

After attending a colleague’s funeral in 1848, Michigan senator Alpheus Felch reported to his wife that “we have had an unusual number of deaths in Congress the present year.” He

⁷Quotation from Daniel Webster to James Louis Petigru, Washington, August 15, 1852; Alexander Hamilton Lawrence to George Jacob Abbott, Washington D. C., May 5, 1852; Daniel Webster to Moses Hicks Grinnell, with enclosure, Marshfield, October 12, 1852, all in *The Papers of Daniel Webster*, 7:322, 344, 357-8; “Speech of Hon. Isaac D. Jones,” quotation on 15. See also, John Y. Mason to Lewis Cass, Washington, September 25, 1848, Lewis Cass Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; *Whig Testimony against the Election of General Scott*; Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 26; and O’Connor, *Lords of the Loom*, 114-31.

tallied “nine members of the present congress [who] have died since the 4th March of last year,” which, he conjectured, represented “a much larger number than usual for the same length of time.” Political deaths placed a unique burden on the nation. As Felch explained, “all members of Congress who die here are buried at the public expense, at a cost near a thousand Dollars.” “The pay of the member,” moreover, “is also always given for the whole session, notwithstanding his death may occur soon after its commencement.” Congressional vacancies left constituents bereft of representation, and they strained the nation’s finances.⁸

The period between the end of the Mexican War and the start of the Civil War saw the expiration of numerous prominent political leaders. Politicians seized upon the imagery of death and mourning to interpret not simply the departure of these elder statesmen, but also the uncertainty of the partisan realignment more generally. One senator, eulogizing Vice President William Rufus King, who died in office in 1853, placed his passing in a larger context: “those to whom our people have been long accustomed to look [...] are falling fast around us.” “It is an anxious thing to feel their loss,” he continued, “at a period like this, pregnant with change, and teeming, perhaps, with great and strange events.” Democrats and Whigs reached for a uniquely potent metaphor to explain these developments—when they mourned the death of individual statesmen, they were also grieving over the death of the second American party system.⁹

Lamenting the death of Jacksonian two-party politics was a means by which Democrats and fellow conservatives forged unity amidst the “political anarchy” of the 1850s. They

⁸Alpheus Felch to wife, Washington, April 5, 1848, Felch Papers.

⁹Address of R. M. T. Hunter, in *Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. William R. King, of Alabama, Vice President of the United States Delivered in the Senate and in the House of Representatives of the United States, Eighth of December, 1853* (Washington: Beverley Tucker, 1854), 13. For historical approaches to death and mourning in the Civil War era, see Stephen Berry, ed., *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War’s Ragged Edges* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011); Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008); and Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1992), 63-89.

envisioned “the conservative men of the country of all shades of opinion, and of all old party alliances” uniting against the fanatical parties imperiling the Union. Democrats did not simply gloat over the death of Whiggery; rather, they were strategically welding “disintegrated Whiggery” onto their party in order to grant the Democracy a monopoly of American conservatism. Democrats mourned the likes of Henry Clay and Daniel Webster to argue that the Whig party had died and that so too had the political culture which previously legitimized partisan opposition. In their eulogies of deceased parties and statesmen, Democrats and their Whig allies selectively remembered past political battles in order to enshrine a standard of acceptable partisan competition which denied legitimacy to upstart political coalitions. Conservative Democrats and politically homeless Whigs railed against an emergent style of politics animated by sectional blocs and centered on fraught questions like slavery. The absorption of residual Whiggery into the Democracy was both a means for Democrats to definitively prove that Whiggery was dead and to make the cause of American conservatism exclusively theirs, potentially allowing Democrats to triumph over their new foes just as they had prevailed over their traditional one.¹⁰

¹⁰“Letter of Hon. James A. Pearce, Washington, July 31, 1856,” in *Old Line Whigs for Buchanan and Breckinridge: Letters from Hon. James Alfred Pearce, and Hon. Thomas G. Pratt, to the Whigs of Maryland. Speeches of Hon. J. W. Crisfield, of Maryland, and Hon. James B. Clay, of Kentucky* (n.p., [1856]), 3; *Letter of Hon. Henry W. Hilliard*, 6; E. C. Sugg to William H. English, Troy, January 1, 1855, William Hayden English Family Papers, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis. By eulogy, I do not mean only formal funeral addresses, although many politicians certainly received such encomiums. Rather, I am employing the concept elastically by finding discussions of and praise for the dead in a variety of political print culture, including stump speeches and pamphlets, some of them far removed in time from actual expirations. Rufus Choate hinted at the potential political uses of eulogy in an oration on Daniel Webster: “you cannot speak of him without seeming to grow polemical, without seeming to make an attack upon other men, upon organizations, upon policy, upon tendencies. You cannot say of him what is true, and what you know to be true, but you are thought to be disparaging or refuting somebody else.” “Speech on the Birthday of Daniel Webster, January 21, 1859,” in Rufus Choate and Samuel Gilman Brown, *The Works of Rufus Choate with a Memoir of His Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1862), 2:442-3. On the political uses of eulogy and memorials, see Andrew Burstein, “Immortalizing the Founding Fathers: The Excesses of Public Eulogy”; Matthew Dennis, “Patriotic Remains: Bones of Contention in the Early Republic,” both in *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*, ed. Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 91-107, 136-48; Desirée Henderson, *Grief and Genre in American Literature, 1790-1870* (Surrey, Great Britain: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 47-68; and Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*.

A refrain of Democrats in the 1850s was, as one put it bluntly, “*the Whig party is dead.*” James Buchanan, stumping for Franklin Pierce, unfavorably compared Winfield Scott with Henry Clay, asserting that “Mr. Clay [...] was the very essence, the life and soul of Whiggery.” The implication was clear. If Clay was the “life and soul of Whiggery,” then Whiggery was dead as early as 1852. A Whig newspaper in Boston acknowledged that the nomination of the allegedly antislavery Scott troubled conservative Whigs—“*It fell like a funeral pall upon their spirits.*” Pierce and the Democracy, in comparison, were the true heirs to Clay’s legacy. In an obituary address for his Whig colleague who died in 1856, Senator James A. Bayard of Delaware noted that John M. Clayton was “a cherished leader of one of the great political parties of the country whilst its national organization was maintained.” Bayard conflated the demise of the man with that of the only party which could challenge Democrats’ pretensions to nationalism.¹¹

Many Whigs concurred with these assessments, although not all agreed that their party was totally extinct. Whigs already suffered from an acute morbidness, burdened with the memory that “twice have the Whigs carried the Presidential election, and on both occasions, [...] they were called upon to mourn the death of their President.” Rufus Choate was unwilling to concede his party’s death, but admitted that the question of “whether we are dead, as reported in the newspapers, or, if not, whether we shall fall upon our own swords and die even so, will be a debate possessing the interest of novelty at least.” One Whig regretted that, despite “every effort to resuscitate the old party,” Whiggery’s “resurrection” was not imminent. Listening to the

¹¹*Speech of Hon. John Perkins, Jr., of Louisiana, on the Results of Two Years’ Democratic Rule in the Country* (n.p., [1855]), 31; *Great Speech of the Honourable James Buchanan, Delivered at the Mass Meeting of the Democracy of Western Pennsylvania, at Greensburg, on Thursday, Oct. 7, 1852* (Philadelphia, 1852), 9; *Boston Courier* quoted in *Whig Testimony against the Election of General Scott*, 12; Address of James A. Bayard, in *Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. John M. Clayton, of Delaware, in the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, December 3, 1856* (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1857), 8.

ubiquitous findings of political coroners, Americans were primed to grieve the passing of the Whig party, a conclusion which Democrats encouraged.¹²

Perhaps the most compelling evidence Democrats marshaled was the fact that prominent Old Whigs were dead. Death was, of course, bipartisan, even though chauvinistic Democrats might on occasion bluster, as one did during a yellow fever epidemic that seemed to strike down only Whigs, “Democrats dont die so easily.” The interbellum period saw the frequent passing of elder statesmen from both parties. Presidents Polk and Taylor, Vice President King, Senator Clayton, in addition to the “immortal triumvirate” of Webster, Calhoun, and Clay, died in the late 1840s and 1850s. One Whig congressman marveled that “death has so often invaded” Congress, continuing, “even the executive mansion is not unfrequently invaded by the King of Terrors.” This gloom only accentuated those relics of the Age of Jackson who stubbornly endured. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, for example, although “yet living, [...] already ranked with his illustrious predecessors.” His longevity, and perhaps also his cadaveresque physiognomy, prompted William Lowndes Yancey to depict Taney as “trembling upon the very verge of the grave, for years kept merely alive by the pure spirit of patriotic duty.”¹³

Democrats exploited their connections to these lamented statesmen to win over living Whigs. A bipartisan political past was an electoral asset for conservatives. One of Franklin Pierce’s campaign biographies boasted that he had served alongside the “intellectual giants of the

¹²“Speech Of Hon. Jno. W. Crisfield,” in *Old Line Whigs for Buchanan and Breckinridge*, 10; “Letter to the Whig Convention at Worcester, Mass., Boston, October 1, 1855,” in *The Works of Rufus Choate*, 1:199; “Speech of James B. Clay, Delivered at the Union Meeting in Mason County, Kentucky,” in *Old Line Whigs for Buchanan and Breckinridge*, 14. On the role of coroners in the antebellum South and the importance of their reports as historical sources, see Stephen Berry, “The Historian as Death Investigator,” in *Weirding the War*, 176-88.

¹³W. H. Wilder to [Lucius Lyon], New Orleans, August 21, 1848, Lucius Lyon Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Address of Sampson Harris, and Address of John Taylor, in *Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. William R. King*, 36, 62-3; *Letter of Hon. Henry W. Hilliard*, 5; *Speech of the Hon. William L. Yancey, of Alabama, Delivered in the National Democratic Convention, Charleston, April 28th, 1860. With the Protest of the Alabama Delegation* (Charleston: Walker, Evans and Co., Print., [1860]), 11.

land.” These included, in bipartisan couplets, “Calhoun and Webster, Buchanan and Clay, Woodbury and Choate, Grundy and Crittenden, Wright and Southard, Walker and Preston, Rives and Benton.” When the party split in 1860, both Democratic nominees claimed Clay’s imprimatur. Voters learned of Stephen Douglas’s role in the Compromise of 1850 and that “Mr. Clay subsequently bore honorable testimony to the ability, fairness, and patriotism displayed by Mr. Douglas.” John C. Breckinridge, meanwhile, could trace his initial electoral success in a Whig district to “Henry Clay, who abjured his politics to pay a just tribute to the worth and ability of the gallant young Kentuckian.” Such campaign material reveals that Democrats were not simply energizing their partisan base in the 1850s. They were also taking advantage of the realignment to broaden their electoral appeal.¹⁴

Through rhetorical necromancy, Democrats and their Whig allies went further and resurrected the great statesmen. They channeled the spirits of deceased Whigs to bolster the Democracy against nascent parties seeking to capitalize on Whiggish antecedents. One pamphlet screamed, “MR. CLAY SPEAKS,” and encouraged readers to “HEAR HIM” endorse James Buchanan in 1856. James B. Clay, son of the Great Compromiser, decried the “use which has been attempted to be made of the name of my father [...] since his death, for partizan and party purposes.” Yet his indignation did not prevent him from drawing on his father’s memory to justify his approval of the 1856 Democratic ticket and his support for the Buchanan administration during the furor over the Lecompton constitution. James Lawson Kemper, a Virginia Democrat, also conjured Clay’s apparition in his effort to attack the Know-Nothing party in the Old Dominion, exclaiming, “Ah! if the great-hearted Clay could once more walk the

¹⁴*Sketches of the Lives of Franklin Pierce and Wm. R. King, Candidates of the Democratic Republican Party for the Presidency and Vice Presidency of the United States* (n.p., [1852]), 4; James W. Sheahan, *The Life of Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1860), 134; National Democratic Executive Committee, *Biographical Sketches of Hon. John C. Breckinridge, Democratic Nominee for President, and General Joseph Lane, Democratic Nominee for Vice-President* (Washington City, 1860), 6.

earth in the plenitude of his pride! How would his lofty spirit chafe under the unmanly surrender of his party and his cause to the ignoble control” of the Know-Nothings.¹⁵

Douglas summoned the specter of Clay in his 1858 senatorial reelection campaign. He countered Abraham Lincoln’s attempt to yoke himself to Clay as a way to curry favor with Illinois Whigs. Lincoln’s political career and the Republican party itself, Douglas charged, were built atop Clay’s grave. Douglas accused, “Clay was dead, and although the sod was not yet green on his grave, this man undertook to bring into disrepute those great Compromise measures of 1850, with which Clay and Webster were identified.” “After the death of Clay and Webster,” it was easy for the Whig party “to have its throat cut from ear to ear” by Lincoln in his effort to “Abolitionize the Whig party, by dissolving it, [and] transferring the members into the Abolition camp.” Douglas convinced Democrats at least—one southern admirer of the Little Giant gushed, “I had often heard it said that when Randolph Calhoun Clay and Webster died that Patriotism and unflinching integrity were gone but Sir in your present campaigning [*sic*] against, Lincoln, [...] you have shown yourself a patriot gentleman and a Loyal Democrat.”¹⁶

In addition to praising individual statesmen, Democrats also fondly recalled their rivalry with the Whig party itself. Past instances of bipartisan compromise served as a model for how Democrats hoped Whigs would act in the 1850s. In the debates over the Compromise of 1850,

¹⁵*Short Answers to Reckless Fabrications, against the Democratic Candidate for President, James Buchanan* (Philadelphia: William Rice, Book and Job Printer, 1856), 32; *Hon. James B. Clay, to His Constituents of the Ashland District* (n.p., [1858]), quotation on 7; “Speech of James B. Clay,” 15-6; James Lawson Kemper, “For Buchanan vs. Fillmore,” [1856], manuscript speech, 13, James Lawson Kemper Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. See also, Sarah Bischoff Paulus, “America’s Long Eulogy for Compromise: Henry Clay and American Politics, 1854-58,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 11 (March 2014): 28-52.

¹⁶“Mr. Douglas’s Reply, Second Joint Debate, Freeport, August 27, 1858,” in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. Robert W. Johannsen (1965; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97-8; John Kierans to Stephen A. Douglas, Weston, Lewis County, VA, October 3, 1858, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Illinois. On the importance of the unaligned former Whig vote in Illinois in 1858, see Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 41-7, 70-4, 236-7, 288.

two southern Democrats remembered, “men laid aside old party distinctions. The great and illustrious of the land—Clay and Cass, Webster and Dickinson, and many others who had fought each other for years upon questions of policy—gathered together, shoulder to shoulder, like brothers.” Democrats elevated their reimagining of the defunct two-party system to a standard of partisan competition against which Know-Nothings and Republicans could be branded as illegitimate. Whereas a Democrat in 1848 had sneered, “who ever heard of Whig principles,” Democrats in the 1850s professed that they would prefer to grapple with Whiggery over Know-Nothingism and Black Republicanism. “Since the death of these great men the whig party has ceased to exist; even its name is forgotten,” one Democrat alleged. But he realized that “still an opposition is left, more bitter and virulent; barbarous and depraved, than ever the whig party professed to be.” A New York Democrat likewise complained, “I wish that I could say that we had the Whig party to oppose,” because “we never allowed ourselves to apprehend from the old Whig party, any design to subvert our Union or overturn our liberties.”¹⁷

The Know-Nothings, in their animus toward Catholics and immigrants, threatened to “overturn” Americans’ “liberties,” while the Republican party, by agitating the question of slavery, evinced a “design to subvert” the Union. Jacksonian politics, conservatives recollected, consisted of two evenly-matched and high-minded parties jousting over economic platforms, all the while according each other legitimacy and refusing to exploit sectionalism and slavery. This sanitized account was false on two points—the politics of slavery had regularly intruded into the second party system, and the concept of a legitimate opposition had hardly been sacrosanct. But this deliberate rendering of Jacksonian two-party politics was useful for arraigning Know-

¹⁷A Letter from Messrs. [Alexander] White and [James] Abercrombie, of Alabama, to the Chairman of the Carrollton District Convention (n.p.: Gideon and Co., Print, [1852]), 2; W. H. Wilder to Lucius Lyon, New Orleans, June 17, 1848, Lyon Papers; A. Logan to Stephen A. Douglas, Mingo Lodge, near Davenport, IA, December 1, 1855, Douglas Papers; *Speech of General Aaron Ward, at the Great Democratic Mass Meeting, at White Plains, N. Y., on September 16, 1856* (New York: J. W. Bell, Daily News Job Office, [1856]), 4.

Nothings and Republicans for violating what Democrats asserted were the norms governing American politics. Democrats defined Old Whigs and themselves as conservatives in order to portray all other political actors as fanatics.¹⁸

By stressing that the policy disagreements that drove Jacksonian politics were dead, Democrats emphasized the futility of sustaining the Whig party. James Lawson Kemper concluded that “the very questions which heretofore divided the old parties are known to be dead forever. [...] The old issues are buried too deep for any man’s resurrecting arm to reach them.” James B. Clay extended the metaphor; he equated ghoulishly digging up such topics with wielding “weapons dragged from the tomb.” Previous debates, a southern former Whig contended, focused on “mere measures of Governmental policy,” while current disputes touched on “fundamental and vital principles.” Slavery, Democrats agreed, was “the living question now before the country.” With politics centered on slavery, disunion, and fanatical legislation, Whigs would have to affiliate with Democrats, rather than continue in opposition on moribund matters like internal improvements or the subtreasury.¹⁹

R. M. T. Hunter, reacting to the Virginia Know-Nothings in 1855, forthrightly declared, “I prefer the old to the new enemy. The old Whigs were a manly party” that “fought upon principles.” Applauding Whigs’ manly, principled stands, even if those principles were flawed, allowed Democrats to specifically disparage Know-Nothings, often portrayed as political opportunists whose mysterious organization relied on “secret cabals” and “midnight caucuses.” Those Old Whigs who followed leaders such as Millard Fillmore into the American party would

¹⁸On the tenuous concept of loyal opposition in nineteenth-century America, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); and Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁹Kemper, “For Buchanan vs. Fillmore,” 3; “Speech of James B. Clay,” 16; *Speech of Richard W. Walker, Esq.*, 5; *Sketches of the Lives of Franklin Pierce and Wm. R. King*, 8.

find themselves deceived, for the soul of Whiggery did not inhabit that party, which was “soon to be buried with its bones, and forever to rest under the gravestones which bear the record of its follies.” Aaron V. Brown shamed Old Whigs in Tennessee for allowing Know-Nothings to desecrate the memory of their party. He shared his “astonishment that no warm and devoted friend has yet come forward to rescue the fame of HUGH LAWSON WHITE, Mr. WEBSTER, and Mr. CLAY, from this bold charge of corruption in the Whig party.” It was up to “living Statesmen” to preserve this legacy, and Democrats were happy to do it if no one else would.²⁰

Republicans, Democrats found, also failed to adhere to the Whigs’ example.

Conservatives insisted that even at the height of their rivalry the two old parties possessed more in common with each other, because they were national and conservative parties, than either did with this new fanatical one. One Massachusetts Whig judged that “the basis of the [Republican] organization is reciprocal sectional hate.” Whigs, in contrast, were extolled for their moderation and Unionism. They had been a national party that never sought the “exclusive benefit of one section of the country to the exclusive detriment of another.” John M. Clayton, eulogized both for his individual character and for the party he represented, received praise for the “intense nationality of his feelings.” When “the integrity of the Union was involved, he broke those fetters” of partisanship. Democrats hoped that Clayton’s example would lead Whigs to join the Democracy. Their alternative was the Republican party, a “Geographical party” which rejected

²⁰“Mr. Hunter’s Speech in Richmond,” in James P. Hambleton, ed., *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise, with a History of the Political Campaign in Virginia in 1855. To Which is Added a Review of the Position of Parties in the Union, and a Statement of the Political Issues: Distinguishing Them on the Eve of the Presidential Campaign of 1856* (Richmond, VA: J. W. Randolph, 1856), 89-90; A. A. Coleman, “Antebellum Democratic Party Address, before 1861,” manuscript speech, 10, Coleman-Stuart Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; *Plain Facts and Considerations: Addressed to the People of the United States, without Distinction of Party, in Favor of James Buchanan, of Pennsylvania, for President, and John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, for Vice President. By an American Citizen* (Boston: Brown, Bazin, and Company, 1856), 29-31; *Speech of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, on Know Nothingism, at Gallatin, July 4th, 1855* (Nashville: J. F. Morgan, Fine Job and Book Printer, 1855), 5-7, quotations on 6.

moderation in opposing slavery. Gone were the “two great parties” and the nationally inclusive politics they sponsored, when “Webster could address Virginians” and southerners such as “Berrien and Bell and Leigh and Johnson could feel and heighten the inspiration of Faneuil Hall and Bunker Hill.”²¹

Whigs accepted the reality of their demise with varying degrees of enthusiasm for collaboration with “their ancient foe.” Georgian Robert Toombs did not relish working with the Democracy, but pragmatism dictated that course as the best protection for slavery. He begrudged, “there is no safety for our constitutional rights at this time in any other organization & we must therefore do the best we can with them.” The Democracy, unlike the Whigs, remained a viable party. As James B. Clay justified his Democratic dalliance, “we Whigs know well, and to our cost, the wonderful tenacity of the Democratic party.” According to Rufus Choate, there was still enough life left in Whiggery for one last stand for the Union against sectionalism and fanaticism. “The Whigs of Massachusetts are absolutely glad that they are alive,” so that they could fight for the Union, even if it proved fatal. “Would it not be a glorious page on which [...] he should record that their last organic act was to meet the dark wave of this tide of sectionalism,” he mused, “to fall, and let our recorded honors thicken on our graves.” Choate designated the Democratic presidential ticket as the best means to accomplish this goal.²²

Clay, Choate, and likeminded Whigs were prescribing a “Good Death” for their party.

Drew Gilpin Faust has reminded us not only of the centrality of death in the Civil War era, but

²¹“Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall, October 31, 1855,” in *The Works of Rufus Choate*, 2:327-41, quotation on 336; *Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin, of Louisiana, on the Kansas Question. Delivered in the Senate, May 3, 1856* (Washington: The Union Office, 1856), 17; Address of James A. Bayard, in *Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. John M. Clayton*, 8; “Speech ‘On the Political Topics Now Prominent before the Country,’ Delivered at Lowell, Mass., October 28, 1856,” in *The Works of Rufus Choate*, 2:392-3, 394.

²²“Speech of Hon. Isaac D. Jones,” 13; Robert Toombs to Thomas, Washington, D. C., February 9, 1856, Robert Toombs Correspondence, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; “Speech of James B. Clay,” 15; Choate, “Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall,” 330-3; Choate, “Speech ‘On the Political Topics Now Prominent before the Country,’” 412.

also of the importance of meeting one's end in an acceptable way. There were, to be sure, ignoble ways to suffer political death. The rhetoric of decay and dishonorable death suffused political literature. An unlucky politician could, for instance, end up as "a mere effete, corrupting political carcass." One former Democrat, weary of political parties, dismissed presidential candidates as no more than "dead corpses" unsuited to lead an "heroic nation of thirty millions of live and electric men." A Democrat likewise condemned a politician who persisted in outdated partisanship during the crisis: "His very bones are rotten with party selfishness; and when he dies, his poisoned carcass will so putrify the adjacent soil, and so defile with its effluvia the surrounding atmosphere, that none of Gods green grass will ever live above his accursed grave!"²³

A Pennsylvania Whig-turned-Democrat chided "those of fanatic zeal [who] habitually denounce with derision, as 'Union savers,' patriotic citizens and statesmen who have resolved to stand by it to the death." The Union, for this Whig, was instead "an incentive to glorious death," something which fanatical politicians did not understand. A Good Death prescribed by Democrats for the Whigs similarly amounted to "political martyrdom"—sacrificing one's partisan existence on a bold stand for principle, which could include the Union, slavery, or the "Constitution of their country." One Whig died a good political death, because, "before he died, he became a Democrat, and fully and repeatedly atoned for the wrong he did to Mr. Buchanan." Democrats were all too eager to grant absolution and hasten the Good Death of Whiggery.²⁴

²³Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 3-31; "Speech of the Hon. Wm. L. Yancey," June 23, 1860, *Washington, D. C. Constitution*, June 27, 1860; "The Eighteenth Presidency!: Voice of Walt Whitman to Each Young Man in the Nation, North, South, East, and West," 1856, in *The Eighteenth Presidency: A Critical Text*, ed. Edward F. Grier (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1956), 44; Kemper, "For Buchanan vs. Fillmore," 4.

²⁴*An Appeal for the Union. By a Philadelphia Whig* ([Philadelphia], [1856]), 11-2; "Judge Douglas in Richmond," in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 68; *Short Answers to Reckless Fabrications*, 7.

Even as they resisted the realignment's corrosive effects on their party, Democrats strategically welcomed the death of the second party system when it allowed them to monopolize political legitimacy. They went to great lengths to convince Whigs that their party was dead. Encouraging Whigs to become Democrats would protect the Union and would effectively put an end to the Whig party, two objectives which Democrats had pursued for decades. Co-opting Whigs' Unionist credentials, Democrats anticipated, would then allow them to exclude fanatical parties from legitimate political competition. Democrats had long aspired to establish themselves as the natural majority party of the nation, and they seized upon the 1850s realignment as an opportunity to realize this goal.

A Bipartisan Defense of the White Man's Republic

Democrats warned that politicizing disagreements over slavery, with the old issues dead, was newly dangerous. Stephen Douglas hazily remembered that "the old Whig party and the Democratic party had stood on a common platform so far as this slavery question was concerned." The parties "differed about the bank, the tariff, distribution, the specie circular and the sub-treasury," he reminisced, "but we agreed on this slavery question." Democrats and their Whig allies endeavored to recapture this imagined consensus in order to withhold legitimacy from Republicans and Know-Nothings. Conservatives of both old parties wanted to guard the white man's republic against fanatics, who undermined slavery and promoted the political agency of women and African Americans. Safeguarding racial and gender boundaries became a basis of cooperation for Democrats and Old Whigs. Just as they had in the Age of Jackson, these

partisans engaged in the politics of slavery and race, only now they employed this rhetoric to close ranks against a shared enemy.²⁵

The veterans of the second party system were well-versed in the politics of slavery. Dueling parties, and factions within parties, assailed one another for supposed tepid support of slavery. Even rivals in free-state contests trafficked in such accusations. Martin Van Buren, the architect of a system designed to mitigate slavery's centrifugal effects, conceded in 1856 that "slavery questions have from the beginning had more or less to do with our political contests." Still, he noted in response to the rise of the Republican party, these disputes "have never before had the effect of dissolving old party connections and sympathies." Conservative Whigs in the North, like Doughface Democrats, were experienced in the rituals necessary to appease southerners within bisectional parties. While numerous northern Whigs followed their antislavery convictions into the Republican party, many were nostalgic for a national party in which they could join forces with southerners for the good of the Union. Democrats did not have a monopoly on the Doughface sensibility.²⁶

While the Democracy was more avowedly white supremacist, with race functioning as a central component of its partisan ideology, Whigs also subscribed to the racism of America's popular and political culture. In 1852 a Whig pamphlet asserted that Franklin Pierce had

²⁵"Mr. Douglas's Reply, Second Joint Debate, Freeport, August 27, 1858," 98.

²⁶Martin Van Buren to Moses Tilden, Lindenwald, [NY], September 1, 1856, in *Letters and Literary Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, ed. John Bigelow (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1908), 1:119; William J. Cooper Jr., *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); William G. Shade, "'The Most Delicate and Exciting Topics': Martin Van Buren, Slavery, and the Election of 1836," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 459-84. For an example of a northern Whig having to backtrack on a public pronouncement in order to placate southerners who detected a whiff of antislavery sentiment, see H. A. Wise to Edward Everett, Washington, D. C., June 8, 1856; Edward Everett to William Henry Trescot, Boston, June 9, 1856; and Edward Everett to William Henry Trescot, Boston, July 27, 1856, all in the Everett Papers.

criticized the fugitive slave act, signifying that he was “thoroughly imbued with anti-slavery sentiment and prejudice, and that he will betray the South and all its vast interests as readily as Martin Van Buren did.” The Democracy was running a “WOOLLY-HEADED CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENCY.” Democrats dismissed this indictment as a “foul and exploded conspiracy of the abolitionists to represent General Pierce as an abolitionist in his views, in order to defeat his election.” Responding in kind, Democrats noted that the antislavery proclivities of Winfield Scott, not Pierce, should alarm southern voters.²⁷

It was thus reflexive when Old Whigs, like Democrats, reached for the analogy of racial amalgamation to make sense of 1850s partisan fluctuations. Senator James Pearce of Maryland noted that the Know-Nothings were tainted by working with “that motly [*sic*] alliance” composing the Republican party. Robert Winthrop similarly feared Whigs falling in line behind the “speckled and motley” “Fusion flag” overtaking Massachusetts. Responding to this same threat, Massachusetts Democrats warned Whigs that “temperance, statesmanship, constitution, Union, nationality, law and Gospel are to be all abandoned for negro philanthropy, by the leaders of this ‘fusion’ movement, who call themselves ‘*republicans*.’” “The democracy and the Union men of the north” were safer than the “*Black republicans*,” because Democrats’ “love of the Union and the white race is stronger than their false philanthropy for the negro.”²⁸

²⁷See the Whig pamphlet, *Frank. Pierce and His Abolition Allies* (n.p.: Daily American Telegraph, [1852]), quotations on 14, 15; and the Democratic reply, “*Franklin Pierce and His Abolition Allies*” (n.p., [1852]), 5, 7. For another example of the Whig politics of slavery, see *Speech of T. L. Clingman, of North Carolina, on the Principles of the Whig and Democratic Parties. Delivered in the House of Representatives, March 7, 1844* (Washington, D. C.: Gales and Seaton, 1844), 9-14. On Whig racism, see Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Boundaries of American Political Culture in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 97-127.

²⁸“Letter of Hon. James A. Pearce, Washington, July 31, 1856,” 3; *Robert C. Winthrop on Fusion*, 3; B. F. Hallett, James Cheever, Silas Peirce, Stephen D. Massey, and Benjamin J. Gerrish (Committee), *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men against Northern Fusion and Sectionalism. From the Democracy of Boston and Suffolk. Adopted by the Ward and County Committees, in Convention, October, 1855* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, [1855]), 5, 6.

Democrats predicted racial degradation for those Whigs who did not accept their invitation to join the white man's party, and they hastened this degradation themselves by deploying racial attacks against Whigs considering fusion with antislavery or nativist political movements. Samuel S. Cox told Douglas about the "Fusion Anti Nebraska" movement in Ohio and anticipated that "we can to day, whip the Whigs & Abolitionists clean out—niggers too." Such Whigs, as evidenced by those they associated with, forfeited their legitimacy as white political actors. Whigs could affiliate with a "compound and motley mixture of Northern Whigs, Freesoilers and Abolitionists," "a political conglomerate of all parties, headed by Abolitionism," or they could avoid racial debasement with the Democracy. The latter course guaranteed that a Whig "has preserved a proper self-respect, and has consented to no degrading coalition."²⁹

Not only did fusion undermine an individual's whiteness, but fanatics' political practices threatened the very foundations of the white republic. In comparison to the statesmanship of Whigs and Democrats, fanatics did not conduct themselves like white men—their political activities resembled those of enslaved Americans. The Know-Nothings, with their nocturnal conclaves, approximated slaves plotting revolt. An Alabama Democrat made this point by striking a contrast with Clay: "he fought long and manfully to the very last, this noblest Roman of them all fought openly, [and] *never stabbed his foe in the dark.*" A southern Democrat questioned Old Whigs who would trust their "twelve hundred millions of your property" to "this Secret and Midnight Junto." The conflation of the figurative danger of white fanatics and the literal danger of black fanatics played on southerners' primordial nightmare. Former Whig

²⁹Samuel S. Cox to [Stephen A. Douglas], Columbus, March 24, 1854, Douglas Papers; *Speech of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, on Know Nothingism*, 19; *Plain Facts and Considerations*, 31.

congressman John Crisfield, speaking of the Republican party, warned Marylanders that “the torch of the incendiary is blazing.”³⁰

White fanatics actively promoted black political agency, which could take violent forms, conservatives warned. “Twenty years ago,” recalled Democrat Fernando Wood in 1860, “the nation was divided into two parties, [...] each truly national, conservative and patriotic.” They eschewed issues “which struck at the homes and the firesides of women and children.”

Fanaticism, however, now made “negro insurrection” a reality at the South. Conservatives knew that enslaved Africans Americans were attuned to national politics and listened to Republicans’ condemnations of slavery, which only galvanized their own efforts to undermine the institution. One southern Whig noted that “we see the effects of this in the increasing restiveness of a part of our population, in the often repeated escapes of our servants from the mildest form of servitude ever known.” Rufus Choate asked, “should we like to see black regiments from the West Indies landing at Charleston or New Orleans to help on emancipation?” The fanatical antislavery impulse logically terminated in such apocalypses for these conservatives.³¹

In an effort to woo conservatives away from the Whig party, antislavery Whigs had been charged with blurring gender and racial boundaries even before they became Republicans. William H. Seward, for example, reportedly defended a “mob” that rescued a fugitive slave in accordance with their own “higher law.” He bailed them out of jail and then invited the “motley crowd of men and women, white and black” to his home. “Brothers in breeches and sisters in Bloomers, in part—have been feted, entertained, welcomed, shaken hands with, if not embraced,

³⁰A. A. Coleman, “Antebellum Democratic Party Address,” 11; *Speech of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, on Know Nothingism*, 20; “Speech of Hon. Jno. W. Crisfield,” 11.

³¹*Speech of Fernando Wood, Delivered before the Meeting of the National Democratic Delegation to the Charleston Convention, at Syracuse, February 7, 1860* (New York: Office of the Daily News, [1860]), 3, 4; “Letter of Hon. James A. Pearce, Washington, July 31, 1856,” 4; Choate, “Speech ‘On the Political Topics Now Prominent before the Country,’” quotation on 396, 402.

by” the New York Conscience Whig. This “miserable and degrading exhibition” was a manifestation of what would happen to the body politic when fanatics took power. Just as Seward had done at his home, fanatics would invite “the whole motley group, (negroes and all [...]),” into the political sphere.³²

Southern Democrats also used the politics of slavery and race against Know-Nothings, in order to deter southern Whigs from joining that party. During Virginia’s 1855 gubernatorial race, the *Richmond Enquirer* queried, “what must be the feeling of every honest Whig to whom this hybrid ticket is presented?” Democrats had faith that “the independent and incorruptible Whigs of Virginia” would “not degrade themselves by the support of the Know Nothing nominees” and their “amalgamation ticket.” Henry Wise derided Virginia Whigs who associated with Know-Nothings. Southern Whigs could no longer work with their former allies, because “Northern Whigs have become abolitionized.” These antislavery Whigs were now Know-Nothings. Know-Nothings’ secrecy was simply a means for southerners to conspire with the same antislavery northerners who had already ruined the Whigs as a national party. Surreptitious collusion with antislavery Yankees suggested transgressive sexuality for Wise. “Behind the curtain,” he imagined, “these gentlemen can shake hands and honey-fuggle with one another. [Much laughter.] This is what is called conservatism.” In contrast to these lackluster proslavery conservatives, the Alabama Democracy praised those “patriotic Whigs” who, “without regard to past political distinctions,” resisted Know-Nothings and prevented the “South from being prostrated before the power of Northern fanaticism and misrule.”³³

³²*Whig Testimony against the Election of General Scott*, 7-8.

³³“The Hybrid Ticket,” *Richmond Enquirer*, reprinted in Hambleton, *A Biographical Sketch of Henry A. Wise*, 165-6; *Religious Liberty. Equality of Civil Rights among Native and Naturalized Citizens. The Virginia Campaign of 1855. Governor Wise’s Letter on Know-Nothingism, and His Speech at Alexandria* (n.p., [1855]), 58-9; *Official Proceedings of the Democratic and Anti-Know-Nothing State Convention of Alabama, Held in the City of Montgomery, January 8th and 9th, 1856* (Montgomery: Advertiser and Gazette Book and Job Office, 1856), 10;

Democrats did not employ the politics of slavery and race only to attract slave-state Whigs. Northern Democrats similarly wielded race to discourage Whigs from aiding any party other than the Democracy. During Indiana's 1854 elections, the *Indiana Daily State Sentinel* appealed to "liberal minded Whigs who are unwilling to be transferred to the mongrels." Illinois Whig Usher F. Linder received praise from the paper when he "repudiated all connection with the piebald woollies in that State." In 1858 a correspondent reassured Indiana congressman William H. English that "you may expect to hear good news from the old Gibraltar of Whiggery." The Democracy could depend on Harrison County, where Democrats were painting Republicans as racial extremists. Democrats circulated one Republican candidate's approval of black suffrage and another's declaration that he would vote for an African American over a German. English's correspondent explained, "I use these remarks to some advantage in my speeches and they will serve to show that the Rep party is fast becoming abolitionized." Such a party, Democrats wanted to make clear, was inhospitable to Old Whigs or to any white man, regardless of ethnicity.³⁴

Frederick Douglass mocked what he deemed a contrived consensus on race and slavery. He reported his rendition of Fourth of July celebrations in 1858 at which former Whigs spoke before Democratic gatherings. Choate "talked gloriously, vain-gloriously, and furiously, for it is no trouble for Mr. Choate to talk." The overarching message of his rhetorical "whirlwind" was to "seal our lips on the subject of American Slavery for the sake of the Union with the South." Caleb Cushing, speaking at Tammany Hall, likewise sought to "convert the great celebration of Liberty into a means of making friends for Slavery," while Edward Everett demeaned himself by "his general reprehensible truckling to the dark spirit of Slavery." Even if a truce on slavery did

³⁴(*Indianapolis*) *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, July 11, 19, 28, 1854; Jordan to William H. English, Corydon, IN, September 26, 1858, English Family Papers.

not exist during the early republic, some Old Whigs were trying to effect one now, an effort which Douglass easily lampooned for its immorality and disingenuousness. Even so, he could not deny its effectiveness.³⁵

Spurious Democracy?

Douglass was convinced that “a fraternization is going on.” “The Silver Gray Whig shakes hands with the Hunker Democrat,” he elaborated, “the former only differing from the latter in name.” Douglass correctly identified one genuine basis for this newfound affinity: “Both hate negroes, [...] and upon this hateful basis they are forming a union of hatred.” The old antagonists were “rapidly sinking all other questions to nothing, compared with the increasing demands of Slavery.” The perpetuation of the white man’s republic was an objective for conservatives, one that served as a foundation upon which a bipartisan “fraternization” could occur. Yet Douglass did overestimate the scope of this conservative concordance.³⁶

Contemporaries in the 1850s, and historians subsequently, have explained away the late antebellum Democracy as a hollow shell of its former Jacksonian self. These critics echo Douglass by charging that Democrats disowned their egalitarianism in favor of a reactionary and undemocratic defense of slavery. No less an authority than the old Jacksonian Francis P. Blair flayed “the spurious Democracy” from which he departed when he became a Republican. The party he had helped create appeared unfamiliar, being full of southern aristocrats and Whigs, “men who never were Democrats” during Jackson’s lifetime. The jettisoned Jacksonian ethos,

³⁵“Freedom in the West Indies: An Address Delivered in Poughkeepsie, New York, on 2 August 1858,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979-92), 3:226-31.

³⁶“A Nation in the Midst of a Nation: An Address Delivered in New York, New York, on 11 May 1853,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 2:429-30.

borne by men like Blair, came to rest in antislavery politics, culminating in the Republican party. In taking the Jacksonianism out of the party of Jackson and relocating it elsewhere, historians further Blair's goal of insulating this intellectual tradition from a conservative organization of proslavery ideologues and their Doughface enablers. Central to this critique is the egress of old Jacksonians such as Blair out of, as well as the influx of former Whigs into, the Democracy.³⁷

Despite the corralling of conservatives that took place within the Democracy, the party remained that of Jefferson and Jackson. The Democracy did not morph into the party of Hamilton and Webster, because Democrats and Whigs diverged in their conservatism. When Louisiana Whig Judah P. Benjamin explained to the Senate why he was joining the Democracy, he justified, "the democratic platform is identical with that of the old whig party; and, in declaring my adhesion to the former, I but change name, not principle." What Benjamin meant by "principle," however, was not a set of policies or a shared vision of governance and social order. Democrats and sympathetic Whigs broadly aligned on a conservative rejection of fanaticism and a nationalist rejection of sectionalism, in addition to the preservation of white supremacy. Despite this convergence, Democrats' conservatism, premised as it was on liberal individualism, white egalitarianism, and majoritarian democracy, distinguished Democracy from

³⁷*A Voice from the Grave of Jackson!: Letter from Francis P. Blair, Esq., to a Public Meeting in New York, Held April 29, 1856* (Washington, D. C.: Buell and Blanchard, Printers, [1856]), quotations on 8-9; Alexander, "Persistent Whiggery in the Confederate South"; Jonathan H. Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Daniel Feller, "A Brother in Arms: Benjamin Tappan and the Antislavery Democracy," *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 1 (June 2001): 48-74; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 149-85; James L. Huston, "The Illinois Political Realignment of 1844-1860: Revisiting the Analysis," *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 4 (Dec. 2011): 528-9; Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 469-97; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2005), 663-4, 675-6, 703-6; and Sean Wilentz, "Slavery, Antislavery, and Jacksonian Democracy," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 202-23.

Whiggery and proved that the party, in terms of its organization and its ideology, was far from spurious.³⁸

Old Jacksonians did leave the party in the late antebellum period, disheartened over what they perceived as its betrayal of democracy and subservience to the Slave Power. Blair saw through the Kansas-Nebraska Act's democratic façade. Its authors "never meant that the majority rule provided in the law should supplant the weight which the constitutional equality of the South would bring [...] to overcome the masses." Undemocratic and prosouthern, the Democratic party left Blair; he didn't leave it. Walt Whitman cautioned "free work-people" to guard against his former party "bawling in your ears the easily-spoken words Democracy and the democratic party." Jacksonians-turned-Republicans argued that their opposition to slavery's expansion represented true Democratic doctrine. A Pennsylvania Republican concurred with his former Democratic colleagues that the two old parties once agreed on slavery, only that consensus was in favor of the congressional prohibition of territorial slavery. The "sham Democracy of to-day," by countenancing slavery's growth, would "degrade the freemen of the North to a level with the slave of the South." With its proslavery policy, the party "tramples and spits upon the graves of the great men who organized it."³⁹

Hannibal Hamlin, like his colleague Judah Benjamin, rose before the Senate in 1856 to do what many antebellum partisans found painful—he switched parties. The Kansas-Nebraska

³⁸*Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin*, 20. See also, Judah P. Benjamin to John Perkins Jr., Washington, July 2, 1856, John Perkins Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁹Blair, *A Voice from the Grave of Jackson!*, 8; Whitman, "The Eighteenth Presidency!", 24, 30; *An Address Delivered by Hon. William D. Kelley, at Spring Garden Hall, Philadelphia, on September 9th, 1856* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Morning Times, [1856]), 2, 7-8, 11-4, quotations on 13. See also, *The Rise and Fall of the Democratic Party. Speech of Hon. Kinsley S. Bingham, of Michigan. Delivered in the United States Senate, May 24, 1860* (n.p.: Republican Congressional Committee, [1860]).

Act prompted him to “declare here that I can maintain political associations with no party that insists upon such doctrines.” Although he had tried to submerge his differences with the Democracy, he found that “tests are applied by that party with which I have acted to which I cannot submit.” Hamlin’s course met with mixed reactions. Ichabod Cole hoped that he would still “take the stump in Maine for Old Buck” in 1856, even though he objected to the party’s platform. After all, this adviser concluded, Hamlin could overlook the planks he disagreed with and still campaign for James Buchanan, because platforms “have not much binding force after the election.”⁴⁰ Others, meanwhile, expressed their “gratification” that Hamlin “had openly & boldly thrown off your allegiance to the mis-named democratic party, & had refused to follow it in its slimy course in pursuit of southern plunders.” It was time to slough off “the humbug of ‘Popular Sovereignty’” and differentiate the parties. As Hamlin himself argued, “the entire and unqualified sovereignty of the Territories is in Congress.” Hamlin stumped for himself in 1856 and became Maine’s first Republican governor.⁴¹

For all the histrionics over such weak-kneed partisanship, Democrats relished the realignment’s cleansing effects. Before Hamlin left the party, his antislavery proclivities prompted one Democrat to warn Attorney General Cushing about a dangerous political “*clique*”

⁴⁰*Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1855-56, 25, pt. 3:1396-7; quotation from Ichabod Cole to Hannibal Hamlin, Eliot, June 6-7, 1856; John Bigelow to Hannibal Hamlin, New York, April 19, 1856; Stephen Emery to Hannibal Hamlin, Paris, [ME], May 27, 1856, typescript; Stephen Emery to [Hannibal Hamlin], Paris, [ME], June 9, 1856, typescript, all in the Hamlin Family Papers (microfilm edition), Special Collections Department, Raymond H. Fogler Library, The University of Maine at Orono. For an example of how Hamlin’s defection caused anxiety outside Maine, see Oswill C. Woolley to William H. English, Jeffersonville, [IN] March 29, 1858, English Family Papers.

⁴¹F. H. Cushing to Hannibal Hamlin, Frankfort, June 13, 1856; A *Maine law man*, & a Republican to Hannibal Hamlin, August 3, 1856, both in the Hamlin Family Papers; *Congressional Globe*, 34th Cong., 1st sess., 1855-56, 25, pt. 3:1397. See also, Josiah H. Drummond to Hannibal Hamlin, Waterville, ME, April 9, 1856; John Bent to Hannibal Hamlin, Boston, June 14, 1856; Charles W. Elliot to Hannibal Hamlin, New Bern[?], June 15, 1856; and A. J. Clough to Hannibal Hamlin, Lowell, MA, June 16, 1856, all in the Hamlin Family Papers. For a different analysis of Hamlin’s motives, see Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (1983; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 53-9.

in Maine—“Hamlin *abolition democrats*” were working with “*abolition* whig[s]” against Kansas-Nebraska. Just as opposition to antislavery fanaticism created common ground for conservatives, opposition to slavery’s expansion united antislavery Whigs and Democrats. This orthodox Democrat was willing to risk “break[ing] up the democratic party” in Maine to be rid of “*abolitionized*,” “*pseudo democrats*” and to advance popular sovereignty, which he deemed “correct and *sound* democratic doctrine.” Another Maine Democrat insisted that a naval yard appointee break off ties with the apostate Hamlin, along with “every Black Republican Know Nothing,” lest “he is willing to be charged with treason to his party.” Committing to popular sovereignty and cutting their losses with “Black” Republicans like Hamlin allowed the Democracy to achieve greater ideological, not to mention racial, purity.⁴²

The realignment provided numerous opportunities for this desired organizational and doctrinal clarification. Institutional winnowing occurred as the party shed “deserters,” “denationalized democrats,” and “parasite freesoilers.” An Indiana Democrat took a sanguine view of the disastrous 1854 elections, in which the northern electorate punished Democrats for Kansas-Nebraska, by concluding that “the catastrophe, sad as it is, will unite the *sound* democrats with greater cohesive force than they ever were before.” Bidding farewell to unsound Democrats enabled the party to recommit to its principles. As a correspondent advised Stephen Douglas, “the Democracy has at this time new parties to oppose and it behooves us to take every opportunity to let its principles and measures [be] known to the public: and success is certain.” In addition to advancing popular sovereignty, Democrats were also anti-nativist. James Buchanan observed that “the Know Nothing party has produced one good effect” in

⁴²John Abbott to Caleb Cushing, Lewiston Falls, February 24, November 15, 1854, Caleb Cushing Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; James[?] D. McIntire to Charles G. Bellamy, Alfred, March 28, 1857, Charles G. Bellamy Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. See also, Charles G. Greene to Caleb Cushing, Boston, March 3, 1854, Cushing Papers.

Pennsylvania, in that “it has lopped many rotten branches from the Democratic tree.” Buchanan was willing to trade rotten, nativist Democrats for “hones[t] & independent Whigs *willing to indorse & maintain the principles of our party.*”⁴³

Even when they embraced “hones[t] & independent Whigs,” moreover, Democrats hardly sanctioned the erasure of party lines. In 1855 Maryland Whig Thomas G. Pratt endeavored to avoid outright “fusion” with the Democratic party by urging “the conservative citizens of all parties and all sections [...] to unite as one party to preserve the Federal Constitution and Government.” Yet Democrats never intended to give up their party—Old Whigs were expected to renounce theirs. Gideon Welles claimed “devotion to the good old cause” and lectured fellow New England Democrat Edmund Burke that the “obliteration of old landmarks [*sic*]” was “injudicious.” While some Whigs desired that “a union party would rise on the fragments of the old,” he explained that he “should lament such an amalgamation in our state.” Pratt had desired “a new party” because “mere fusion” would only aid the stronger Democrats. Underscoring this reality, Pratt went on to campaign for the Democratic ticket in 1856. Democrats could feign bipartisanship, but their rhetoric did not connote a renunciation of partisan fervor. Selectively downplaying party rivalry was simply an effective technique to enlist Whigs, who had always been less comfortable with partisanship anyway.⁴⁴

⁴³Hallett et al., *Appeal to Democrats and Union Men*, 4; E. C. Sugg to William H. English, Troy, January 1, 1855, English Family Papers; James N. Shine to Stephen A. Douglas, Montezuma, VA, February 16, 1856, Douglas Papers; James Buchanan to David Lynch, Legation of the United States, London, September 21, 1855, typescript, James Buchanan and Harriet Lane Johnston Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

⁴⁴“Correspondence,” Thomas G. Pratt to John Walton et al., Annapolis, September 13, 1855, broadside, Box 1, Folder 4, Perkins Papers; Gideon Welles to [Edmund Burke], Hartford, November 5[?], 1851, Edmund Burke Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; “Letter of Hon. Thos. G. Pratt,” in *Old Line Whigs for Buchanan and Breckinridge*, 7-10. Gideon Welles himself eventually became a Republican. On Whigs’ views of partisanship, see John Ashworth, “Agrarians” and “Aristocrats”: *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983), 205-18; and Thomas Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship: Essays on the American Whig Party* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 6-12.

Eulogies of the second party system could, therefore, only be taken so far. While rhetorically useful to connect Democrats to Old Whigs, endorsements from dead Democrats were still required to prove a Jacksonian pedigree. After his political beginning as a Jacksonian foot soldier in New Hampshire, recounted a campaign biography, Franklin Pierce entered Congress “in one of the hero ages of the American democracy” when “the United States Bank was then in the arena.” Pierce’s habit of “boldly defend[ing] the Old Hero” gained him access to Jackson’s “fireside and hospitable board.” A younger generation of Democratic leaders who had not enjoyed Jackson’s intimacy still had to honor his memory. Douglas’s 1860 campaign biography related, “the cause of the old hero found [...] a most enthusiastic champion” when nineteen-year-old Stephen made “his first public speech” in support of Jackson in 1832.⁴⁵

Both loyal Democrats and those who left the party jostled over the Jacksonian legacy. Blair invoked Jackson on his deathbed despairing of the future of his party should men like Buchanan take power. Buchanan, meanwhile, took pride in the fact that Old Hickory commended him shortly before his death. The reality is that the Democrats who remained in the party were just as Jacksonian as those who left. Jacksonian ideology, ambiguous when not contradictory, inspired stalwarts and defectors. The same president who took a bold stand for the Union against South Carolina nullifiers also allowed the illegal destruction of abolitionist mailings in Charleston. The Jacksonian aversion to consolidated power could be directed against a federal state administered either by fanatical abolitionists or a conspiratorial Slave Power. Jacksonian producerism enshrined egalitarianism, a concept which propelled some Democrats into antislavery ranks to advance the rights of *all* laborers, but which caused others to hunker down as the defenders of equality exclusively for white men. Jacksonian principles and practices

⁴⁵*Sketches of the Lives of Franklin Pierce and Wm. R. King*, 3-4; Sheahan, *The Life of Stephen A. Douglas*, 5-6.

possessed a hard racial and gendered edge—only independent white men could exercise the prerogatives of citizenship in the white man’s republic. Democrats continued to brandish these prejudices, while those who left the party compromised the antislavery movement with that import. Hamlin, for instance, took his stand for “the rights of the free white men,” who were the ones in danger of becoming “slaves.” Charting a tidy linear trajectory of the Jacksonian persuasion into either the Democratic party or the Free Soil and Republican parties ignores the far messier dispersal of Jacksonian thought. James Buchanan was just as Jacksonian as Francis Blair, maybe more so. After all, 1850s Democrats remained in the party that Jackson built, and partisan loyalty was dear to the Old Hero, for whom democracy and Democracy were inseparable.⁴⁶

Despite the incomplete nature of the conservative alliance on an organizational level, critics still charged, as Michigan’s Kinsley Scott Bingham did, that Democrats “have lost the manly, independent spirit, which was the characteristic of the party in the days of General Jackson.” Opponents pointed to the reality of Whig infiltration as evidence of a deeper ideological adultery. For one defector, the Democracy had always been a party of *isms*. Unfortunately, at present, “from extreme radicalism, it has gone over to extreme Hunkerism.” The “transmigration” of Whiggery was to blame. When the Whig party “died of political marasmus,” the Democracy “inherited its legacy of conservatism.” The “rollicking, dashing party of the past, full of revolutionary designs,” atrophied as it “gathered to itself the

⁴⁶Blair, *A Voice from the Grave of Jackson!*, 4-10; *Buchanan’s Political Record. Let the South Beware!* ([Washington, D. C.: National Executive Committee of the American Party, 1856]), 4; R. G. Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan. Late Minister to England and Formerly Minister to Russia, Senator and Representative in Congress, and Secretary of State: Including the Most Important of His State Papers* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856), 356; Hannibal Hamlin to [Leander] Valentine, Washington, June 6, 1856, Hamlin Family Papers. For the argument that antislavery Jacksonians transferred their animus from the Money Power to the Slave Power, see Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil*.

conservatism of the North and of the South” and adopted “the specious cry of ‘popular sovereignty.’” In contrast to Democratic tirades against fanaticism, the renunciation of the party’s own fanatical heritage is what some departing Democrats regretted most. Even former Whigs found that, by catering to their decaying party, “the so-called democracy of to-day” had abandoned “the principles of free government” in favor of “classification, caste” and “THE EXTENSION OF SLAVERY INTO FREE TERRITORIES.” Abraham Lincoln attributed this transformation to the entrance of the “old exclusive silk-stocking whiggery” into the Democratic party. “The plain old democracy” of Illinois, meanwhile, backed the Republicans, the true Jeffersonians.⁴⁷

Even if their “radical, progressive, *revolutionary*” nature had turned “retrogressive and conservative,” Democrats answered that their underlying principles had not changed. While welcoming Whigs represented a broadening of Democrats’ rhetorical appeal, there was a simultaneous ideological deepening, as Democrats reaffirmed established Jacksonian principles. One Democrat noted that Republicans “charge upon the Democrats—that they are spurious, that they themselves wish to bring the government back to the principles of Washington and Jefferson.” “The modern Democracy,” he countered, were, in fact, “children of their sires.” Democrats abided by Jacksonian precepts—it was the conservative emphasis they placed on these principles in the 1850s that was new. This conservative veneer did not signal a Whiggish turn. Just as Democrats preserved their organizational integrity amidst the realignment, they also

⁴⁷Bingham, *The Rise and Fall of the Democratic Party*, 15; *The Democratic Party As It Was and As It Is!: Speech of Hon. Timothy C. Day, of Ohio, in the House of Representatives, April 23, 1856* (n.p., [1856]), 1-2, 5-6; Lincoln to Anson G. Henry, Springfield, IL, November 19, 1858; Lincoln to Henry L. Pierce and Others, Springfield, IL, April 6, 1859, both in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953, 1955), 3:339-40, 374-6; *The Democratic Party: Its Responsibility, Its Practice and Policy, since the Inauguration of Franklin Pierce, March 4th, 1853. Speech of Hon. James Harlan, of Iowa. Delivered June 22nd, at Des Moines City, before the Republican State Convention* (Mt. Pleasant, IA: Office of the Republican News, 1859), 2.

maintained their political philosophy. Although united in rejecting sectionalism and fanaticism, Whigs and Democrats did not share positive visions of nationalism and conservatism.

Democrats based their national conservatism on their faith in democratic self-governance, antistatism, white male equality, and liberal individualism, ideas anathematic to the American conservative tradition represented by Whiggery.⁴⁸

That the Democracy was the party of popular self-rule had long unsettled many Whigs, for whom Democrats had always been the more rumbustious party. Horace Greeley, before making his jump to the Republicans, explained his preference for Whiggish “Order” over the Democrats’ surfeit of “Liberty.” The demagogic Democracy offered only “anarchy or mob-rule,” which counted as “the worst of despotisms,—it is the rule of thousands of savage tyrants instead of one—it is a carnival of unbridled lust, brutality, and ruffianism.” Long before he deigned to enter that unprincipled party, Thomas L. Clingman accused the “Locofoco party” of supporting “the Dorr rebellion” in “overturning the Constitution” of Rhode Island. Democratic editor William Leggett noted in 1835 that there has been “a deal of declamation about our ultraism,” “our Utopianism, Jacobinism, Agrarianism, Fanny Wright-ism, Jack Cade-ism; and a dozen other *isms* imputed to us.” Democrats, to heed their detractors, were “for overthrowing all the cherished institutions of society; for breaking down the foundations of private right, [and] sundering the marriage tie.” Many conservatives would later have trouble overlooking the Democrats’ established reputation as a party of overzealous reformers with misplaced confidence in the people.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Day, *The Democratic Party As It Was and As It Is!*, 2; *The True Democracy. A Speech Delivered at East Cambridge, Sept. 29, 1854. By J. C. Lovejoy, of Cambridgeport* (Boston: C. C. F. Moody, Printer, [1856?]), 6, 10.

⁴⁹Horace Greeley, *Why I Am a Whig: Reply to an Inquiring Friend* (New York: The Tribune Office, [1852?]), 1-4; *Speech of T. L. Clingman*, 16; William Leggett, “Reply to the Charge of Lunacy, January 30, 1835,” in *Democratick Editorials: Essays in Jacksonian Political Economy*, ed. Lawrence H. White (Indianapolis: LibertyPress, 1984), 16,

Some Whigs directed their skepticism specifically at the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Democratic territorial policy. They traced the decade's political turmoil and their party's disintegration back to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. If the Democracy could abrogate such a longstanding compact, it could hardly be conservative. Robert Winthrop believed that Kansas-Nebraska had the potential to distract Whigs from their conservative course by "tempt[ing] us for the moment to break from all our old relations and to plunge into any policy which might hold out ever so delusive a hope of redress." His "sober second thought," however, exposed the foolishness of overreacting in the style of antislavery fanatics.⁵⁰ Even Whigs working with Democrats complained about the law. Wary conservatives assumed that Democratic territorial expansion would sabotage orderly national development. The pseudonymous "Philadelphia Whig" questioned the propriety of entrusting such power to territorial voters soon after settlement. S. S. Nicholas, a conservative Kentuckian, blamed the Democracy for social tumult in the territories. He countered Democrats' contention that "our system may advantageously embrace an indefinite extent of population and territory." "Vigilance committees ruling California with lynch law, the northwest territories governed by

18. On the radical reformism of the Democratic party in the 1830s, see Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, 159-89; and Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 352-8.

⁵⁰Robert C. Winthrop *on Fusion*, 2, 3. See also, Winthrop, *A Memoir of Robert C. Winthrop*, 180-1; A Philadelphia Whig [pseud.], *An Appeal for the Union*, 7-8; Choate, "Speech 'On the Political Topics Now Prominent before the Country,'" 395-6; *Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin*, 18; S. S. Nicholas, "Disunion. Extract from a Series of Numbers Published under This Title in the Summer and Fall of 1856," in *Conservative Essays, Legal and Political* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1863), 56; Edward Everett to William Henry Trescot, Boston, June 6, 1855[1856?]; George Bancroft to Edward Everett, New York, January 11, 1856; Edward Everett to William Henry Trescot, Boston, September 12, 1856; and Edward Everett to James Buchanan, Boston, December 8, 1856, copy, all in the Everett Papers.

martial law, Utah ruled by priest despotism, and civil war in Kansas” were the fruits of Democratic manifest destiny.⁵¹

Some Whigs did make peace with popular sovereignty. “The Missouri Compromise has been repealed,” a “Philadelphia Whig” counseled, and “the substituted rule of leaving to the people of the territories the right to decide for themselves before they become States, but anticipates by a very brief period a right that then becomes absolutely theirs” upon statehood. As good conservatives, Whigs ought to accept the Kansas-Nebraska Act rather than continue “agitation” of the issue. Some Whigs went further and appropriated popular sovereignty as a conservative measure. Alabamian Henry W. Hilliard lauded the “popular will applied to the upspringing social systems,” while Maryland’s Reverdy Johnson became one of Stephen Douglas’s staunchest defenders. He lionized “the great national and conservative doctrine of *Congressional non-intervention*, with slavery in an organized Territory.” Johnson found popular sovereignty salutary, because, when “the matter was [...] to be referred to the territorial people,” it “imputed no censure, moral or political, to any section” and left the question “forever excluded from the halls of Congress.”⁵²

Despite these endorsements, Whiggish discomfort with Democrats and their doctrine revealed a deeper partisan, ideological, and cultural divide over majoritarian democracy and popular politics. In 1850 a former Whig congressman pleaded with a delegate to Indiana’s constitutional convention to “let the Whigs remain as they have ever been, true men—

⁵¹A Philadelphia Whig [pseud.], *An Appeal for the Union*, 4-8; S. S. Nicholas, “Manifest Destiny, January 19, 1858,” in *Conservative Essays*, 40-1. See also, John R. Van Atta, “‘A Lawless Rabble’: Henry Clay and the Cultural Politics of Squatters’ Rights, 1832-1841,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 337-78.

⁵²A Philadelphia Whig [pseud.], *An Appeal for the Union*, 8-10; *Letter of Hon. Henry W. Hilliard*, 4; *Speech of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, of Maryland, Delivered before the Political Friends of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, at a Meeting in Faneuil Hall, Boston, on Thursday, June 7, 1860. To Which Is Added the Letter of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, to the Chairman of the Douglas Meeting in New York on the 22d of May, 1860* (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860), 4-5.

conservative men—law and order men—Let them resist everything which approaches the *leveling down* system of locofocoism.” He took objection to a Democratic call for the direct election of judges. “The corrupt tendencies of our own nature” meant that “popular elections” would “tend to corrupt *candidates*.” Democracy, when coupled with human nature, precluded virtuous governance. This Whig feared that his party would yield, because Democrats had framed their proposal as “a question of trust in the people.” Democrats were “always talking of their confidence in the people & their readiness to trust them,” disingenuous rhetoric which he predicted would result in “demagoguism.”⁵³

Just as Democratic and Whig conservatives differed over democracy, these seemingly similar Unionists also disagreed on the nature of American nationhood. Whigs and Democrats celebrated the Union, mythologized an era of bisectional politics, and bemoaned “geographical” parties. Yet their nationalism diverged when defining the role of the state in national development. Democrats bristled at any tendency toward consolidation and national uniformity, which, during the 1830s and 1840s, meant any policy devised by Whigs. Both Democrats and Whigs voiced support for “progress,” which for Democrats resulted from excising the state from individuals’ pursuits, but for Whigs meant governmental aid in mutually beneficial undertakings. The Whigs prescribed an activist state, in which “Government is regarded as the natural friend and servant of the People,” a force to “lighten their burdens” and “increase their facilities for intercourse or intelligence.” For Democrats, in contrast, statism only hampered individual fulfillment and, consequently, national progress.⁵⁴

⁵³George G. Dunn to A. B. Conduitt, Bedford, IN, October 16, 1850, English Family Papers.

⁵⁴Greeley, *Why I Am a Whig*, 12.

In the 1850s Democrats transferred their hostility toward Whiggish proposals for state-led economic growth to the homogenizing, legislated moralism of Republicans and Know-Nothings. In their less charitable moments, Democrats lumped fanatics and Whigs together due to their common descent from primeval Federalism. Democrats had regularly referred to Whigs as “Federalists,”⁵⁵ and fanatics were similarly peddling Federalism in an updated guise. The guiding assumption of Federalism, judged Martin Van Buren, was “an inextinguishable distrust, on the part of numerous and powerful classes, of the capacities and dispositions of the great body of their fellow-citizens.” Democrats collapsed ideological and generational differences when they spoke of the “federal abolition Whig press” and warned of “the old Federal and now the Black Republican doctrine that the people are not competent [*sic*] to govern them selves [*sic*].”⁵⁶

Because they defined 1850s political competition as an ideological confrontation with fanatical ideas begotten of Federalism, party identity remained compelling for Democrats. Some historians argue that Democrats and Whigs converged on a host of issues before the Civil War, undercutting the party differentiation necessary to engender partisan loyalty. While discrete issues, like state aid to internal improvements, lost their potency, the underlying philosophical cleavage that had separated the parties endured. Democrats fit fanaticism into their preexisting partisan binary. Republicanism and Know-Nothingism were simply the new Whiggery, which itself was only Federalism warmed over. While “the Democratic party has always fought under the same name,” its opponents “have fought [...] under various names and various issues.”

These transitory parties mattered little—“their *name is Legion*.” Yet party distinctions remained

⁵⁵William T. Johnson to William Young, Office of the Age, May 1, 1846, printed circular; Daniel Frisbee to Moses McDonald, Kittery, March 1, 1853, both in the Bellamy Papers.

⁵⁶Martin Van Buren, *Inquiry into the Origin and Course of Political Parties in the United States* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 352; John Abbott to Caleb Cushing, Lewiston Falls, February 24, 1854, Cushing Papers; Isaac Chadbourne to Charles G. Bellamy, Alfred, February 28, 1860, Bellamy Papers. See also, George M. Leeman to Charles G. Bellamy, Cape Neddick, March 23, 1855, Bellamy Papers.

stark for Democrats, because they were fighting the same dangerous philosophy. Federalism, Whiggery, and fanaticism shared an ideological taproot—an affinity for an overweening state to govern men deemed incapable of ruling themselves.⁵⁷

Democratic philosophy countered that white men could only flourish with a circumscribed state and devolved democracy. Democratic antistatism, mocked by one Whig as “repulsive, chilling, nugatory,—a bundle of negations, restrictions, and abjurations,” regarded the government “as an enemy to be watched.” Democrats’ negative state would indirectly spur national development by simply not sabotaging it with its meddling. The “same party [that] crushed the financial monster,” “swept away the cords of that wire work of national improvements,” and defeated the Whigs party’s other “high federal measures” responded similarly to fanatics, who also sought to stifle manly autonomy. One Republican accounted for his past Democratic loyalty by explaining that “I believed that they strove to give to man the freest and fullest chance to develop himself and provide for the prosperity of his posterity.” Democrats still promised to facilitate such opportunity, with the “negations, restrictions, and abjurations” they applied to the federal government. Hemming in the tyrannical state, whether Federalist, Whiggish, or fanatical, empowered individuals to govern themselves and to expand the republic free from both economic favoritism and invasive moral strictures.⁵⁸

These conflicting conceptions of the state stemmed from deeper assumptions regarding individualism. Whigs were more comfortable with social engineering to turn human nature

⁵⁷A. A. Coleman, “Antebellum Democratic Party Address,” 10. Michael F. Holt even goes so far as to claim that in the 1850s “the Jacksonian Democratic party that had helped constitute the Second American Party System died just as the Whig party did.” On partisan convergence, see Lacy K. Ford Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 308-37; Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 101-81, quotation on 104; and J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 165-342.

⁵⁸Greeley, *Why I Am a Whig*, 12; Lovejoy, *The True Democracy*, 5; Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan, of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman and Son, 1856), 7; *An Address Delivered by Hon. William D. Kelley*, 13.

toward positive ends and, therefore, sought to restrain individuals with social mores and institutional impediments. The Whiggish Good Society consisted of individuals encapsulated within organic units. Hierarchical relationships and mutual obligations within collectivities such as the family or congregation restrained individual passions and fostered a harmony of interests. The conservative political theorist Edmund Burke called these cellular units within the organic body politic “little platoons.” “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society,” Burke elaborated, “is the first link in the series by which we proceed toward a love to our country and to mankind.”⁵⁹

Southern proslavery conservatives praised the Slave States as home to such platoons. The partisan vagabond John C. Calhoun called the South “an aggregate, in fact, of communities, not of individuals.” “Every plantation is a little community,” in which “labor and capital” were “perfectly harmonized,” contributing to “the harmony, the union, and stability” of the Slave States. For Robert Toombs, the reciprocal “relation of master and slave” likewise generated “harmony.” Even after he began cooperating with the Democrats, this former Whig clung to the Burkean notion that rights derived meaning from their social context. “Vague notions of abstract liberty, or natural equality” did not shape “the rights of the white race as well as the black.” Harmony and order instead originated in hierarchy, duty, and the idea that “all individual rights [are] subordinate to the great interests of the whole society.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (1790; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 40-4, 173, quotation on 41.

⁶⁰“Remarks Made during the Debate on His Resolutions, in Respect to the Rights of the States and the Abolition of Slavery,—December 27th, 1837, *et seq.*,” in *The Works of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Richard K. Crallé (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1853-55), 3:180; *A Lecture Delivered in the Tremont Temple, Boston, Massachusetts, on the 24th January, 1856, by R. Toombs. Slavery—Its Constitutional Status—Its Influence on the African Race and Society.* (n.p., [1856]), 9, 12. On the northern bourgeois family as a restraining platoon along Whig specifications, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145-85.

Democrats, meanwhile, equated social harmony with the interaction of unrestrained and equal white men possessing abstract individual rights. Democrats also nested white male republicans in concentric circles of overlapping loyalties, emanating outward from the household to the Union itself. These little platoons, however, were platforms to power, not receptacles of restraint. Burke cautioned against prioritizing “personal advantage” over the good of one’s platoon, while Democrats advanced a utilitarian conception of the platoons which placed them in a supporting role to the sovereign individual. Mastery within subsidiary social networks was a springboard for the entrance of white men into politics on terms of equality with their peers. The interaction of politically equal white men, in turn, guaranteed social stability. Relying on the prerogative of individual white men in an atomistic social order was safer than filtering power through hierarchical, organic networks of mutual obligations, which would diffuse men’s power and erode their equality and rights. Exercising “honest independence of thought,” an Alabama Democrat explained, would allow individuals to ward off “the utopian dreams of visionary philosophers.” He commended “our institutions[,] its component parts possessing elements of discord[,] each acting independently of the other, each sovereign within its sphere, and yet all moving in harmony to the sublime unity of one government.” Confidence in the individual’s capacity to safely wield such awesome discretion would check the consolidation of fanatical power, preserve individual rights, and secure social harmony.⁶¹

The place of the individual in society thus comprises the fundamental distinction between Whiggish and Democratic conservatism. Democrats adopted a “conservative” disposition in order to preserve their radical notions of individual autonomy, white male equality, and democratic self-governance, concepts alien to traditional ideological conservatism, which is

⁶¹Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 41; A. A. Coleman, “Address on Change in Boyhood Home, before 1861,” manuscript speech, 13-6, Coleman-Stuart Family Papers.

often grounded in Burke's political theory. Whigs were better Burkeans. The restraints of organic communities, for Whigs, yielded social harmony. Yet social organicism assumed gradations of inequality among different classes and orders and impinged on the inviolable individual rights of white men. Democrats were happy to enmesh women and Americans of color in networks of dependency, but organicism applied to white men would revive the social order of the colonial and early republican eras, when whiteness and manhood did not automatically guarantee equality and independence. Organicism also led to a notion of the collective good overriding that of the individual, with the state aiding efforts to perfect society over time. Democrats, in contrast, favored the replication of their already perfect republic across space through territorial expansion, with diverse individuals free to roam and pursue their own interests, unencumbered by moral oversight and economic regulation.⁶²

Social order premised on the democratic interaction of sovereign individuals was an innovative recipe for conservative stability. By the mid-nineteenth century, most American politicians broadly agreed on the merits of democratic self-rule, at least in the abstract. Yet Democrats and Whigs had arrived at that consensus by different routes and acted upon it in

⁶²For another example of Burkean conservatism in antebellum America, see Dickson D. Bruce Jr., *The Rhetoric of Conservatism: The Virginia Convention of 1829-30 and the Conservative Tradition in the South* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1982). For a contrary view of Democrats as Burkeans, especially regarding their racism, see Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 177-211. On Whig ideology generally and the parties' contrasting views on development through time versus across space, see Ashworth, "Agrarians" and "Aristocrats", 52-84, 193-9; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 582-5; Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 1990, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 237-48; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Opening of American Society: From the Adoption of the Constitution to the Eve of Disunion* (1984; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 131-42; and especially Major L. Wilson, *Space, Time, and Freedom: The Quest for Nationality and the Irrepressible Conflict, 1815-1861* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 49-119. On Whig conservatism specifically, see Brown, *Politics and Statesmanship*, 49-92; Richard N. Current, *Daniel Webster and the Rise of National Conservatism* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), 103-8, 145-52, 193-202; and Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 210-37. On the difference between conservatism defined as a "disposition" and defined as an "ideology" drawing from Burke, see, respectively, Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative," 1956, in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, 1962, rev. ed. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1991), 407-37; and Samuel P. Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," *The American Political Science Review* 51, no. 2 (June 1957): 454-73.

dissimilar ways. American conservatives, with Whigs following the lead of the Federalists, gradually made peace with democracy and popular, partisan politics after the 1790s. They had to in order to survive politically in a nation resting upon a bedrock of popular sovereignty.

Recounting his visit to the United States in 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at how the philosophical concept of popular sovereignty had attained concrete expression. He observed that “in America the sovereignty of the people is not, as with certain nations, a hidden or barren notion; it is acknowledged in custom, celebrated by law.”⁶³

Democrats under Jefferson and Jackson had long treated popular sovereignty as much more than a “barren notion” by placing it at the foundation of their political culture and their conception of governmental power. Conservatives had to keep up, lest they be accused of aspersing the power of the people. Democrats began with the premise of democracy and were loath to restrain it. Having accepted the Democrats’ premise, conservatives were far more comfortable “imposing fetters upon the power of the majority,” because “those fetters are the very essence of civil liberty.” Although by the 1840s both Whigs and Democrats catered to the masses, Democrats did so more rambunctiously and instinctively. That the heirs of Jefferson and Jackson were never begrudging in their “democracy” alarmed American conservatives from the 1790s through the 1850s.⁶⁴

⁶³Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, ed. Isaac Kramnick, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (1835-40; repr., London: Penguin Books, 2003), 68-71. For the Federalists, see David Hackett Fischer, *The Revolution of American Conservatism: The Federalist Party in the Era of Jeffersonian Democracy* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965); for the Whigs, see Schlesinger, *The Age of Jackson*, 267-305; and Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 482-507.

⁶⁴S. S. Nicholas, “Power of Majorities over Constitutions, March 3, 1858,” in *Conservative Essays*, 19. For America resting on a theoretical consensus of liberalism and democracy, within which both Whigs and Democrats, conservatives and liberals, operated, see Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution* (1955; repr., Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1991), especially 89-142, 198-200; and Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America: The Thankless Persuasion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 67-86, 117-27. That a consensus on certain fundamental tenets existed need not imply a dearth of substantive political debates, especially if it is understood that Democrats were enthusiastic democrats, while Whigs were reluctant ones. Common ground need not be barren of ideological conflict.

Conservative Whigs joined the Democracy, whether convinced their party was truly dead, or simply because they were lost in the wilderness of the realignment. Whigs did not abandon their conservatism when they coalitioned with Democrats; nor did Democrats surrender their understanding of individualism, equality, and democracy. Democrats turned their reverence for democracy to conservative ends, and the reputation of Old Whigs added a rhetorical ictus to their claims that they were the party which would conserve the happy republic from fanatical innovation. Democrats welcomed Whig refugees from the collapsing second party system, not to roll back democracy, but to lend their defense of democracy a conservative patina. In the process, they democratized American conservatism and ensured that it would endure far beyond the 1850s.

The ideological differences that separated these collusive conservatives hint at the tension within Democratic political thought. Conservative Whigs shied away from Democrats' obeisance to the popular will. As the Indiana Whig exercised over an elective judiciary feared, democracy would permit the dark side of human nature to "rush forth with accelerated speed and hightened [*sic*] fury bearing away upon their maddened bosoms all these fine but frail castles that demagogues build upon their *pretended* 'confidence in the people.'" There was something distinctly unconservative, maybe even fanatical, inherent within territorial popular sovereignty specifically, as well as within democracy generally. Many Democrats, who desperately wanted to be America's conservative party, began to detect whiffs of this theoretical impasse in their ideology. As would become clear, it was not Democrats' democracy that was spurious, but their conservatism.⁶⁵

⁶⁵George G. Dunn to A. B. Conduitt, Bedford, IN, October 16, 1850, English Family Papers.

CHAPTER 5: DOUGHFACE TRIUMPHANT:
JAMES BUCHANAN'S MANLY CONSERVATISM AND THE ELECTION OF 1856

I have no patience at the distrust of any southern man in regard to my course on the subject of Slavery.

—James Buchanan, 1856¹

Fresh off his gubernatorial victory, Henry A. Wise traded in his homespun to prepare for his self-designated role as kingmaker of the Democracy. By 1856 the Virginian felt that he and his state had earned the right to choose the party's next presidential nominee, in return for walloping the Know-Nothings the previous year. Wise recalled that northern states had succumbed to Know-Nothing fanaticism, leaving his state to redeem the nation—the “indomitable democracy of Virginia, here and nowhere else, turned back the tide of revolution.” Wise concluded, “if any State could in justice claim the right to have her wishes preferred, it was Virginia, in this nomination.” Some admirers even promoted him for the honor. Senator George W. Jones of Iowa favored Wise's prospects, seeing as he had “already saved the Country from ruin.” The presidential canvass in 1856, Democrats anticipated, would require a similar feat on a national scale.²

Wise's gubernatorial campaign can indeed be seen as a prelude to the party's national strategy in 1856. Democratic rhetoric during the presidential election echoed that of Virginians

¹James Buchanan to John Slidell, Wheatland, near Lancaster, May 28, 1856, copy, Breckinridge Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

²“Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856,” in *James Buchanan, His Doctrines and Policy as Exhibited by Himself and Friends* (New York: Greeley and McElrath, Tribune Office, [1856]), 13, 14; quotation from George W. Jones to Henry A. Wise, Dubuque, IA, July 8, 1855; Henry A. Wise to George W. Jones, Only, near Onancock, VA, June 29, 1855, typescript, July 27, 1855, typescript; O. Jennings Wise to Henry A. Wise, Paris, December 28, 1855; O. Jennings Wise to Henry A. Wise, Paris, July 29, 1856, all in the Wise Family Papers, 1777-1973, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

in 1855, and that of Indianans in 1854, because in these elections Democrats imagined a common fanatical foe, regardless of the distinct parties that actually challenged them. Virginia Democrats had railed against both antislavery and nativist fanaticism as they defended the rights of slaveholders, Catholics, and immigrants. They raised the stakes of their state contest by claiming to fight an enemy of national scope in defense of the rights of all white men. These elections were nothing short of climactic confrontations between two opposing philosophies—conservatism versus fanaticism. Wise later connected his gubernatorial race and the presidential campaign and found that “by the position V^a took under my lead in 1855 [and] ’56 the Democratic Party triumphed and the Union was saved.”³

Despite his pretensions, in 1856 Wise stayed true to the man whose presidential ambitions he had been zealously advancing for years—James Buchanan of Pennsylvania. Wise and Buchanan shared a close friendship, both political and “personal.” The Virginian had led slave-state delegates in ballot after fruitless ballot for Buchanan in the 1852 national convention. Buchanan appreciated Wise’s “exertions in my favor,” which, he promised, “shall ever remain deeply engraven on my heart.” Although failing to nominate his chosen candidate, Wise enjoyed playing power broker and, nothing if not adaptable, took credit for Franklin Pierce’s eventual nomination. Wise repeated this performance at the 1856 Cincinnati convention with more success. When Buchanan finally received his party’s nomination, Wise, true to form, “gladly took the responsibility.”⁴

³Henry A. Wise to George Booker, Richmond, March 11, 1857, Wise Family Papers.

⁴“Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856,” 10; James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, near Lancaster, March 10, quotation from March 18, May 10, June 9, 1852, May 16, 1852[1853]; quotation from Henry A. Wise to Franklin Pierce, Only, near Onancock, Accomac Co., June 22, 1852, copy, typescript; Henry A. Wise to P. R. George, Only, near Onancock, VA, December 11, 1852, copy, typescript; quotation from O. Jennings Wise to Henry A. Wise, Paris, March 23, 1856, all in the Wise Family Papers. Wise told Pierce that he could assist his campaign by defending him against accusations of drunkenness. Wise should know, after all, because Pierce had “never had but one frolic” as a congressman, “and in that,” Wise recounted, “I

James Buchanan led the Democracy to victory in 1856 in what he designated “one of the severest struggles recorded in our history.” Buchanan and his party triumphed over John C. Frémont, candidate of the Republican party, and Millard Fillmore, the Know-Nothing nominee. In a confusing contest among shifting alliances, Fillmore also had the backing of a rump convention of Whigs, otherwise defunct as a nationally competitive organization. Frémont, meanwhile, received the nomination of the North Americans—antislavery northerners who had abandoned the Know-Nothing party after it refused to demand the Kansas-Nebraska Act’s repeal. Another potentially national party, which had initially hoped to skirt sectionalism, had splintered over slavery. This geographical rift appeared to vindicate Democrats’ dismissal of Know-Nothings’ aspirations to national status. Frémont’s nomination by both antislavery and nativist northerners, moreover, seemed to lend credence to Democrats’ assumption regarding the sectional nature of the Republican coalition as well as the ideological similitude of the two “fanatical” movements.⁵

Faced with seemingly evanescent opponents, Democrats longed to achieve their timeless goal—the recognition of their party as the Union’s natural majority party and its only truly national party. This transitional election marked the end of the second American party system and the commencement of institutionalized rivalry between Democrats and Republicans. Yet this emergent partisan stability was hardly apparent at the time. The only consistent element before and after the election was the Democracy, and the party’s *national* success was

was a partaker.” On Wise and Buchanan in 1852 and 1856, see Clement Eaton, “Henry A. Wise: A Study in Virginia Leadership, 1850-1861,” *West Virginia History* 3 (1942): 190-4; and Craig M. Simpson, *A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 89-91, 122-5.

⁵James Buchanan to John Y. Mason, Bedford Springs, PA, August 15, 1856, Mason Family Papers, 1805-1886, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. For a brief overview of the election, see Roy F. Nichols and Philip S. Klein, “Election of 1856,” in *History of American Presidential Elections, 1789-1968*, vol. 2, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1971), 1005-33.

impressive. Although the party would fracture only four years later, and another Democrat would not win the White House until 1884, the election revealed the consolidation of Democrats' conservative ideology and political culture on a national scale. The party did not, as some historians contend, run geographically distinct campaigns against the northern Republicans and the predominantly southern Know-Nothings, with contradictory antislavery and proslavery messages in each section. Democrats' rhetorical timbre may have differed by region, reflecting their philosophical embrace of diversity over uniformity, but their underlying conservative and national message sounded throughout the Union.⁶

The Democracy was able to articulate a nationally consistent message due to the compatibility of its conservative principles with its conservative candidate. Democrats loved their chieftains, even as they postured as a party of ideas. At the 1856 Cincinnati convention, when the Illinois delegation abandoned Stephen Douglas to make Buchanan's nomination unanimous, they took consolation from the fact that the platform included the Little Giant's "great principle"—popular sovereignty. Illinois Democrats recapitulated their party's rhetorical motif to justify voting for Buchanan: the "spirit of the Democratic party resides in its principles more than in its men." Wise similarly explained that he was "acting upon principle" when he led the South in abandoning Buchanan for Pierce four years earlier. Masking his disappointment

⁶A standard view of the election holds that Democrats waged two separate campaigns—one against the northern Republicans and another against the primarily southern Know-Nothings. Roy F. Nichols and Philip S. Klein go so far as to argue that only northern states saw an actual contest due to Fillmore's weakness in the South (this would have surprised the Democrats who campaigned vigorously against Fillmore). Michael F. Holt has complicated this interpretation by arguing that the Know-Nothings cannot be dismissed as a sectional party. Although misguided as to the long-term viability of the Know-Nothings as a national party, his conclusions invite a reappraisal of the election as a national contest. I argue that Democrats waged a national campaign because of the way they understood their common fanatical foe, regardless of whether Republicans or Know-Nothings were the immediate threat. Nichols and Klein, "Election of 1856," 1020, 1027-31; Roy Franklin Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (1948; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1968), 32-4, 61-2; Holt, "Another Look at the Election of 1856," in *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s*, ed. Michael J. Birkner (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1996), 37-67.

over being bypassed at that time, Buchanan reassured his followers that Pierce ought to receive their support. After all, Buchanan lectured, “as Democrats we should always yield our personal preferences for men when great principles require the sacrifice.”⁷

Finally securing the nomination in 1856, Buchanan had to prove his principles and his manhood, because, despite their lofty protestations to the contrary, the Democracy was a party of principles *and* of men. Democrats conflated principles and men by inscribing their beliefs onto their men. As they did with their party’s founders, Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, Democrats rallied behind men who simultaneously evinced core philosophical tenets and laudable personal qualities. Buchanan’s conservative credentials seemed appealing. He interpreted his election as the vindication of the “great conservative Democratic principles immediately involved in the late canvass on which the Constitution & the Union depend.” This meticulous career politician and prudent political manager flaunted a history of denouncing fanaticism and catering to southern interests. An ideal Democrat, however, had to subscribe to conservative principles and exhibit conservative manhood—the two necessarily complemented one another.⁸

⁷*Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in Cincinnati, June 2-6, 1856. Reported for the Cincinnati Enquirer* (Cincinnati: Enquirer Steam Print, 1856), 33; Henry A. Wise to Franklin Pierce, Only, near Onancock, Accomac Co., VA, June 22, 1852, copy, typescript, Wise Family Papers; James Buchanan to Theodore Leonard et al., Wheatland, (near Lancaster,) June 14, 1852, in D. W. Bartlett, *The Life of Gen. Frank. Pierce, of New-Hampshire, the Democratic Candidate for President of the United States* (Auburn, NY: Derby and Miller, 1852), 288.

⁸James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, December 2, 1856, Wise Family Papers. James Buchanan needs a modern biography. The standard work continues to be Philip Shriver Klein’s sympathetic and dated treatment, *President James Buchanan: A Biography* (1962; repr., Newton, CT: American Political Biography Press, 2006). Jean H. Baker’s *James Buchanan* (New York: Times Books, 2004) is a short and incisive, albeit needlessly polemical, account that faults Buchanan’s personal and sexual attraction to southern men for his prosouthern politics and disastrous presidency. Useful, although not comprehensive, are the essays in Michael J. Birkner, ed., *James Buchanan and the Political Crisis of the 1850s*; and John W. Quist and Michael J. Birkner, eds., *James Buchanan and the Coming of the Civil War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013). See also, Nicholas Wood, “‘A Sacrifice on the Altar of Slavery’: Doughface Politics and Black Disenfranchisement in Pennsylvania, 1837-1838,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 84-5, 93-6.

Buchanan was a lifelong bachelor, and his unique masculinity presented both difficulties and opportunities during the campaign. Bachelorhood was a liability for any statesman in antebellum America. Buchanan may have advocated the proper “principles,” but as a “man” he seemed an unlikely choice for a party that paraded aggressive masculinity. Creative Democrats, nonetheless, found a way to argue that their candidate’s unorthodox manhood actually enhanced his conservative and national standing, and in doing so they laid bare the assumptions on which their party’s conservative political culture rested. By recasting his bachelorhood into a signifier of his manhood, conservatism, and nationalism, Democrats turned Buchanan into a candidate whose conservative masculinity dovetailed with his conservative principles—the party’s principles and the candidate’s manhood aligned *because* Buchanan was a bachelor.

A particularly noteworthy aspect of the 1856 election was thus the politicization of the candidates’ domestic lives and masculinity, a development which reveals how intrinsic constructions of gender and domesticity were to antebellum political thought and to Democratic conservatism specifically. The election was a contest among a bachelor, a husband, and a widower. Reporting on discussions of Buchanan’s “celibacy” and Frémont’s elopement, the *New York Herald* lamented, “what has all this to do with the capacity, public services and real eminence of our distinguished men?” The paper answered its own question when it observed that electioneers sought “some advantages of a domestic character—in this struggle to get into the White House.” Yet the candidates’ private lives did intersect with political concerns. In light of Know-Nothings’ anti-Catholicism, for example, Frémont’s suspected marriage by a Catholic priest, as well as the rumored Catholic ancestry of Fillmore’s deceased wife and the education of his daughter at a convent, represented more than entertaining speculations. Indeed, the *Herald*,

which endorsed Frémont, soon abandoned its principled course and ruled that Buchanan's bachelorhood disqualified him from the presidency.⁹

One Democratic campaign document informed Pennsylvania voters that “whenever he emerged from his quiet home, it was to demand the recognition of all the guarantees of the Constitution to all the States.” Buchanan endured scrutiny not only of his public record, but also of the type of “home” from which he “emerged” into the political arena, as Americans anticipated whether he would favor free labor or plantation households as president. In antebellum America, political economy and culture gave rise to sectionally distinct conceptions of the household and gender relations. Domesticity became sectionalized, with the archetype of the southern plantation household, a site of combined economic and domestic ventures, set against the northern bourgeois household, which abided by the separate spheres ideology deriving from the Market Revolution. Answering accusations that their “Doughface” candidate betrayed northern families by prioritizing the interests of plantation households, Democrats responded that being unmarried predisposed Buchanan to treat all Americans fairly. Lacking his

⁹*Columbus, Ohio State Journal*, Sept. 17, 1856; *New York Herald*, quotation from July 1, 11, 19, quotation from 20, Aug. 1, Sept. 19, 1856; quotation from *Stockton (CA) Weekly San Joaquin Republican*, Aug. 23, 1856. In August 1856 an account that sought to explain Buchanan's bachelorhood appeared in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*. The piece, allegedly provided by the Buchanan campaign, recounted that after the tragic death of the young Buchanan's intended, he never subsequently married out of love for her. He was a bachelor not “because of indifference to woman, but really from the highest appreciation of one of the loveliest of the sex.” Although containing many factual errors, multiple papers reprinted it, and the *Herald* concluded that “the story is published by the Buchanan party as an electioneering document.” Arguing that this Democratic ploy legitimized discussion of Buchanan's private life, the *Herald* promptly began to attack his bachelorhood. Editor's Drawer, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Aug. 1856, 421-2; *New York Herald*, July 23, 1856. See also, *New York Herald* July 1, 11, 19, 20, Aug. 1, 7, Oct. 17; *Madison, Wisconsin Patriot*, Aug. 23, 1856; *Sacramento Daily Democratic State Journal*, Aug. 20, 1856; *Stockton (CA) Weekly San Joaquin Republican*, Aug. 23, 1856; and Philip G. Auchampaugh, “James Buchanan, The Bachelor of the White House: An Inquiry on the Subject of Feminine Influence in the Life of Our Fifteenth President,” *Tyler's Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 20, no. 1 (July 1938): 160-1. On Buchanan's engagement with Ann Coleman and her untimely death in 1819, see Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 27-35. Michael D. Pierson examines the election as a contest between the sectionalized gender and domestic ideologies of the northern Republicans and the Democrats, more attuned to southern patriarchy. He looks at the election from the perspective of the Republicans, inviting an assessment of Democratic beliefs regarding gender and domesticity. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 115-63.

own household, he could rise above the domesticity specific to his own section and treat all families, especially those competing in the territories, impartially.¹⁰

Buchanan's marital state thereby reinforced his conservatism and nationalism. Democrats manipulated the gender of their "dried up old bachelor" in order to project their ideology onto him. They constructed a candidate who could appeal to diverse constituencies, including southerners, northerners, Unionists, Old Whigs, and loyal Jacksonians. Doughfaces like Buchanan aspired to be arbiters between the sections, but often found themselves derided for their malleable unmanliness. Newspaperman Murat Halstead criticized Buchanan for lacking substance and principles, noting that Democrats wanted to nominate him in order to enjoy "the chance to give him, pending the canvass, either a Northern or Southern face, or both at once if it shall be deemed expedient." The noncommittal Buchanan would be able to "combine the radical and conservative sections of the party North and South," as well as "secure to him a large body of the Whigs." For Democrats, this quality bespoke the amoral neutrality essential to harmonizing competing interests in a diverse republic. As an unattached bachelor, unmoored from the domestic imperatives of a northern family, Buchanan's gender and sexuality heightened his capacity to perform the intersectional mediation for which Doughfaces were responsible.¹¹

¹⁰Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan, of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman and Son, 1856), 11. Historians who analyze sectionally divergent domesticity see it as a factor in the sectionalism of the Civil War era. Highlighting domestic distinctions, however, can obscure the continuation of the northern corporate and patriarchal household, akin to those in the South. For more on how the Democratic party spoke for a constituency of southern plantation households and northern corporate households, see chapter 2. On the sectionalization of domesticity and its political ramifications, see Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*; Nina Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), xi-36; and LeeAnn Whites, "The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender," in *Gender Matters: Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Making of the New South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 11-24.

¹¹*Boston Daily Atlas*, June 10, 1856; *Trimmers, Trucklers and Temporizers: Notes of Murat Halstead from the Political Conventions of 1856*, ed. William B. Hesseltine and Rex G. Fisher (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1961), 24.

Buchanan's masculinity consequently became a site for propounding Democratic principles. His bachelorhood signified his naturally conservative temperament—unlike fanatics, he did not submit to his passions in private or in politics. His political history in the early days of the second party system, readable on his aged countenance, enabled Democrats to court both loyal Jacksonians and Old Whigs who yearned for a return to that era's conservative and national leadership. Without his own northern family, furthermore, Buchanan would evenhandedly superintend all families, whether plantation households or those composed of free laborers. Bachelorhood made him the truly national, conservative, and manly candidate in 1856. Buchanan's unorthodox manhood, once rebranded by Democrats, became the gendered equivalent of popular sovereignty—a seamless consonance between principle and man, platform and candidate.

James Buchanan's Conservative Body

Stumping in Virginia, Henry Wise suggested that Buchanan's masculine vitality stemmed from a bachelor's sexual abstinence. "A man of sound morals," Wise explained, "he has conserved himself, and kept his faculties so well by a virtuous life, that he, now at the age of sixty-five, has many years of service still in him." Thus could this elder statesman offer himself to be "called upon at the right time, for his conservatisms." Wise likely drew on the teachings of reformer Sylvester Graham, who preached that a healthy life required abstemiousness, dietary and sexual. Buchanan's official campaign biography similarly gloated that "he had been reserved for the occasion" when the two forces he spent his life combating—antislavery and nativist fanaticism—"are just now the exciting questions in issue." Buchanan's personal conservatism caused him to live long enough for his ideological conservatism to prove useful.

He was conservative in his politics because he was “conservative” in his private life, and, moreover, the evidence of his conservatism was his aged, yet virile, body.¹²

Observers could tell that conservatives such as Buchanan were manlier than degraded fanatics, because fanaticism and conservatism manifested themselves somatically. Democrats elided principles and men, so that partisan beliefs were detectable in a man’s positions in the past and on his body in the present. One pamphleteer, for instance, in attacking southerners who opposed the Democracy and vacillated on slavery, metaphorically indexed the “political flesh marks by which they may be known.” These “flesh marks” equated antislavery men with chattel—their political beliefs legible on their debased, enslaved bodies. Democrats such as Wise instead felt comfortable with Buchanan, because he embodied comforting, conservative principles. Buchanan’s age, his marital status, his household, and his sexuality allowed ideological conservatism to be induced from his body.¹³

Fanatics, on the other hand, physically suffered from the degradation which Democrats warned would occur through surrendering the prerogatives of white manhood to the moral dictates of the *isms*. Democrats maligned fanatics’ manhood by deriding them as “busy-bodies and meddlers” and “political prostitutes.” Fanatical women, meanwhile, “unsexed” themselves by trespassing in the masculine political sphere, where they “address[ed] mobs of men in strains of vulgar violence.” In fabricating social problems for themselves to then overzealously fix, fanatics were unpleasant people—and they looked it. They were simultaneously “misanthropic

¹²“Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856,” 10, 13; R. G. Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan. Late Minister to England and Formerly Minister to Russia, Senator and Representative in Congress, and Secretary of State: Including the Most Important of His State Papers* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1856), 369. For a brief overview of Grahamism, see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 246-54.

¹³*The Agitation of Slavery. Who Commenced! And Who Can End It!! Buchanan and Fillmore Compared from the Record* (Washington: Union Office, 1856), 4.

spirits” and intense in the pursuit of “dreams of reform [that] are ceaseless and prolific.” *The Democratic Review* described an antislavery meeting as composed of “lank-jawed, hungry-eyed men,” “snuffy old women,” and “sanctimonious, unhappy-looking individuals, in white chokers.” Uptight in their restrictive clothing, yet impassioned in their politics, fanatics could not help but possess a corrupted visage. Henry Wise’s cousin endured one of Senator Henry Wilson’s “harangue[s]” on Kansas. The appearance of the Massachusetts Republican’s antislavery audience—“some six or eight sleek fellows in white chokers”—as well as the “coarse expression to his face” only underscored his fanatical beliefs. Fanatics’ physiognomy, and even their fashion choices, betrayed their politics.¹⁴

Democrats sought to contrast Buchanan’s manly conservatism with this debauched fanatical manhood, but they first had to overcome the stigma attached to unmarried men. One newspaper recounted a joke in which a student answered “why the noun bachelor was singular” by responding, “it is so very *singular* they don’t get married.” Lifelong unmarried men belonged to a marginal group, easily susceptible to caricature in antebellum America. Common stereotypes included the effeminate man or the hypersexual lecher, neither of which conformed to normative manhood. Massachusetts Democrat Caleb Cushing, who never remarried after his wife’s death in 1832, reflected on marriage when he received news of a friend’s engagement in 1854. Although technically not a bachelor himself, Cushing noted that remaining single could be

¹⁴A *Speech Delivered at Webster, Mass., Providence, R. I., Nashua, N. H., and Other Places, during the Presidential Campaign of 1856, in Support of James Buchanan, by George B. Loring, of Salem* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, 1856), 6; “Mr. [Howell] Cobb’s Speech, in Depot Hall,” in *Speeches of Messrs. Weller, Orr, Lane, and Cobb, Delivered in Phœnix and Depot Halls, Concord, N. H., at a Mass Meeting of the Democratic Party of Merrimac County* (n.p., [1856?]), 26; *Infidelity and Abolitionism: An Open Letter to the Friends of Religion, Morality, and the American Union* (n.p., [1856]), 5; *Plain Facts and Considerations: Addressed to the People of the United States, without Distinction of Party, in Favor of James Buchanan, of Pennsylvania, for President, and John C. Breckinridge, of Kentucky, for Vice President. By an American Citizen* (Boston: Brown, Bazin, and Company, 1856), 26; S. W. C., “Wisdom and Folly,” *The United States Democratic Review*, July 1856, 574; H. A. Wise to Edward Everett, Washington, D. C., February 20, 1856, Edward Everett Papers (microfilm edition), Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

a liability. Having long “urge[d] such a step” upon his friend, he conceded that “my example has not conformed with my doctrine.” Marriage would benefit his friend, however, because “as the general rule, personal happiness, not less than true usefulness, and respectability, is only to be found in well-chosen matrimonial association.” Bachelorhood may not have precluded “personal happiness,” but it certainly endangered one’s “respectability” and “usefulness” in the political realm.¹⁵

Bachelorhood represented a profound transgression in antebellum political culture, because republican citizenship and statesmanship presumed marriage and household mastery. Bachelors served as negative foils for republican virtue; even Cushing could mock a “crusty old bachelor” to elicit laughter during a political address. Wise, in spite of his friendship with both Buchanan and Cushing, the latter serving as the Virginian’s chief groomsman at his third marriage in 1853, argued that only the coercive power of the state could redeem bachelors. Unmarried men lacked republican virtue because they “selfishly” stayed single. The maverick Virginian strongly supported public education in his state, and he demanded that bachelors bear the brunt of taxation. He queried, “is there any old bachelor among you, who has no child of his own, who is too mean to support some poor man’s daughter as his wife?” Such men “selfishly evaded [...] the burthens in society of supporting a wife and family of children—the highest duty

¹⁵*Salisbury (NC) Carolina Watchman*, May 31, 1859; quotation from Caleb Cushing to P. R. George, Washington, September 30, 1854, draft letter; P. R. George to [Caleb Cushing], [illegible], September 26, [1854], both in the Caleb Cushing Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; John M. Belohlavek, *Broken Glass: Caleb Cushing and the Shattering of the Union* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 2005), 49. See also, William M. Cooke to John Y. Mason Jr., St. Louis, MO, April 24, 1847, John Y. Mason Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and John Letcher to [Paulus Powell], Lexington, VA, September 25, 1854, Paulus Powell Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. On bachelorhood and manhood in early America, see Vincent J. Bertolini, “Fireside Chastity: The Erotics of Sentimental Bachelorhood in the 1850s,” *American Literature* 68, no. 4 (Dec. 1996): 707-37; Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 132-4; and John Gilbert McCurdy, *Citizen Bachelors: Manhood and the Creation of the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), especially 84-119. On the unmarried, lecherous rake, see Thomas Foster, “Reconsidering Libertines and Early Modern Heterosexuality: Sex and American Founder Gouverneur Morris,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 22, no. 1 (Jan. 2013): 65-84.

of a good citizen.” To compel these men to contribute to the public good, Wise proposed that “rich bachelor[s] [...] should be taxed most of all.” During the 1856 canvass, Massachusetts Democrat Benjamin F. Butler even jokingly recommended “send[ing] old bachelors to Utah” to combat polygamy. Single men, in short, had to be turned into good citizens, because, as Cushing had observed, “true usefulness” required marriage.¹⁶

To rebut the image of bachelors as aberrant men and substandard political actors, Democrats argued that bachelorhood actually undergirded Buchanan’s masculinity and his conservative statesmanship. Buchanan was not a lecherous old man untempered by feminine domesticity. Rather, his bachelorhood suggested physical self-control and, correspondingly, conservative politics. By never marrying or fathering children, he rejected undiluted passion, whether defined as overly enthusiastic politics or sexual excess, both of which fanatics promiscuously indulged. Campaign material emphasized Buchanan’s “blameless life” to imply that his private habits qualified him for public office. His frequently commended traits, such as “the even tenor of his life,” “the spotless purity of his character,” and his reputation as “a man of known caution,” had dual meanings—at home and in politics he was conservative. Fanatics, in contrast, succumbed to sexual and political passion. The “hot blood that distends the swollen veins of fanaticism” made fanatics “ardent” in their politics, as well as in sex, leading inevitably

¹⁶Caleb Cushing, *Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall, Boston, October 27, 1857*. Also, *Speech Delivered in City Hall, Newburyport, October 31, 1857* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, 1857), 31; *Religious Liberty. Equality of Civil Rights among Native and Naturalized Citizens. The Virginia Campaign of 1855. Governor Wise’s Letter on Know-Nothingism, and His Speech at Alexandria* (n.p., [1855]), 39; *Speech Delivered by Henry A. Wise, at the Free School Celebration, in the County of Northampton, on the Fourth of July, 1850; Dedicated to the People of Accomack and Northampton, and Now Addressed through Them to the People of the State of Virginia* (Baltimore: Bull and Tuttle, 1850), 11-2; *Columbus Ohio State Journal*, July 9, 1856; Simpson, *A Good Southerner*, 76-7, 95. On the connections between marriage and citizenship/political legitimacy, see Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Glover, *Southern Sons*, 132-4. In his study of the evolving identity of bachelors in early America, John Gilbert McCurdy argues that bachelorhood had emerged as a recognized identity and variant of manhood by the 1800s. He cites Buchanan’s campaign as evidence that bachelorhood was not a severe indictment of one’s manhood. His analysis misses the full scope of the attacks on Buchanan and his critics’ claims that he lacked political legitimacy, because, as a bachelor, he also lacked manhood. McCurdy, *Citizen Bachelors*, 198-200.

to amalgamation and “free love.” Buchanan, on the other hand, boasted “a mind free from that species of insanity, where passion usurps the place of reason.” “His inclinations,” one southern Whig satisfactorily concluded, “are generally conservative.”¹⁷

Unlike fanatical men, Buchanan’s body exuded manhood; his sexual restraint did not make him a stereotypically effeminate bachelor. In a political culture prizing assertive manhood, lacking virility precluded statesmanship. Supporters thus depicted the portly, white-haired, sixty-five-year-old perpetual officeholder as “muscular,” “in the vigor of health, intellectually and physically,” and, according to the hyperbolic Wise, “though his head be white as snow [...] he is yet vigorous in mind and body, and is a man of Herculean labor.” This portrayal takes on significance given that his bachelorhood and advanced age provided easy fodder for critics. Democrats instead pointed to Buchanan’s bachelorhood to account for his impressive virility in old age—a life of abstinence had kept him healthy. Ubiquitous testaments to his health and strength answered the charge that his marital status detracted from his manhood and statesmanship.¹⁸

Buchanan’s sexual and political moderation set an example for the nation’s gender norms. This mission seemed particularly important in 1856, given the political roles assumed by

¹⁷*Short Answers to Reckless Fabrications, against the Democratic Candidate for President, James Buchanan* (Philadelphia: William Rice, Book and Job Printer, 1856), 28; Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan*, 16; “Letter of Hon. James A. Pearce, Washington, July 31, 1856,” in *Old Line Whigs for Buchanan and Breckinridge: Letters from Hon. James Alfred Pearce, and Hon. Thomas G. Pratt, to the Whigs of Maryland. Speeches of Hon. J. W. Crisfield, of Maryland, and Hon. James B. Clay, of Kentucky* (n.p., [1856]), 5, 6; *Plain Facts and Considerations*, 3; “Speech Delivered at Delhi, Delaware County, N. Y., at a Meeting of the ‘Hardshell’ or National Democracy of the County, September 29, 1854,” in *Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson, of New York. Including: Addresses on Important Public Topics; Speeches in the State and United States Senate, and in Support of the Government during the Rebellion; Correspondence, Private and Political (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Dickinson), Poems (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Mygatt), Etc.*, ed. John R. Dickinson (New York: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1867), 1:494; *Infidelity and Abolitionism*, 5; Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, 421.

¹⁸Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, 425; Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan*, 3; “Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856,” 10.

Republican women, especially Jessie Benton Frémont. Jessie Frémont attained celebrity status with the candidacy of her husband John. Republicans practically turned her into a candidate, and antislavery women mobilized in support of “John and Jessie.” Frémont herself, writing from New York City, proudly observed, “just here & just now I am quite the fashion—5th Avenue asks itself, ‘Have we a Presidentess among us.’” Conservative Democrats grimaced at this unprecedented female incursion into partisan politics. Bemoaning the fact that “the women of the north are certainly making long strides in a political direction,” one Texas newspaper applauded “how much more like women the Buchanan [...] ladies behave” when compared with “abolition females” organizing and even stumping for Frémont. The stodgy Buchanan was similarly unimpressed with the frenzy surrounding Jessie Frémont. When he modestly reminded John Y. Mason, a close friend from Virginia, that his wife “ought not to think of apartments in the White House until after the election,” he sniped that “our ‘Jessie’ has no doubt but that she will occupy these apartments.” Buchanan acknowledged Frémont’s entrance into politics, even as he mockingly sought to force her back into a domestic role.¹⁹

Whereas Buchanan’s supporters referenced his “unspotted character” as evidence of his conservative politics, John C. Frémont’s domestic life bespoke fanaticism. Jessie and John had eloped, leading one Democrat to cry that Frémont “stands out as a bold defiant and unrepenting REBEL against the LAWS OF FILIAL DUTY, the LAWS OF HIS COUNTRY, and the LAW OF GOD.” Frémont’s elopement, with no less than the daughter of the old Jacksonian Thomas Hart Benton, showed contempt for convention. Another Democratic speaker mocked the

¹⁹“Buchanan and Fremont,” in *Songs for Freemen: A Collection of Campaign and Patriotic Songs for the People, Adapted to Familiar and Popular Melodies, and Designed to Promote the Cause of “Free Speech, Free Press, Free Soil, Free Men, and Fremont”* (Utica: H. H. Hawley, Publisher, 1856), 15; Frémont to Elizabeth Blair Lee, [Apr. 18, (1856)], in *The Letters of Jessie Benton Frémont*, ed. Pamela Herr and Mary Lee Spence (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 98; *Dallas Herald*, Sept. 6, 1856; James Buchanan to John Y. Mason, Bedford Springs, PA, August 15, 1856, Mason Family Papers. See also, *Boston Daily Atlas*, June 27, 1856, Aug. 8, 1856. On Jessie Benton Frémont and Republican women in 1856, see Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 129-63.

Republican platform's denunciation of Mormon polygamy in Utah. Americans of all parties condemned Mormons as fanatics. But Republican opposition to Mormons' marital practices, this Democrat believed, was disingenuous, "considering the record of their candidate and ours on the marriage question." This may have been a reference to the fact that Frémont's mother had left her husband for Frémont's father and that the Republican nominee was born out of wedlock. A bachelor, on the other hand, was the furthest thing from a polygamist. Given two generations of the Frémont family's domestic unorthodoxy, Democrats could only conclude that the Republican's private life presaged the fanatical politics he would pursue as president.²⁰

The sexuality of the Democratic candidate shaped his politics. The public construction of Buchanan's manly and healthy bachelor body positioned him as the proper mean between passionate overindulgence and effeminate subservience, both as a man and as a politician. "His tall, commanding figure, his serene and lofty aspect" denoted his manhood and his conservative temperament, with his safe political beliefs stemming from his restrained manhood. A midwestern Democrat captured the correlation of Buchanan's gender and his political legitimacy: "he is a man, & a statesman, & I can vote & work for him, for he is a *man*." As in his private life, Buchanan avoided political extremes. He was "progressive, not in the spirit of lawlessness, but in harmony with the steady advance of our institutions." At the same time, he was "conservative, not in veneration for antiquated abuses, but in sacred regard for rights which cannot be violated without destroying the fundamental law." Both his "personal character" and his "political orthodoxy" were reassuringly conservative.²¹

²⁰*The True Democracy. A Speech Delivered at East Cambridge, Sept. 29, 1854. By J. C. Lovejoy, of Cambridgeport* (Boston: C. C. F. Moody, Printer, [1856?]), 1, 4; Loring, *A Speech Delivered at Webster, Mass.*, 17; Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 117-29.

²¹*Address of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, before the Democratic Association of Nashville, June 24, 1856* (Nashville: G. C. Torbett and Company, 1856), 22; Anthony Ten Eyck to Alpheus Felch, Manitowoc, WI, January 27, 1856,

James Buchanan's Partisan Body

A Whig defined the choice in 1856 as between “a ripe and experienced statesmen [*sic*]” or the “untried statesmanship” of the political neophyte Frémont. Buchanan’s aged and unmarried body was visual proof of his experience. It also signified his conservatism. By subduing his passions and “conserving himself,” as Henry Wise put it, he had reached a respectable old age. His age made him a comforting, conservative presence that hearkened back to the imagined stability of the early republic, allowing his supporters, both Democrat and Whig, to link him to the second party system’s heroes, both Whig and Democrat. Buchanan’s form, therefore, was simultaneously a partisan and a non-partisan body. His elderly countenance was visual proof that he had served alongside not only Andrew Jackson, but also Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. Recounting Buchanan’s record intensified the partisan loyalty of Jacksonians and attracted leaderless Whigs, both groups yearning for a mythologized past when national and conservative statesmen banished fanaticism from politics. Democrats hoped that their evocations of the second party system, discernible in Buchanan’s lengthy career and physical longevity, would resonate with conservatives of all parties.²²

The Democracy and the Know-Nothings doted upon former Whigs, hoping to profit from their residual conservatism. Each party’s candidate “aspire[d] to command the conservative army.” The Know-Nothings claimed to be the party of conservative Unionism, and Millard Fillmore, like Buchanan, was offered to voters as “a national and conservative man.” Democrats therefore needed to prove that Buchanan was the best candidate to fight fanaticism, whether of the antislavery or nativist variety. Buchanan himself counseled unattached Old Whigs: “It is

Alpheus Felch Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan*, 3.

²²*An Appeal for the Union. By a Philadelphia Whig* ([Philadelphia], [1856]), 15.

quite impossible that you should become Know Nothings or Free Soilers; & you have no place to go except to the Democratic party, which has now become the only true conservative party of the Country.” In this, he recommended, “I should adopt no half-way measures.” Buchanan and his party made non-partisan appeals to “Democrats—Whigs—Conservatives of all parties” a prominent feature of their canvass.²³

The Know-Nothings, however, endeavored to deny Democrats the mantle of conservatism. Some Whig leaders, such as Fillmore, had joined the American party regardless of their own stance on nativism and anti-Catholicism, in order to overtake its party structure and perpetuate Whiggery in a new guise. Ambitious Know-Nothings even hoped to woo Democrats into their conservative coalition. New York congressman Solomon G. Haven, one of Fillmore’s advisers, anticipated that the renomination of Franklin Pierce would anger conservative Hunker Democrats. The Pierce administration had alienated many Hardshell Hunkers, especially in New York, by doling out patronage to Softshells and Free-Soil Democrats. Haven, more optimistic than prescient, predicted that “the Hards will not be satisfied” and that their failure to secure the nomination for their leader, Daniel Dickinson, “will send them to our side.” Buchanan’s nomination nonetheless placated Hunkers, with Dickinson himself approving his party’s ticket as “an old line Democrat.” “Not only will he [Buchanan] be supported by all true Democrats,” Dickinson foresaw, “but by all conservative Whigs who are unwilling to forsake a national to rally under a sectional standard.”²⁴

²³*The Agitation of Slavery*, 8; Letter from “Charles B. Calvert, of Maryland,” in *Buchanan’s Political Record. Let the South Beware!* ([Washington, D. C.: National Executive Committee of the American Party, 1856]), 10; James Buchanan to William B. Reed, Legation of the United States, London, February 29, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908-11), 10:63; *The Last Appeal to Pennsylvania* (n.p., [1856]), 7.

²⁴Solomon G. Haven to James M. Smith, Washington, March 12, 1856, Solomon G. Haven Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; “Speech at a Mass Meeting Held to Ratify the Nominations of the Cincinnati Convention. Delivered at the Court-House in Binghamton, N. Y., June 21, 1856,” in

A united Democracy continued to court such Old Whigs by eulogizing the second party system. In 1856 they bolstered their case by offering Buchanan as a relic of that golden age. Buchanan was one who “yet lives,” the “sole survivor” of “that race of giants” which included Jackson, Calhoun, Clay, Webster, and Polk. The Pennsylvania Whig William B. Reed, whom Buchanan had instructed to join the Democracy, traced Buchanan’s legislative history and found him aligned with the pillars of the second party system: “Mr. Buchanan vot[ed] with Clay, and Clayton, and Crittenden, and Rives, and Tallmadge, and White,” “BENTON, [...] WEBSTER, and WRIGHT.” Given this “consistent record,” Reed affirmed that “Mr. Buchanan will make a safe, and moderate, and National President.” By connecting him with the titans of Jacksonian politics, Democrats tried to remove Buchanan from contemporary disputes by concluding that, like the deceased sages, he “has outlived detraction.” As with his sexual abstinence, installing him in America’s political pantheon insulated him from the impassioned fanaticism of the 1850s. The stature of Buchanan only increased in proportion to how long he outlived the great men who had previously dwarfed him.²⁵

Dead Whigs even vouched for Buchanan from beyond the grave. The sons of Webster and Clay backed Buchanan, and both visited the Keystone State to channel their fathers in his support. James B. Clay delivered a postmortem endorsement on behalf of his father, as he rationalized before an audience of Kentucky Whigs “how it is possible that I, my father’s son, can reconcile it to myself to vote for Mr. Buchanan.” Old Whigs even seemed to rise from the

Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson, 1:510, 514; Holt, “Another Look at the Election of 1856,” 47-54.

²⁵*An Address on the Parties and Issues of the Presidential Election, by Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, Delivered at Philadelphia, before the Key-Stone Club of That City, August 15, 1856* (Nashville: G. C. Torbett and Co., 1856), 35; *The Appeal to Pennsylvania and the Middle States. A Speech by William B. Reed: Delivered at a Meeting of the Friends of Buchanan and Breckenridge, at Somerset, Pa., September 24, 1856* ([Philadelphia?, 1856]), 17, 20, 25; Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan*, 4. See also, Sarah Bischoff Paulus, “America’s Long Eulogy for Compromise: Henry Clay and American Politics, 1854-58,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 11 (March 2014): 43-6.

dead, or at least postpone their extinction, in order to aid the Democracy. A correspondent informed Democratic senator James A. Bayard that “Mr. Clayton is quite indisposed but says, if it becomes necessary he will take part in Delaware against Fillmore & Fremont.” A short two months after the ailing John M. Clayton offered to campaign for the Democracy, Bayard received plaudits for his eulogy of the Delaware Whig.²⁶

Surviving Whigs reached their own decisions as to which candidate would best combat fanaticism in 1856, with the course of leading Old Whigs, such as the “fossiliferous Whiggery in New-England,” becoming a topic of anxious speculation throughout the nation. Many conservatives would have been “equally pleased with the election of Buchanan or Fillmore,” provided Frémont and the “sectional” Republicans went down to defeat. A New England bookseller related to his Democratic customer in Alabama that “Choate & Everett would be highly indignant if they were named in connection” with the Know-Nothings. He forecast that “a large number of the prominent old Webster Whigs will be found voting for Buchanan this year.”²⁷ Edward Everett, whose name would have lent gravitas to whichever party it graced, ended up backing the Americans. This course earned a gentle rebuke from Buchanan, who

²⁶“Speech of James B. Clay, Delivered at the Union Meeting in Mason County, Kentucky,” in *Old Line Whigs for Buchanan and Breckinridge*, 15-6; quotation from O. K. Barrell to James A. Bayard, Washington, September 3, 1856; Thomas F. Bayard to James A. Bayard, Philadelphia, December 3, 1856, both in the Thomas F. Bayard Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Address of James A. Bayard, in *Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. John M. Clayton, of Delaware, in the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States, December 3, 1857* (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, Public Printer, 1857), 5-10; Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 260; Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy*, 59; Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945), 481.

²⁷Millard Fillmore to Edward Everett, Buffalo, July 12, 1856; H. A. Wise to Edward Everett, Washington, D. C., July 14, 16, 31, August 12, 17, 23, 1856; quotation from *New York Times*, clipping, in Robert C. Winthrop to Edward Everett, Nahant, July 28, 1856; Edward Everett to William Henry Trescot, Boston, quotation from September 12, December 29, 1856; Joshua Bates to Edward Everett, December 5, 1856, all in the Everett Papers; Levi L. Cushing Jr. to [John W. A. Sanford Jr.], Cambridge, September 11, 1855; Levi L. Cushing Jr. to [John W. A. Sanford Jr.], Cambridge, June 24, 1856, both in the John W. A. Sanford Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery. See also, Henry A. Wise to Robert Tyler, Richmond, VA, August 15, 1856, Henry A. Wise Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; and *Letter of Hon. O. F. [Oscar Fitzallen] Moore, of Ohio, to His Constituents* (Washington, D. C.: American Organ, Print, 1856), 5.

complained that he “witnessed with much regret & disappointment your march, under the lead of Mr. Fillmore, from the proud & patriotic old whig party into the ranks of the Know Nothings.” Robert Winthrop followed Everett into the Know-Nothing “ranks,” while Rufus Choate sanctioned fellow Whigs voting for Buchanan. New York’s Hamilton Fish, upset that Fillmore could not win yet unable to stomach backing the Democrat, voted for Frémont “under a protest.” Still, many Old Whigs preferred Buchanan to the “Black Republican” candidate. Everett explained to Buchanan that, although “I did not vote for you,” he still wished the Democrat would “check the progress of sectional feeling” and revivify “the Conservative feeling of the North.”²⁸

Discomfort over Know-Nothing fanaticism made Buchanan the clear conservative choice for some Whigs. Fanaticism in any guise was reprehensible, and Know-Nothingism was just as much an *ism* as abolitionism. Allen Hamilton, an influential Indiana Whig who was born in Ireland, announced his support for Buchanan and also revealed that he had already been voting the Democratic ticket for two years. Hamilton’s calculus was simple; as he explained to William H. English, “the no nothing [*sic*] movement disgusted me.” Buchanan, he judged, “will be conservative and pour oil on the troubled watters [*sic*] of our internal troubles.” A Maryland Whig, sounding like the Democrats with whom he was cooperating, fused fanaticisms—Buchanan and his vice-presidential nominee, John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, would guarantee the “defence of Southern rights against the purposes of the Free Soilers, and defence of

²⁸H. A. Wise to Edward Everett, Washington, D. C., August 23, 1856; quotation from Hamilton Fish to Edward Everett, Newport, September 15, 1856; quotation from Edward Everett to James Buchanan, Boston, December 8, 1856, copy; quotation from James Buchanan to Edward Everett, Wheatland, near Lancaster, December 11, 1856; Edward Everett to William Henry Trescot, Boston, September 12, December 29, 1856, all in the Everett Papers; Robert C. Winthrop Jr., *A Memoir of Robert C. Winthrop. Prepared for the Massachusetts Historical Society* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1897), 185-95; “Speech ‘On the Political Topics Now Prominent before the Country,’ Delivered at Lowell, Mass., October 28, 1856,” in Rufus Choate and Samuel Gilman Brown, *The Works of Rufus Choate with a Memoir of His Life* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1862), 2:412.

the rights of conscience in religious belief, and of the Constitutional rights of our naturalized citizens against the purposes of the American party.” For these Whigs, the Democracy was the only party that rejected *all* of the *isms*.²⁹

Democrats thrilled over conservatives throughout the nation martialing for Buchanan. Democratic literature rattled off the names of both nationally and locally prominent Whigs, with compendia such as “OLD LINE WHIG LAWYERS IN CINCINNATI FOR MR. BUCHANAN.” Bagging Whigs influential at the local level represented just as much a coup as securing an Everett or a Choate. Indiana Democrats, including Senator Jesse Bright, for instance, rushed to welcome Allen Hamilton into the Democracy. Congressman Thomas A. Hendricks told him that he was “greatly rejoiced when conservative & influential Whigs are found laboring with the democrats in this struggle.” Whigs in Maryland figured prominently in the Democratic campaign. Despite Fillmore’s strength there, the state’s Whig senators, Thomas G. Pratt and James A. Pearce, along with Reverdy Johnson and Whig congressmen, endorsed Buchanan. With support ranging from the Deep South’s Judah P. Benjamin to New England’s Rufus Choate, Democrats exulted “that from Maine to Georgia, the most eminent minds heretofore opposed to the Democratic party are rallying in his [Buchanan’s] support.”³⁰

²⁹Allen Hamilton to William H. English, Fort Wayne, June 12, 27, 1856, William Hayden English Family Papers, Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis; “Speech of Hon. Isaac D. Jones,” in *Letter from the Hon. James Alfred Pearce, United States Senator from Maryland, on the Politics of the Day. Letter from the Hon. Thomas G. Pratt, United States Senator from Maryland, to the Whigs of That State. Speech of the Hon. Isaac D. Jones, Delivered in Response to the Call of a Democratic Procession at Princess Anne, Somerset County, Md., on the Evening of Tuesday, July 15, 1856. Speech of the Hon. John W. Crisfield, Delivered at Princess Anne, Somerset County, Md., on Tuesday Evening, July 15, 1856, Responding to the Call of a Democratic Procession* (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Standard, 1856), 16. One correspondent wanted William H. English to arrange for James B. Clay to speak in Indiana. For other Whigs supporting Democrats in Indiana, see Hiram T. Craig to William H. English, Martinsville, March 24, 1856; E. Conningore[?] to William H. English, Paoli, July 13, 1856; and J. A. Talbott to William H. English, Indianapolis, August 16, 1856, all in the English Family Papers.

³⁰*Buchanan and Breckinridge. The Democratic Hand-Book, Compiled by Mich. W. Cluskey, of Washington City, D. C. Recommended by the Democratic National Committee* (Washington: R. A. Waters, 1856), 26-8; Jesse D. Bright to Allen Hamilton, Washington, June 16, 1856; Thomas A. Hendricks to Allen Hamilton, Washington City, March

Yet Whiggery's influx did not turn the Democracy from its Jacksonian roots, with Buchanan's aged body anchoring the 1850s Democracy to the party of Old Hickory. Buchanan's service during the party's heroic past and his personal ties to Jackson energized partisans. The venerable Martin Van Buren, who could no longer attend rallies by 1856, being "deprived of that gratification by advanced age," approved of Buchanan's nomination and lent his Jacksonian aura to a man whom Jackson had never particularly liked. In their heated party battles, Jackson and Henry Clay aligned in their distrust of the conniving Buchanan. This fact did not prevent Democrats from repeatedly associating Buchanan with the Old Hero, with one pamphlet noting, "probably the most interesting part of Mr. Buchanan's history, was his early and effective support of General Jackson for the Presidency."³¹

Democrats often reminded Old Whigs that the issues of the second party system were dead. But when attempting to activate Jacksonian loyalties, they rehashed the great party struggles and gave Buchanan a central role in them. In such epic clashes as those over the Bankruptcy Bill and internal improvements, Buchanan had demonstrated his devotion to "the

31, 1856, both in the Hamilton Family Papers, Manuscripts and Rare Books Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis; *Letter from the Hon. James Alfred Pearce, United States Senator from Maryland, on the Politics of the Day. Letter from the Hon. Thomas G. Pratt, United States Senator from Maryland, to the Whigs of That State. Speech of the Hon. Isaac D. Jones, Delivered in Response to the Call of a Democratic Procession at Princess Anne, Somerset County, Md., on the Evening of Tuesday, July 15, 1856. Speech of the Hon. John W. Crisfield, Delivered at Princess Anne, Somerset County, Md., on Tuesday Evening, July 15, 1856, Responding to the Call of a Democratic Procession* (Washington, D. C.: Office of the Standard, 1856); *Short Answers to Reckless Fabrications*, 10; *Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin, of Louisiana, on the Kansas Question. Delivered in the Senate, May 3, 1856* (Washington: The Union Office, 1856), 17-21.

³¹*Letter of Ex-President Van Buren. June 28, 1856* (Philadelphia: William Rice, Printer, [1856]), 3; Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan*, 5. The charge of "bargain and sale," by which Buchanan was accused of attempting to mediate a *quid pro quo* between Jackson and Clay to secure Old Hickory's election in 1824, followed Buchanan for the rest of his career and earned him the mistrust of both Jackson and Clay. See also, Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, 45-6, 68-70, 72-7, 367; William M. Corry to Joseph Holt, June 20, 1856, Joseph Holt Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; *Buchanan's Political Record*, 4; "Speech of James B. Clay," 15-6; *The Life of the Hon. James Buchanan, as Written by Himself, and Set to Music by an Old Democrat, to the Tune of "Poor Old Horse Let Him Die!" Price—"Half a Jimmy!"* (Lancaster, Near Wheatland, 1856), 6; Jean H. Baker, *James Buchanan* (New York: Times Books, 2004), 28; and Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 49-53, 56-9, 136.

cause of equal rights—for special privileges to none, and for justice to all.” The platform adopted by the Cincinnati convention reiterated traditional Jacksonian maxims, such as acknowledging “the popular will” and ensuring that “the Federal Government is one of limited power” and “rigid economy.” Democrats laid these planks alongside those touting the Kansas-Nebraska Act and disparaging the “political crusade” aimed at “Catholic and foreign-born” Americans. The continuity of Jacksonian thought was textually laid out in a platform that joined these issues and was embodied in a candidate whose career spanned both eras.³²

Buchanan, the elderly Van Buren noted, was approaching “the evening of his life.” In the sectional politics of the 1850s, there was no clearer qualification for office, in the minds of conservatives, than being linked to dead men or being near death oneself. Buchanan was the last vestige of a nobler era, and it fell to his age and wisdom to quell sectionalism. Upon his nomination, he joked, “if I can be instrumental in settling the Slavery question [...] and then add Cuba to the Union, I shall, if President, be willing to give up the ghost, and let [Vice President] Breckenridge [*sic*] take the Government.” Like the “best of the Roman rulers,” Buchanan would leave the public stage, having done his part in “the service of the republic.”³³

James Buchanan’s National Body

According to Henry Wise, Buchanan’s selection was “due to Pennsylvania,” as well as to Virginia. Wise envisioned a bisectional coalition of the “great tier of Middle States,” centered on the partnership of the “‘sour krout’ democracy” of the Keystone State and Virginia’s “‘red

³²Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, 67, 137-8; “Democratic Platform of 1856,” in *National Party Platforms, 1840-1964*, ed. Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 23-7.

³³*Letter of Ex-President Van Buren*, 8; “Letter from the Hon. A. G. Brown to the Hon. S. R. Adams,” Washington City, June 18, 1856, in *James Buchanan, His Doctrines and Policy*, 16; *The Agitation of Slavery*, 35.

waistcoat' democracy of Thomas Jefferson." Wise's description of this potential alignment did not quite have the same ring to it as Martin Van Buren's projected union "between the planters of the South and the plain Republicans of the North" a generation earlier. Nonetheless, a Virginia-Pennsylvania backbone would reinvigorate the bisectional Democracy that had earlier rested on Van Buren and Thomas Ritchie's Virginia-New York axis. The Democratic party would continue to be *the* national party.³⁴

The union of Wise and Buchanan personified Democrats' Unionism. The two men conflated their friendship with the political dalliance of their states, expressing both in intimate terms. Wise vowed that "Virginia and Pennsylvania shall forever be united in democratic and patriotic triumphs." After his victory, the president-elect gushed to his "best friend" in the Old Dominion that "I respect, nay I venerate Virginia & my gratitude to her will end only with my life. She & Penn^a united can preserve the Constitution & the Union, & may Heaven grant that they may never be separated." "As to our selves individually," he reassured Wise, "I entertain no apprehensions." Buchanan could effect such a partnership between the Slave States and the Free States, because his bachelorhood not only indicated his conservatism, but also his nationalism—the childless Buchanan was "the most congenial candidate to national men," because he could be father to the entire nation. Buchanan's ability to rise above sectionally distinct households, because he did not head a normative one of his own, equipped him to moderate sectional passions, moral visions, and contrasting conceptions of the family—making him the embodiment of the amoral refereeing at the heart of popular sovereignty.³⁵

³⁴"Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856," quotations on 10, 12, 14; Henry A. Wise to George Booker, Richmond, March 11, 1857, Wise Family Papers; Van Buren quoted in Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 1990, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 87; Eaton, "Henry A. Wise: A Study in Virginia Leadership, 1850-1861," 190-4; Simpson, *A Good Southerner*, 89.

³⁵"Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856," 14; James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, near Lancaster, PA, November 26, 1856; James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, December 2,

A bachelor seemed predisposed to national statesmanship. After Buchanan's nomination, Pennsylvanian Samuel W. Black rose to convey his state's appreciation to the Cincinnati convention and to assuage any remaining anxieties over their candidate's virility. In what would become a theme of the campaign, Black told the raucous crowd:

Now let me set Mr. Buchanan right on the matrimonial question (hurra! hurra for old Buch!) Though our beloved chieftain has not, in his own person, exactly (laughter) fulfilled (renewed laughter) the duties that every man owes to the sex, and to society, there is a reason. Ever since James Buchanan was a marrying man, he has been wedded to THE CONSTITUTION, and in *Pennsylvania we do not allow bigamy*. (The Convention flings its hats to the ceiling.)

Buchanan should not be faulted for not fulfilling the "duties" of a man, Black clarified. Instead, he practiced a higher form of statesmanship and, by doing so, "fulfilled" his "duties [...] to society." As Henry Wise did, Black translated bachelorhood into a monastic abstention from a more worldly union of flesh that would only distract less pure politicians from preserving the Union of states.³⁶

While Black contended that bachelorhood enhanced statesmanship, other supporters located the same benefit in childlessness. Another Pennsylvanian predicted that "Mr. Buchanan will make a good President. [...] He has no children [and] not many relations to provide for." Lacking his own progeny, others argued, the nation was Buchanan's charge. One pamphleteer asserted that "like Washington, Madison, and Jackson, Mr. Buchanan is childless. God has denied these benefactors children, 'that a nation might call them father.'" Buchanan reportedly referenced his childlessness to mollify a delegation of Democrats affiliated with the Young America movement, who were curious if he was just another of the "old fogies" obstructing

1856, both in the Wise Family Papers; Reed, *The Appeal to Pennsylvania and the Middle States*, 5. See also, James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, near Lancaster, March 10, 1852, June 21, 1856, Wise Family Papers.

³⁶*Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in Cincinnati*, 36. See also, *Madison Wisconsin Patriot*, July 5, 1856; and *Columbus, Ohio State Journal*, Sept. 17, 1856.

national progress. He assured them “that he was an old democrat and childless” and “had concluded long ago to maintain the best relations with the young men of the country to whom his attitude was almost paternal.” Striking this fatherly pose before Young Americans, “his feeling was therefore anything but hostile.” Childlessness made Buchanan a natural political harmonizer.³⁷

By filling the role of the stern and impartial father/statesman, Democrats promised, Buchanan would pacify the territories, the site of contestation over slavery under the parameters of popular sovereignty. Buchanan would ease North-South tensions by “separat[ing] these angry foes, not by ideal lines and unequal privileges, but by giving the right to each to enter upon and occupy ample and abundant territory.” Buchanan himself postured as a wise old sage capable of managing bickering children. In accepting his party’s nomination, he advised, “let the members of the family abstain from intermeddling with the exclusive domestic concerns of each other.” Free labor families and plantation households would rest secure under the paternal gaze of James Buchanan, whose lack of a family only strengthened his ability to fairly implement popular sovereignty.³⁸

Buchanan’s bachelorhood thereby presented supporters with an opportunity to bind him to the platform on which he and his party stood. The Cincinnati platform embraced popular sovereignty, declaring “NON-INTERFERENCE BY CONGRESS WITH SLAVERY IN STATE AND TERRITORY” to be “the only sound and safe solution of the ‘slavery question’ upon which the great national idea of the people of this whole country can repose in its determined conservatism of the Union.” Politicians used platforms to differentiate parties in a metaphorical

³⁷A. Johnston to Allen Hamilton, Kingston, March 10, 1857, Hamilton Family Papers; *The Agitation of Slavery*, 35; William M. Corry to Joseph Holt, June 20, 1856, Holt Papers.

³⁸*The Agitation of Slavery*, 35; Buchanan to John E. Ward et al., Committee, Wheatland (near Lancaster), June 16, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan*, 10:84.

sense; according to historian Jean H. Baker, platforms served as “a special place for Democrats to stand during the campaign.” A Maine Democrat who attended the Cincinnati convention disparaged “any of our Democrats that thinks the platform is to [*sic*] hard for their feet barefooted,” continuing, “they better not step on and leave their room for others.” And “ample room for all” there would be, for “the platform extends from one end of the nation” to the other. Because popular sovereignty treated the sections fairly, its inclusion in the platform prompted a Georgia Democrat to boast before New Englanders that “the platform we stand upon is as broad as the Union and as national as the constitution, and invites to its defence patriots of all parties and all sections.”³⁹

Not only could all Democrats and all Americans stand on the Cincinnati platform, they could also rally around Buchanan, whose manly, conservative, and national body became his party’s platform. Platforms facilitated the merger of men and principles, because a nominee was bound by the planks upon which he stood. After his nomination, Buchanan mused, “being the representative of the great Democratic party, and not simply James Buchanan, I must square my conduct according to the platform,” which he judged to be “sufficiently broad and national for the whole Democratic party.” With national and conservative principles enshrined in the platform, the candidate who stood upon it became the physical manifestation of those ideals, a correlation made even stronger by the fact that Buchanan’s bachelorhood and childlessness supposedly made him an unbiased umpire for all Americans competing under popular sovereignty. Buchanan, like the platform, was thus “a man upon whom all can unite.” The

³⁹“Democratic Platform of 1856,” 25-6; Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (1983; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 285; Isaac Chadbourne to Charles G. Bellamy, Alfred, June 25, 1856, Charles G. Bellamy Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; “Mr. Cobb’s Speech, in Depot Hall,” 32.

doctrine of popular sovereignty, like conservatism more generally, was subsequently mapped onto Buchanan's manly form—his national body analogous to his party's platform.⁴⁰

James Buchanan's Southern Manhood

Henry Wise took a break from electoral machinations to prepare for his daughter's nuptials in the summer of 1856. Yet he had not wholly abandoned president-making. Relishing his newly robust national reputation, he invited his old friend James Buchanan to not simply attend the wedding, but to actually "give away the bride." Buchanan sent his regrets, explaining that "I could not, without giving great & perhaps just offences, leave home under existing circumstances." Convention barred Buchanan from actively campaigning. Wise had violated that stricture in his own canvass in 1855, when he traversed Virginia lambasting his opponents as inadequate defenders of slavery, yoked as they were to untrustworthy politicians at the North. Yet when the steadfastly proslavery, occasionally secessionist, and thrice-married Wise invited Buchanan to escort his unmarried daughter, he symbolically entrusted white southern womanhood to the care of a northern bachelor.⁴¹

Wise's invitation signaled to fellow southerners that Buchanan was a safe man for the South and slavery. While stumping for Buchanan, Wise needlessly reminded Virginians that "no one here or elsewhere will say I am an anti-slavery man." He and other southern Democrats staked their reputation on the guarantee that the manly James Buchanan would protect white southern women from the sexual ravages of servile insurrection. This pervasive fear reached acute levels in 1856, a reflection of white southerners' acknowledgement, albeit distorted, of

⁴⁰"Speech, June 9, 1856," in *The Works of James Buchanan*, 10:81; *Proceedings of the National Democratic Convention, Held in Cincinnati*, 35.

⁴¹James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, near Lancaster, June 21, 1856, Wise Family Papers.

enslaved southerners' intense interest in the Republican campaign. In this charged atmosphere, Democrats offered white southerners a candidate who would safeguard their households, by rhetorically rendering Buchanan as a paternalist who adhered to southern tenets of manhood. Armed with Buchanan's extensive prosouthern record, Democrats also engaged in the politics of slavery against Millard Fillmore. At the same time, Buchanan's role as the South's protector, which resonated before audiences in the North and in the South, hardly undermined the party's nationalism. That a northern man so enthusiastically defended the honor of the other section only underscored the conservative nationalism of this Doughface and his Democracy.⁴²

The combination of the malleable identity of the bachelor with the sectionally distinct norms of southern manhood meant that Democrats could depict Buchanan as both a man generally, and as a southern man specifically. In the Slave States, manhood, and consequently political legitimacy, derived from two sources—household mastery and communally-conferred honor. *Mastery* stemmed from the material foundation of an independent household and control over its dependents, including white women and especially slaves. Despite mastery's household prerequisites, the public dimension of southern *honor* made manhood flexible in the South. Under the public rituals of honor culture, mediated by the community, manhood possessed a performative aspect. The public conferral of honor could compensate for a man's lack of mastery at home; men could lay claim to manhood by performing their mastery in public.⁴³

⁴²“Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856,” 10; Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 57-61; Harvey Wish, “The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” *The Journal of Southern History* 5, no. 2 (May 1939): 206-22.

⁴³On the differences between manhood defined as mastery and manhood defined as honor, and on the overlap between the two poles of the “honor-mastery paradigm,” see Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, “Rethinking Southern Masculinity: An Introduction,” in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), vii-xvii, quotation on x.

The elasticity inherent in southern manhood allowed Democrats to advance seemingly unorthodox men. Democrats staked on the aggressively masculine reputation of their party to compensate for individual shortcomings. Childless and unmarried men, along with those who transgressed norms of propriety in their private lives, could demand public recognition of their honor and, as a result, seize the status of a southern statesman. Vice President Richard Mentor Johnson, for instance, had long-term sexual relationships with women he owned. Alexander H. Stephens, diminutive, sickly, and a lifelong bachelor, earned an enviable reputation as a statesman. One of Buchanan's intimate friends was fellow Democratic bachelor William Rufus King of Alabama. King successfully ran for vice president in 1852, although lamenting that his "*Friend Buchanan*" did not receive the presidential nomination, for which his "purity of character" and "long political experience" qualified him. Buchanan, for his part, expressed satisfaction over his friend, "one of the best & purest men I have ever known," receiving the second spot on the ticket.⁴⁴

On mastery, see Nancy Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Household in the Delta, 1861-1875* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 117-60; and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). On honor, see Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen: The Political Culture of American Slavery* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Recent approaches combine mastery and honor or stress the performative dimension of southern manhood, which bridges the gap between the two concepts. See Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms*; Mark R. Cheatham, *Andrew Jackson, Southerner* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013); Brian Fennesy, "Master of an Interior World: Masculinity, Sensibility, and William Gilmore Simms," *The Simms Review* 19, nos. 1/2 (Summer/Winter 2011), 63-82; Glover, *Southern Sons*; and John Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009). On the malleability of the bachelor identity, see Bertolini, "Fireside Chastity"; and McCurdy, *Citizen Bachelors*. On southern bachelors, see Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 239-40.

⁴⁴William R. King to Robert Tyler, Senate Chamber, [Washington, D. C.], June 28, 1852, photocopy, William R. King Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery; James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, near Lancaster, June 9, 1852, Wise Family Papers; Thomas Brown, "The Miscegenation of Richard Mentor Johnson as an Issue in the National Election Campaign of 1835-1836," *Civil War History* 39, no. 1 (March 1993): 5-30. On the relationship between Buchanan and King, which some speculate may have been romantic and sexual, see Baker, *James Buchanan*, 20-2, 25-6.

Both bachelors headed proxy families consisting of nieces and nephews. They were similar to Andrew Jackson, with his legion of wards, none of whom were biological children. Both men also took these dependents abroad on diplomatic errands, and Buchanan acted as surrogate father to his niece, Harriet Lane, who presided over his White House. King was one of the dominant forces in Alabama politics dating back to that state's territorial phase. In their eulogies upon his death in 1853, several congressmen felt the need to point out that King paled in comparison to the demigods who passed before him—Calhoun, Clay, and Webster. Yet his “brother Senator[s]” also recalled his “manly firmness” and found that “his example in all the relations of life, public and private, may be safely commended to our children.” According to R. M. T. Hunter, King's “public honors” resulted from his unimpeachable “personal honor.” A well-respected legislator and party leader, King's career and reputation, despite never having married or fathered children, hinted at the potential for a bachelor from the North to approximate a southern statesman, at least for the exigencies of a presidential campaign.⁴⁵

Although unmarried and childless, King *was* a slaveholder. He thereby benefited from a tangible criterion of southern mastery constitutive of political legitimacy—he exerted control over “his people.” The best that Buchanan's supporters could offer was that he had long

⁴⁵*Obituary Addresses on the Occasion of the Death of the Hon. William R. King, of Alabama, Vice President of the United States Delivered in the Senate and in the House of Representatives of the United States, Eighth of December, 1853* (Washington: Beverley Tucker, 1854), 10, 16, 24, 25, 27, 67-8, 74. On Buchanan, see Baker, *James Buchanan*, 47-51; and Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 206-10. William R. King is in need of an historical treatment. On King, see William Thomas King to Thomas Devane King, Paris, France, March 22, 1844[?], typescript; William T. King to Thomas D. King, New York, [August 1844?]; Catherine Ellis to Thomas D. King, Baden Baden, Germany, August 20, 1845; quotation from W. T. King to Thomas Devane King, Paris, France, June 15, 1846, typescript; and William R. King to William T. King, Chestnut Hill, March 27, 1851, photocopy, all in the King Family Papers. King's nephew concluded, “I fear he will never add to the number of the family, as he seems now to be satisfied to give away the young brides and stand Godfather to his young countrymen,” even though there was a woman in France, where King was serving as American minister, “who never sees him without having hysterics for an hour after he leaves her.” Jackson's niece also served as hostess at the White House during his administration. Cheatham, *Andrew Jackson, Southerner*, 53-7, 79-89, 121; Mark R. Cheatham, “‘The High Minded Honourable Man’: Honor, Kinship, and Conflict in the Life of Andrew Jackson Donelson,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 265-92.

broadcast his paternalism beyond his own home and would continue to protect other men's household dependents as well as their right to own slaves. Buchanan did head his own "family," with his campaign biography noting that "his family consists of himself and niece." But Buchanan's domestic responsibilities reached beyond Harriet Lane. Campaign literature frequently highlighted his role as the "perpetual benefactor of the poor widows" in his hometown of Lancaster. Buchanan's concern for these women and their children countered speculation that "he has no sympathy or regard for the [female] sex." He acted as a surrogate husband to unmarried women by establishing a fund to provide "fuel for indigent females." As a result of his magnanimity, "many a desolate hearth has been made glad by his noble charity" and mothers "teach their little ones to bless the name of James Buchanan." Democrats recycled these maudlin testimonials to prove that their unmarried candidate knew how to protect women and children and to show that his paternalism rippled outward to enfold numerous households.⁴⁶

Buchanan's physical home, moreover, served as a domestic microcosm of the sectional fraternization that Democrats hoped to achieve under his stewardship. Buchanan reposed at his pastoral Wheatland estate in southern Pennsylvania in the manner of a country squire. Despite the stereotype of the "cold blooded, imperturbable and selfish old bachelor," he was in fact noted for his "warm-hearted friendship," "hospitality," and "the hold he has upon the affections of the people among whom he resides." "The Sage of Wheatland" would have been right at home among the southern gentry, some of whom made pilgrimages to see "Old Buck." Intersectional cohabitation was familiar to the Pennsylvanian—he and King had lived together in Washington

⁴⁶*Sketches of the Lives of Franklin Pierce and Wm. R. King, Candidates of the Democratic Republican Party for the Presidency and Vice Presidency of the United States* (n.p., [1852]), 34; Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, 18-9, 422-3, 424; "Buchanan's Sympathy for Women," *Stockton Weekly San Joaquin Republican*, Sept. 27, 1856. See also, *Plain Facts and Considerations*, 6, 8-9; *Short Answers to Reckless Fabrications*, 27-8; and *New York Herald*, Sept. 28, 1856. The absence of separate spheres in the Slave States, according to Kenneth S. Greenberg, yielded a consonance between southern men as masters of slaves and as statesmen. Greenberg, *Masters and Statesmen*.

boardinghouses while serving in Congress. One visitor to Wheatland later recounted “finding in his library a likeness of the late Vice-President King, whom he loved (and who did not?).” Wise trekked to Wheatland after the election to turn down a cabinet position. Although the Virginian declined to join the president-elect’s “official” family, Buchanan later told him, “I never enjoyed a visit from any man more in my life than I did your recent visit.” During the campaign, additionally, “many prominent whigs [were] at his house.” This bachelor, the patriarch of his party, knew how to maintain harmony in his political household.⁴⁷

Buchanan’s paternalism also percolated beyond his home to encompass white southern women. Reaching back to the congressional debates over the reception of abolitionist petitions in 1836, Democrats found that Buchanan had consistently defended plantation households. Arguing that Congress should not entertain such petitions lest they incite slaves, Senator Buchanan had originally proclaimed, “touch this question of slavery seriously—let it once be made manifest to the people of the south that they cannot live with us, except in a state of continual apprehension and alarm for their wives and their children, for all that is near and dear to them upon the earth,—and the Union is from that moment dissolved.” Such statements amounted to motifs in Buchanan’s public speeches for the rest of his career. Twenty years later,

⁴⁷*New York Herald*, July 19, 1856; “Chapter XXIV. Conclusion—Mr. Buchanan at Home,” in Horton, *The Life and Public Services of James Buchanan*, 419-28; James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, December 2, 1856, Wise Family Papers. See also, “Mr. Buchanan’s Character at Home,” in *Short Answers to Reckless Fabrications*, 26-7; [Illegible] to [Herschel V. Johnson], Philadelphia, November 25, 1856, Herschel V. Johnson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; Henry A. Wise to George Booker, Richmond, VA, November 26, 1856, Wise Family Papers; H. A. Wise to Edward Everett, Washington, D. C., August 5, November 28, 1856, Everett Papers; Baker, *James Buchanan*, 25-6, 47, 137-8, 150, 151-2; and Klein, *President James Buchanan*, 206-7. On the role that “messing” together in the capital’s boardinghouses played in forging intersectional ties among antebellum politicians, see Rachel A. Shelden, “Messmates’ Union: Friendship, Politics, and Living Arrangements in the Capital City, 1845-1861,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 1, no. 4 (Dec. 2011): 453-80.

the victorious Buchanan admonished the North: “With the South it is a question of self-preservation, of personal security around the family altar, of life or of death.”⁴⁸

For conservatives, fanaticism facilitated black political agency, which would lead to interracial sex and specifically to the rape of white women. Southern Democrats took solace in the fact that Buchanan knew “*the consequences of abolition*” as well as any paranoid slaveholder. Supporters in the South seized upon his lengthy record, especially his opposition to abolitionists’ petitions to Congress and their mailings in the South. Wise, remembering his state’s history, recollected, “when the issue of incendiary publications arose, he [Buchanan] voted to violate the very mails rather than permit the agitators of a Nat Turner insurrection to light the fires of incendiarism.” While protecting southern women, Buchanan’s own virility was never a threat. Wise and other Democrats, by foregrounding his bachelorhood, had rhetorically neutered the aged northerner. Antislavery Americans often accused slaveholders of sexual depravity, specifically referencing the access which they forced upon enslaved women’s bodies. The “patriarchal and oriental South” conjured images of the sexual licentiousness of “the slave driver’s harem.” If the South was a seraglio, then James Buchanan was its eunuch.⁴⁹

Buchanan’s defense of southern women was cited in the politics of slavery to convince southerners that Buchanan was preferable to Fillmore. Just as Democrats and Know-Nothings battled over which candidate was the most conservative, they also debated who was the soundest on slavery. John W. A. Sanford Sr., a Know-Nothing candidate in Georgia, advised his Democratic son in Alabama that the issues of the second party system “have [...] ceased to be

⁴⁸*Congressional Globe*, 24th Cong., 1st sess., 1835-36, 3:222; “Speech at Wheatland,” November 6, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan*, 10:96.

⁴⁹*The Agitation of Slavery*, 11-5, quotation on 11; “Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856,” 10; [Leonard Marsh], *A Bake-Pan. For the Dough-Faces. By One of Them* (Burlington, VT: C. Goodrich, 1854), 4; *Nebraska: A Poem, Personal and Political* (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1854), 25.

subjects of discussion” and that, when choosing between Buchanan and Fillmore, “the question is how do they stand affected upon the subject of negro slavery.” He doubted his son possessed “ingenuity enough to show a marked dissimilarity between the sentiments of” the two men.

Democrats warmed to this challenge, prompting another Know-Nothing to report that “Buchanan’s folks in the South are getting very much alarmed and are pitching into Mr. Fillmore [...] most relentlessly.” Buchanan protected southern women by supporting the gag rule and speaking out against abolitionist petitions. Fillmore, Democrats charged, voted alongside fanatics such as Joshua R. Giddings for Congress to consider the petitions. Not much separated him from Frémont, Democrats warned, who also allied himself with Giddings, a man who “look[ed] forward to the day when there shall be a *servile insurrection* in the South.”⁵⁰

Southerners gauged Buchanan’s masculinity for indications of his proslavery conservatism, and they also consulted his exhaustively reprinted record. Pamphlets ransacked both Doughfaces’ legislative histories to differentiate Fillmore and Buchanan on minute points going back decades. Fillmore, for example, “voted in favor of petitions to receive *negro* ambassadors from the black republic of Hayti” and opposed “the annexation of Texas, solely on the ground that slavery existed in that country.” Buchanan, meanwhile, supported the admission of new slave states such as Arkansas and Texas, wished to annex Cuba, and voted for John C. Calhoun’s 1837 resolutions affirming states’ rights and slavery. Tennent Lomax, a Democrat in

⁵⁰John W. A. Sanford [Sr.] to John W. A. Sanford [Jr.], Milledgeville, July 29, 1856. Another Democratic son in Georgia decided to put family above party and vote for his Know-Nothing father. E. M. Sanford to John W. A. Sanford [Jr.], Milledgeville, August 30, [1856], both in the Sanford Papers; Solomon G. Haven to James M. Smith, Washington, July 29, 1856, Solomon G. Haven Family Papers; *The Agitation of Slavery*, 15-25; *The Fearful Issue to Be Decided in November Next! Shall the Constitution and the Union Stand or Fall? Fremont, The Sectional Candidate of the Advocates of Dissolution! Buchanan, The Candidate of Those Who Advocate One Country! One Union! One Constitution! And One Destiny!* (n.p., 1856), 9-10, 24. The quotation is from one of Giddings’s speeches, reprinted in campaign literature to link him to Frémont. For Buchanan’s position on the gag rule, see William W. Freehling, *Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*, vol. 1 of *The Road to Disunion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 324-7.

Georgia, compiled his own authoritative scrapbook of the election. He used it to record the numerous bets he made on the race's outcome—wagering “1 fine hat,” for instance, “that Virginia would go for Buchanan by 10,000.” But most of his compendium featured annotated press clippings that exhaustively rehashed the two men's careers. Fillmore supported citizenship for “Free Colored Foreigners” in 1842, while, more recently, his congressional allies voted for the expulsion of Preston Brooks “for inflicting on” Senator Charles Sumner “a deserved chastisement.” Southerners such as Lomax pored over the candidates' political histories in order to make well-informed decisions before casting a ballot for a Yankee (see figs. 4 and 5).⁵¹

The Kansas-Nebraska Act figured as a key point of comparison between Buchanan and Fillmore. Democrats hypothesized that Fillmore would allow the restoration of the hated Missouri Compromise Line, precluding the possibility of new slave states. Buchanan, instead, heartily endorsed popular sovereignty, “founded as it is upon an elementary principle of Self Government,—the will of the majority of those directly interested.” If the people so desired, he would oversee the accession of additional slave states into the Union. Democrats needed to stress his adherence to Kansas-Nebraska to soothe southern anxieties. Unlike his rivals for the nomination, Franklin Pierce and Stephen Douglas, Buchanan was not linked to the measure because he was serving as minister to the Court of St James's during Pierce's administration. At the end of the Mexican War, furthermore, Buchanan had suggested running the Compromise Line through the Mexican Cession as an alternative to Dallas, Dickinson, and Cass's popular sovereignty. Democrats explained away Buchanan's past by arguing that extending the line back

⁵¹*The Agitation of Slavery*, 29-30; quotations from “Bets,” Lomax's annotations on p. 48, clipping on p. 63, Tennent Lomax Scrapbook, Tennent Lomax Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery. Lomax was hardly alone in betting on an electoral outcome. In 1848 a Mississippian noted that he had “two pairs of boots, a fine hat, & sundry little articles” staked on the presidential contest. In 1856, meanwhile, Jesse Bright, Thomas Pratt, James Bayard, and Judah Benjamin had “large bets pending on the Electoral vote of Indiana.” W. S. Stuart to sister, Monticello, November 20, 1848, Coleman-Stuart Family Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; H. A. Wise to Edward Everett, Washington, D. C., September 27, 1856, Everett Papers.

in 1847 would have benefited the South and that, regardless of his prior position, Buchanan had now converted to popular sovereignty and stood on a platform approving Kansas-Nebraska.⁵²

Democrats also deployed the politics of slavery by linking Know-Nothings and Republicans, a party more obviously susceptible to charges of antislavery fanaticism. Frémont was “the candidate for the Presidency of conjoined fanaticisms” and “the candidate of Greeley, Seward, and Giddings.” Know-Nothings and Republicans, Democrats discovered, shared a common fanatical ideology. The American party contained “Abolition Know Nothings [who] are out for Fremont.” The two parties were also connected on an organizational level through fusion movements. Buchanan used racially and sexually suggestive language when he observed that in Pennsylvania, “the Black Republicans & Know nothings are coquetting with each other,— alternately abusing & coaxing.” From a pragmatic perspective, Democrats also argued that “every vote thrown for Mr. Fillmore is more or less an aid to John C. Fremont, to the extent that it may weaken James Buchanan.” The Know-Nothing ticket would split the conservative vote, send the election to the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, and ensure Frémont’s victory. “This proves that the ticket,” Henry Wise shrieked, “is a mongrel ticket—that the offspring of it is [...] a mulatto, or [...] a Mulungeon!” Democrats did not wage separate

⁵²Quotation from James Buchanan to William Worrell, Wheatland, near Lancaster, October 24, 1856, James Buchanan and Harriet Lane Johnston Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; Buchanan to John E. Ward et al., Committee, Wheatland (near Lancaster), June 16, 1856, in *The Works of James Buchanan*, 10:82-3; James Buchanan to John Slidell, Wheatland, near Lancaster, May 28, 1856, copy, Breckinridge Family Papers; A. Dudley Mann to John Perkins, London, June 4, 1854, John Perkins Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For attacks on Fillmore, see *The Agitation of Slavery*, 29, 31-5. For Buchanan’s earlier proposal, see his “Harvest Home” letter positioning himself for the 1848 election, Buchanan to Charles Kessler et al., Washington, August 25, 1847, in *The Works of James Buchanan*, 7:385-7; and David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, completed and ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976), 56-7, 69-71. For attacks on Buchanan’s earlier position regarding the Missouri Line, see *Buchanan’s Political Record*, 4-5. For the defense of Buchanan, see *The Agitation of Slavery*, 13-4, 35; Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan*, 10; and “Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856,” 10-1. In contrast to Democrats’ defense of Buchanan, a Whig pamphleteer claimed that Buchanan had a “safe and conservative character” because he originally supported the Missouri Compromise and in 1854 “took no part in its repeal,” a development which many Whigs detested. A Philadelphia Whig [pseud.], *An Appeal for the Union*, 8.

campaigns against Republicans and Know-Nothings, but lumped them together in a national campaign against fanaticism.⁵³

In light of his impressive proslavery credentials, a confident Buchanan circulated a letter among delegates at the Cincinnati convention asserting, “I have no patience at the distrust of any southern man in regard to my course on the subject of Slavery.” Buchanan identified with southerners personally and politically; he bemoaned that during the election the British were “gloating over the prospects of the emancipation of *our* slaves & the dissolution of the Union” [emphasis added]. Buchanan was also sound on white supremacy. His amoral neutrality extended to race relations. No past actions attested to “Mr. Buchanan’s want of feeling to the colored men.” At the same time, his paternalism did not extend unduly to African Americans—never, “in his proverbial benevolence,” had he given “preference to the negro over the men of his own color and blood.” Northern audiences read that Buchanan “regards this as a government of white men, and not a government of colored men.” The white man’s republic would be safe indeed.⁵⁴

This rhetoric shows that the politics of slavery was not a purely southern phenomenon in 1856; it also played well before northern audiences. Many northerners who supported Buchanan counted themselves “the opponent[s] of the extension of slavery,” although they would still

⁵³*Infidelity and Abolitionism*, 1; *The Fearful Issue to Be Decided in November Next!*, 3, 24; quotation from James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, near Lancaster, PA, September 13, 1856; James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Wheatland, near Lancaster, August 27, 1856, both in the Wise Family Papers; “Speech of Governor H. A. Wise, at Richmond, June 13, 1856,” 14. See also, *Address of Hon. Thomas L. Clingman, on the Political Condition and Prospects of the Country, to the Freemen of the Eighth Congressional District of North Carolina* (n.p., [1856]), 11-2; “Speech of Hon. Isaac D. Jones,” 15-6; and Remarks of William Barksdale, in *Proceedings of the Celebration of the Fourth of July, 1856, by the Jackson Democratic Association of Washington, at the Bladensburg Spa Spring Grove. Containing the Oration of Hon. A. E. Maxwell, of Florida, and Sketches of the Remarks of the Other Speakers* (n.p.: Office of “The National,” 1856), 13-4.

⁵⁴James Buchanan to John Slidell, Wheatland, near Lancaster, May 28, 1856, copy, Breckinridge Family Papers; James Buchanan to John Y. Mason, Bedford Springs, PA, August 15, 1856, Mason Family Papers; *Short Answers to Reckless Fabrications*, 25.

“guard the rights of the South under the Constitution.” Northern Democrats prided themselves in sticking up for the South, even if they personally opposed slavery and its growth. Many free-state Democrats faulted their region for sectional tensions. Their candidate often placed the onus of sectionalism squarely on the North. In a tone which would have smacked of rank condescension to antislavery northerners, Buchanan lectured in his victory speech, “all we of the North have to do is to permit our Southern neighbors to manage their own domestic affairs, as they permit us to manage ours. It is merely to adopt the golden rule, and do unto them as we would they should do unto us.” In his retirement, Buchanan ruminated on the carnage unfolding around him. The Civil War resulted from a dynamic where “one extreme naturally begets another.” The initial actors in this fanatical brinksmanship were, for Buchanan and fellow Democrats, always the fanatics of the Free States.⁵⁵

Democrats thereby understood Buchanan’s defense of the South and willingness to countenance slavery’s expansion not as Doughface treason against the North, but as a manly stand in favor of the Union. His past support of the Slave States received praise in the Free States as “an exhibition of firmness only too rare in those days among Northern men.”

Buchanan was lionized in the North for “demanding for the South no hollow and hypocritical platform, but a broad, radical, distinct recognition of those rights, [...] shared honestly and fairly between the people of all the sections of the Union.” Many southerners understood the defense of their rights and the preservation of the Union as complementary. James L. Orr, in persuading the South Carolina Democracy to send a delegation to its first national convention in over a

⁵⁵*The Last Appeal to Pennsylvania*, 3; Buchanan, “Speech at Wheatland,” November 6, 1856, 97; James Buchanan, *Mr. Buchanan’s Administration on the Eve of the Rebellion* (1866; repr., Scituate, MA: Digital Scanning, 1999), 14. The Know-Nothings also presented Millard Fillmore as a candidate appealing to both proslavery and antislavery audiences. For the antislavery Fillmore, see Anna Ella Carroll, *Which? Fillmore or Buchanan!* (Boston: James French and Company, 1856), 21-2. This fact supports Michael Holt’s contention that the Know-Nothings were not purely a southern party in 1856; like the Democracy, they were trying to please diverse audiences nationwide. Holt, “Another Look at the Election of 1856.”

decade, expected that “the aid of the conservative men at the North” would “enable us to save a constitutional Union,” as well as “ourselves and our institutions.” The South could depend on these northerners, “who in their section have done good service against political abolitionism.” As northern fanaticism was the aggressor, to which southern fanaticism only responded, the South expected northern Democrats to tamp down the zealotry in their own section. Democratic nationalism thus often unfolded as an unabashed defense of the South.⁵⁶

James Buchanan’s Doughface Body

The Democracy’s opponents agreed that the party’s candidate and platform meshed, although for them, this symbiosis signified unmasculine dependence. Sam Houston, a southern supporter of the Know-Nothings, observed that it was impossible to “separate the candidate and platform,” because Buchanan “has merged himself in the platform.” Buchanan’s political cravenness could be explained by his personal failings; Houston reportedly felt that Buchanan’s “great private fault was being a bachelor.” The Know-Nothings had arisen partly as a reformist crusade against established parties. Their anti-partisan culture primed them to interpret Buchanan’s “entire dependence on the party that nominated him” as proof of political corruption in addition to masculine degradation. Charles B. Calvert of Maryland boasted that Millard Fillmore’s “manly independence, in qualifying his acceptance of the American platform, stands out in bold relief, when contrasted with the subserviency of the acceptance of his competitor.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶Democratic State Central Committee of Pennsylvania, *Memoir of James Buchanan*, 10; *The Cincinnati Convention. Letter from James L. Orr, of South Carolina, to Hon. C. W. Dudley, on the Propriety of Having the State of South Carolina Represented in the Democratic National Convention, to Be Held in Cincinnati* (Washington, D. C.: H. Polkinhorn’s Steam Book and Job Printing Office, [1855]), 3; Lacy K. Ford Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 345-8.

⁵⁷“Gen. Sam Houston on the Presidency,” in *Buchanan’s Political Record*, 9; *Austin (TX) State Gazette*, Oct. 4, 1856; Letter from “Charles B. Calvert, of Maryland,” 11-2; Michael F. Holt, “The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism,” *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 2 (Sept. 1973): 313-20.

For antislavery Americans, the fact that Buchanan “renounce[d] his Identity” when he mounted the Cincinnati platform demonstrated not just unmasculine dependence but also subservience to the Slave Power. His support for the doctrine of popular sovereignty, enshrined in the platform, troubled many in the Free States. One Republican campaign song equated adhering to the platform with surrendering to the South, by having Buchanan pronounce:

The South “demands more room”—the West and North
must bow,
And the East must knuckle down—and the Niggers hold the plow,
For “Platform” James am I.

Republicans agreed that Democrats could stand upon the body of “‘Platform’ James,” although for them, his body seemed distinctly unmanly and traitorously prosouthern. In one critical political cartoon, a fire-eater and his slave sit atop Buchanan’s prone form, suggesting the degradation of allowing his body to serve as a prosouthern platform (see fig. 6). Buchanan’s bachelorhood, moreover, only reinforced his opponents’ portrayal of him as an unmasculine Doughface primed to betray northern households. Republicans thereby answered Democrats’ assertions that they had the masculine, conservative, and national candidate. Bachelorhood instead indicted his manhood and, when coupled with his Doughface history, predisposed Buchanan to commit treason against families in the Free States.⁵⁸

Antislavery Americans could read Doughfaces’ unsavory principles on their degraded bodies. For Democrats, fanatics forfeited whiteness and manhood. Yet for antislavery northerners, Doughfaces were the ones who yielded up their manhood through obsequiousness to the Slave Power. Doughfaces constituted a distinct “race” or “species,” and their “degradation”

⁵⁸*James Buchanan, His Doctrines and Policy*, 9; *The Life of the Hon. James Buchanan, as Written by Himself, and Set to Music by an Old Democrat, to the Tune of “Poor Old Horse Let Him Die!” Price—“Half a Jimmy!”* (Lancaster, Near Wheatland, 1856), 8. Even this pamphlet’s place of publication was a jab at Buchanan, who often located himself at “Wheatland, near Lancaster” in his correspondence.

was physically discernable. While for Democrats fanatics exhibited excess passion, their critics charged that Doughfaces suffered from a lack thereof. They were “pale-blooded”—one of these northern men with southern principles had “not a drop of manly blood coursing through his veins.” Doughfaces failed to defend the North against southern aggression, and their doughy pallor registered their deficient masculinity. One Republican claimed that he would “feel a greater pride in sharing the bright red blood” of a “poor slave-mother” than he would kinship “with the pale faces of some of the statesmen of the North.” Doughfaces were characterized by “both *softness* and paleness, and these again a lack of *firmness*, or unmanliness.”⁵⁹

Doughfaces’ bodies were evidence that these men had emasculated *and* enslaved themselves. They served the Slave Power; therefore, “slavery has corrupted them.—They are sold to slavery, and will do the work of slavery.” By becoming slaves themselves, they lost their political legitimacy and their whiteness. One northern Democrat confided that he “hate[d] a Dough-face,” such as President Pierce, and hoped instead to “get a *white man* nominated at Cincinatti [*sic*].” While for him Buchanan passed this test, for many northerners, few Democrats proved acceptable. A female correspondent to abolitionist Frederick Douglass’s newspaper questioned Pierce’s statesmanship by painting him as “a man of easy, gentlemanly manners; but he looks *far* more fit to be ruled than to rule.”⁶⁰

⁵⁹Lewis D. Campbell to William P. Fessenden, Hamilton, October 16, 1855, William P. Fessenden Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; [Marsh], *A Bake-Pan. For the Dough-Faces*, 3, 4, 5; “God’s Law Outlawed: An Address Delivered in Manchester, New Hampshire, on 24 January 1854,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979-92), 2:460; *Frederick Douglass’ Paper (Rochester, NY)*, March 10, 1854; “Speech of Mr. William M. Evarts, at the Same Meeting,” in *A Voice from the Grave of Jackson!: Letter from Francis P. Blair, Esq., to a Public Meeting in New York, Held April 29, 1856* (Washington, D. C.: Buell and Blanchard, Printers, 1856), 14.

⁶⁰*Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Feb. 24, March 3, 1854; Anthony Ten Eyck to Alpheus Felch, Manitowoc, WI, January 27, 1856, Felch Papers.

Proslavery politics diminished Doughfaces' pretensions to statesmanship. As part of his long-running feud with Stephen Douglas, Frederick Douglass analyzed the Little Giant's body for his newspaper audience. After meeting him in Illinois, the tall African American described Stephen as a "short man, firmly knit, has a large head, short neck, broad chest, a youthful face, and is exceedingly ready of speech." He was "a man who would be at once recognized by an intelligent observer, as a dangerous man." He struck another critic as "an almost dwarf in height, with Herculean head and shoulders, and the eye of a basilisk!" Stephen's impressive physical presence was undermined by his height as well as by the sinister political causes to which he bent his physical prowess. A satirical poem cast him as a "Tom Thumb titan [who] is not seen / Save when he climbs upon a negro's back, / Or struts and spouts upon an auction block." Standing on a slave was a metaphor for the fact that deficient men like Douglas depended on slavery to bolster their political standing. The proslavery content of their speeches similarly withered the rhetorical performances of Rufus Choate, Caleb Cushing, and Edward Everett, who was especially famous for his oratory. "Under all the gauze and lace of their bewitching rhetoric, under all the high-sounding phrases of their devotion to the Union," Frederick Douglass detected the "hideous and hell black imp of Slavery." Proslavery sentiments degraded Doughfaces' physical stature as statesmen.⁶¹

Republicans attacked Buchanan as one of these unmanly Doughfaces. But they could also concentrate on the more fundamental issue of his bachelorhood to bolster their claims that he was deficient as a man and, correspondingly, as a statesman. Campaign literature was rife with stereotypical depictions of either the lascivious bachelor untempered by feminine influence,

⁶¹*Frederick Douglass' Paper*, Feb. 24, Dec. 1, 1854; *Nebraska: A Poem, Personal and Political*, 12; "Freedom in the West Indies: An Address Delivered in Poughkeepsie, New York, on 2 August 1858," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 3:226-32, quotation on 231.

whose election would result in “having our National Palace converted into a bachelor’s den,” or the effeminate bachelor who suffered from “a lack of some essential quality.” Bachelorhood jeopardized one’s political legitimacy, in addition to one’s manhood. A pseudonymous correspondent to the *New York Evening Post* made this point clear. “An Ex-Old Maid” declared that “an Old Bachelor is at most but a half man.” As if this did not qualify as reason enough to oppose Buchanan, the writer then queried, “and how can such a person make more than a half-President?” Denunciations of Buchanan’s bachelorhood, whether flippant or vicious, contained a serious message regarding the correlation of manhood and statesmanship. The excitement surrounding Jessie Frémont showed that many Americans believed a married woman was worthier of occupying the White House than the Democratic bachelor.⁶²

Buchanan’s failure to head a household undermined his claims to national statesmanship. The fact that Buchanan never entered into a marital union led many to ask whether he could evenhandedly administer the analogous Union of North and South. As a Republican campaign song put it, Buchanan “is afraid of the girls and to union a foe.” John and Jessie, although native southerners, adhered to the norms of free labor society and bourgeois domesticity. As such, another song contrasted the Democratic bachelor with the Republican couple who represented the union of sections:

The “White House” has no place
That a bachelor can grace,
So with “Jessie” we’ll adorn it anew!

“Fremont and Jessie” will be faithful;
“Union”—“of hearts” be their sway,
’Tween the sunny, balmy South,
And the steadfast, busy North,
The dawn of FREEDOM’S GLORIOUS DAY!

⁶²*New York Herald*, quotation from July 23, Aug. 1, 1856; *New York Evening Post* article reprinted in *Columbus, Ohio State Journal*, June 18, 1856; “Jessie Fremont,” in *Songs for Freemen*, 24; *Boston Daily Atlas*, June 27, 1856.

The two senses of “union” complemented one another. By conflating his marriage with the Union itself, Republicans refuted accusations that Frémont’s election would amount to a sectional victory. Democrats employed the same analogy to bolster their nationalism. When Indiana’s Democratic governor Joseph A. Wright married a Kentuckian in 1854, papers in both states imbued the nuptials with political significance: “Indiana and Kentucky have always stood side by side, when danger threatened the unity of States, and now they have clasped hands across the altar of love.” The governor of Kentucky helped Wright celebrate this “union of States” and “union of hearts.” But with a bachelor candidate, such metaphors did not come so easily. As a Republican speaker explained to a mass meeting in New York City, “no wonder this man is a sectionalist. He was never for union in all his life.”⁶³

Where Democrats contended that Buchanan’s single state allowed him to lead all families, Republicans doubted a bachelor’s ability to empathize with and defend free labor households in the territories. His bachelorhood only compounded the Doughfacism of his party’s proslavery record. Many antislavery Americans assumed that northern and southern families comprised distinct domesticities. Doughfaces, by catering to those of the South, committed domestic treason. Rebutting the notion that the Democracy was friendlier to the foreign-born, a speaker warned a gathering of German-American Republicans in Philadelphia that the proslavery Democracy harmed families relocating to the territories. He cautioned, “truly, the politicians who propose to the Germans, or to any other class of people, having families to provide for, to vote the Cincinnati platform, must think them insane.” He elaborated,

⁶³“The Bachelor Candidate”; and “Political Judgment Day,” both in *Songs for Freemen*, 28-9, 41; (*Indianapolis Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, Aug. 22, 1854 (the *Sentinel* copied the article from the *Frankfort (KY) Yeoman*); “Republican Mass Meeting in Union Square. Speech of Anson Burlingame, of Massachusetts,” *New York Herald*, Sept. 25, 1856. On how Republicans politicized the marriage of John and Jessie Frémont by employing it to embody free labor principles and on how they attacked Buchanan’s bachelorhood, see Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 117-29. Pierson does not capture the full complexity of Republican accusations that Buchanan’s bachelorhood constituted a predisposition to Doughfacism.

“it may be all very well for an old bachelor [applause and laughter] in easy circumstances, who has no posterity to take care of, to stand on that platform,” but “we, for our part, have not the heart in us to take their [our children’s] future bread out of their mouths, to give it to a few great gentlemen, who live quite comfortably without it, on the labor of their slaves.” Selfish bachelors, “in easy circumstances,” had more in common with slaveholders who lived “comfortably” on enslaved labor than they did with hardworking families in the North.⁶⁴

Despite Republicans’ harsh attacks, James Buchanan and the National Democracy secured a plurality of the popular vote. Democrats swept the South, save Maryland which went for Fillmore. Republicans, meanwhile, made dramatic inroads in the North, winning eleven free states to Buchanan’s five. Historians often interpret the election as a “victorious defeat” for the young Republican party and as a herald of sectional politics. Yet we would do well to see it as a testament to the endurance of conservative nationalism. Democrats throughout the Union, and around the world, sighed with relief. William T. King, the nephew of Vice President King, reported from Rome that Americans abroad received “the news of the election of Buchanan” with “profound satisfaction.” From his diplomatic post in Paris, Henry Wise’s son related to his father that “until today, many of our good democrats here have looked very blue.” But when word arrived, John Y. Mason of Virginia, the American minister to France, could not wait to wake the younger Wise and share the “gratifying news.” After Buchanan’s nomination, a Democrat in California had predicted “the success of Democracy over the *isms*.” And indeed, Buchanan’s victory represented the triumph of Democratic conservatism. “Fanaticism has been

⁶⁴“Dr. Solger’s Address, at the German Republican Mass Meeting at Philadelphia, on Saturday Evening, Oct. 11,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, Oct. 18, 1856.

rebuked,” rejoiced a Georgian, “in the election of that good and great man Mr. Buchanan as President.”⁶⁵

It required ingenuity on the part of Democrats to make a “great man” out of Buchanan. They first had to strip their candidate of the negative connotations associated with bachelorhood. Being unmarried meant that Buchanan was, even more so than other Doughfaces, sectionally neutral and politically conservative. He was manly, national, and conservative, Democrats emphasized, *because* he was unmarried. Without his own normative, sectionally-specific family, Buchanan offered Democrats a blank slate upon which they could project their gendered ideology, which positioned all white men, regardless of whether they headed a northern home or a plantation household, as equal masters. The election of 1856 thus reveals the inner workings of Democrats’ gendered political thought, because their manly and conservative candidate was so painstakingly contrived.

Despite their successful manipulation of gender during the election, Buchanan and fellow Democrats soon learned that metaphors of domesticity, masculinity, and marriage were double-edged swords. Even fellow partisans could wield this gendered rhetoric against Buchanan. His overt support for slavery while president offended some northern Democrats. In 1858 a Pennsylvanian complained that Buchanan “has thrown himself into the arms of the South and has disregarded the interests, and appeals [*sic*] of his Northern friends.” Buchanan’s nickname was “Old Buck,” and Doughface, although usually spelled “dough,” was sometimes reckoned as “doe.” After Buchanan supported the admission of Kansas into the Union as a slave state under

⁶⁵William T. King to Dr. Saltmarsh, Rome, December 1, 1856, typescript, King Family Papers; O. Jennings Wise to Henry A. Wise, Paris, October 29, 1856, Wise Family Papers; B. F. Mahan to Alpheus Felch, San Francisco, July 21, 1856, Felch Papers; E. Randolph Harden to [Herschel V. Johnson], Athens, GA, November 23, 1856, Johnson Papers; William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 413-48; Nichols and Klein, “Election of 1856,” 1032-3; Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy*, 60-5.

the Lecompton constitution in 1857-1858, one Democrat prophesized that he would “see a poor cold Buck leaving the White House without Horns having lost them on the Plains of Lecompton taking his Cause towards the Back Woods in Pennsylvania where party Packs of Blood Hounds will never be able to start him again.” Old “Buck” metamorphosed into a “doe” face through the rhetorical emasculation of losing his antlers. This image contrasted with that of a virile buck outpacing competitors in an 1856 political cartoon (see fig. 7). Now, fleeing from “Packs of Blood Hounds,” Old Buck assumed the role of a fugitive slave. By abasing himself before the Slave Power, Buchanan forfeited the prerogatives of his gender and race and was analogous to a fugitive enslaved woman.⁶⁶

His previously steadfast defender, Henry Wise, also broke with Buchanan over Lecompton. In 1858 Buchanan chided Wise for the lapse in their correspondence during the Lecompton imbroglio. The embattled president, facing the defection of old allies and the sectional deterioration of his party, dusted off old allusions to marriage and Union when he pleaded with Wise, “it is true I have regretted, most deeply regretted that we have differed upon a very important public question; but I have carefully guarded my ‘heart, speech & behaviour’ so as to prevent me from indulging a single feeling which could affect our friendly relations, which I trust may continue ‘as long as we both shall live.’”⁶⁷

This time, Wise had no desire to see Buchanan’s bachelorhood as conducive to statesmanship. He retorted, “I felt no necessity to ‘guard’ either my ‘heart, speech or behavior,’ to prevent our friendly relations from being affected.” “‘*As long as we both shall live*’ are *marital* words,” Wise skewered, “and I may well claim to appreciate their full force and

⁶⁶A. Johnston to Allen Hamilton, Kingston, November 1, 1858, Hamilton Family Papers; William C. Davison to Stephen A. Douglas, Buffalo, November 6, 1858, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Illinois.

⁶⁷James Buchanan to Henry A. Wise, Washington, October 9, 1858, Wise Family Papers.

meaning.” The thrice-betrothed Wise, who earlier had brandished Old Buck’s bachelorhood as a boon to the South, now intimated that Buchanan ought not to speak of personal or political unionism, concepts incomprehensible to a bachelor. Wise went further in a public letter. He attacked Buchanan for supporting the Lecompton constitution, even though territorial settlers had not approved it in a referendum. Wise explained that “the President is a bachelor, and he must, therefore, be excused for not comprehending a ‘domestic institution’ as well as we who have houses full of children.” This childless bachelor mangled popular sovereignty by not allowing Kansans to regulate their families through voting on their own “domestic institutions,” which for southerners included slavery. The acrimonious political divorce of James Buchanan and Henry Wise was but one manifestation of the intraparty feud over popular sovereignty and territorial slavery that would threaten the nationalism of the Democracy and erode its conservatism after the party’s stunning success in 1856.⁶⁸

⁶⁸Henry A. Wise to James Buchanan, Richmond, VA, October 12, 1858, copy, Wise Family Papers; *The Lecompton Question. Governor Wise’s Tammany, Philadelphia and Illinois Letters, Together with Letters to Charles W. Russell, Esq. by a Virginia Democrat* ([Richmond?, 1858?]), 6.

James Buchanans Political Record 5

<i>Abolition Petitions</i>	<i>82-87</i>
<i>Arkansas Admission of</i>	<i>91-94</i>
<i>Calhouns Resolutions</i>	<i>95-101</i>
<i>Cuba Annexation of</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Drop of Democratic blood</i>	<i>80-81</i>
<i>Incendiary Publications</i>	<i>88-91</i>
<i>Letter of Acceptance</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Platform of the Democracy</i>	<i>115-120</i>
<i>Utend Manifesto</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>Sandford Letter</i>	<i>123</i>
<i>Texas Annexation of</i>	<i>100</i>
<i>Veto Power</i>	<i>105-6</i>
<i>War of 1812</i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Laboring men</i>	<i>80</i>

Figures 4 and 5. Pages from Tennent Lomax's Scrapbook. Above, index of Buchanan's political positions which Lomax collected information on; below, clipping comparing "Buchanan & Fillmore" on "Incendiary Publications." Source: Scrapbook pages 5 and 58, Tennent Lomax Papers. Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

58

Buchanan & Fillmore

Incendiary Publications

Letter to John Gayle

adopted," a practice adopted by the Senate, and one which Mr. Buchanan said, in his speech in 1840, published by us, had proved eminently beneficial, because it had afforded us peace and quiet," and yet Millard Fillmore voted with Adams, Briggs, Fessenden, Cass and Blaine, and against the United South, except Arnold, of Tenn., against the disposition of a petition, which, Mr. Wadsworth said, "contained a prayer that the power of the Federal Government should be exercised to assist in the circulation of incendiary pamphlets and in protecting incendiaries personally in the slave States."

The contrast between James Buchanan and Millard Fillmore is so striking that he who runs may read.

Mr. Fillmore attempts to screen himself from condemnation at the South for this and innumerable other votes of similar character by the specious plea that "every citizen, presenting a respectful petition to the body that, by the constitution, had the power to grant or refuse the prayer of it, was entitled to be heard; and therefore the petition ought to be received and considered." (Letter to John Gayle.) Did he believe that Congress had the power "to grant or refuse," at their pleasure, the prayer of this petition? To exercise its power to assist in the circulation of incendiary publications and to protect incendiaries personally in the slave States? It would be an insult to our readers to argue such a question before them.

Mr. Fillmore's Letter to John Gayle.

We publish this letter in full, as we find it in the *Alabama Journal*, a Fillmore organ. We hope every Southern man will read the letter. It fixes Mr. Fillmore's position in 1858. He believes Congress has no power to interfere with slavery in the States; but is entirely silent as to the Territories and District of Columbia. He never has denied the power of Congress to abolish slavery in the Territories and District of Columbia. In his Erie Letter he distinctly avows it. He then acted very consistently while in Congress in voting to receive and consider petitions to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia; for he says in the letter to John Gayle "that every citizen presenting a respectful petition to the body (Congress) that, by the Constitution, had the power to grant or refuse the prayer of it, was entitled to be heard; and therefore the petition ought to be received or considered."

This fully explains the difference between Buchanan and Fillmore. Buchanan held that abolition petitions ought to be received and rejected. Fillmore, that they ought to be received and considered. The course of Buchanan is *ad agitation*. The course of Fillmore *jeopard the flame*.

Mr. Fillmore's Letter to John Gayle.

ALBANY, N. Y., July 31, 1858.

HON. JOHN GAYLE.—Dear Sir:—I have your letter of the 16th instant, but my official duties have been so pressing that I have been compelled to neglect my private correspondence.



Figure 6. Anti-Buchanan political cartoon. *Source:* “The Democratic Platform” (c. 1856), Courtesy of James Buchanan Resource Center (online database), Archives and Special Collections, Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.



Figure 7. James Buchanan as “Old Buck” surpassing his presidential opponents. *Source:* “The Buck Chase of 1856” (Philadelphia: J. Childs, 1856), Courtesy of James Buchanan Resource Center (online database), Archives and Special Collections, Waidner-Spahr Library, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA.

CHAPTER 6: THE OTHER DOUGLAS DEBATES:
DEMOCRATS DEBATE WHITE SUPREMACY AND POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

Whence does popular sovereignty take rise? What and where is its basis? I should really like to hear from the author of the Nebraska bill, a philosophical theory, of the nature and origin of popular sovereignty. I wonder where he would begin, how he would proceed and where he would end.

—Frederick Douglass, 1854

We had a right to expect from Mr. Douglas at least a clear and intelligible definition of his own doctrine. We are disappointed. It is hardly possible to conceive anything more difficult to comprehend.

—Jeremiah Sullivan Black, 1859

That's our doctrine.

—Spectator listening to Stephen Douglas, 1859¹

Abraham Lincoln began his 1858 campaign to unseat Senator Stephen A. Douglas with a charge of conspiracy. He accused four leading Democrats—Douglas, Pierce, Taney, and Buchanan—of colluding to spread slavery nationwide. Throughout the 1850s everything seemed to fall into place, with the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, the election of James Buchanan, and the *Dred Scott* decision. Lincoln employed one of his plebeian, yet straightforward, analogies for the Doughfaces' *fait accompli*: “when we see a lot of framed timbers, different portions of which we know have been gotten out at different times and places and by different workmen [...] and when we see these timbers joined together, and see they exactly make the

¹“Slavery, Freedom, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act: An Address Delivered in Chicago, Illinois, on 30 October 1854,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, ed. John W. Blassingame et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979-92), 2:557; J. S. Black, “Observations,” in *Observations on Territorial Sovereignty, Consisting of Three Several Answers to the Magazine Article, Speeches, and Pamphlets of Senator Douglas, with an Introductory Preface* (Washington, D. C.: Thomas McGill, Printer, 1860), 9; “Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, at Wooster, Ohio, September 16, 1859,” in *In the Name of the People: Speeches and Writings of Lincoln and Douglas in the Ohio Campaign of 1859*, ed. Harry V. Jaffa and Robert W. Johannsen (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 1959), 225.

frame of a house or a mill,” it was “impossible not to believe that Stephen and Franklin and Roger and James all understood one another from the beginning, and all worked upon a common plan or draft drawn up before the first blow was struck.”²

Lincoln exaggerated the snugness of the Democratic edifice. While the collaborators he named regarded themselves as good Jacksonians and conservatives, and while critics considered them loyal tools of the Slave Power, these Democrats disagreed over much. Serious divisions wracked the Democracy in the late 1850s and persisted until the party wrecked itself at Charleston in the spring of 1860. While Democrats parried Republican attacks, they also engaged in intraparty debates over their beliefs. Douglas in particular was more concerned with battling enemies within his party and fixing the course of the National Democracy, than with responding to the gadfly Lincoln. Indeed, much of the controversy among Democrats centered on Douglas’s pet doctrine and its implementation in the federal territories.

Clearly defining their party’s position took on added immediacy as actual societies were functioning, albeit haltingly, under the auspices of popular sovereignty. The difficulties of its territorial application convinced many of its clumsiness as public policy. In the scramble for territorial control that began in 1854, proslavery and free-soil settlers in Bleeding Kansas revealed the violent stakes of local democracy. Following Buchanan’s 1856 election on a platform embracing popular sovereignty, the Supreme Court decreed Congress’s impotence regarding territorial slavery in the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision. Southern Democrats had long contended that only constitutional conventions could outlaw or sanction slavery when a territory became a state, while Douglas and many free-state Democrats held that territorial legislatures could do so soon after a territory’s creation. President Buchanan and southern Democrats read

²“Speech of Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, June 16, 1858,” in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, ed. Robert W. Johannsen (1965; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 18-19.

the *Dred Scott* decision as affirmation that territorial governments, because they were created by Congress, possessed no power over slavery, a position which deflated the Little Giant's expansive notion of local self-government. The debate over the respective powers of legislatures and conventions evolved from pedantic quibbling into a party-rending impasse in the late 1850s.

The Democracy nearly fractured, furthermore, when faced with the 1857 Lecompton constitution, Kansas's application for slave-statehood. The Buchanan administration and its southern allies accepted the constitution as the legitimate expression of Kansans' sovereignty, while Douglas entered the opposition, angered that rigged elections, an unrepresentative constitutional convention, and a prejudiced referendum on slavery made a mockery of popular sovereignty. Douglas's adherents defeated the constitution in early 1858, vindicating popular sovereignty at the expense of Democratic harmony. The cleft deepened between Douglas and his coalition on one hand, and an alliance of southern states' rights Democrats and administration partisans on the other. When Douglas ran for reelection later that year, Buchanan sabotaged his candidacy. The growing party schism manifested itself as a combination of factional maneuvering, vindictive patronage appointments, and, most importantly, disagreements over shared ideology.³

³Nicole Etcheson, "General Jackson is Dead: James Buchanan, Stephen A. Douglas, and Kansas Policy," in *James Buchanan and the Coming of the Civil War*, ed. John W. Quist and Michael J. Birkner (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013), 86-110; Nicole Etcheson, "The Great Principle of Self-Government: Popular Sovereignty and Bleeding Kansas," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 27 (Spring-Summer 2004): 14-29; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, completed and ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1976), 199-224, 267-331; Kenneth M. Stampp, *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Allen C. Guelzo notes that Democratic intraparty divisions were important to the dynamics of the 1858 senatorial contest between Lincoln and Douglas, but unlike the disagreements between those two men, he does not elevate the Democracy's internal squabbles to the level of principled debate. Guelzo, *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 64-70, 134-8, 294-9.

The late 1850s thus marked an opportune moment for Democrats to take an introspective look at the doctrine to which they had yoked themselves a decade earlier. Many were uncomfortable with what they found. As Justice Robert C. Grier quipped, “if he [Douglas] had been a trout fisher he would have known that an artificial fly may make an excellent bait, [...] but it will not bear a close examination or analysis of its materials.” Belonging to a party of ideas, Democrats fancied themselves political theorists. But they were also government officials and partisans. From 1847 onward, Democrats had advertised popular sovereignty as a combination of pragmatism and principle, a synthesis of policy and theory. It was, most immediately, a balm for the sectional furor which flared up after the Mexican War. At the same time, it drew from Jacksonian ideology and the deeper reservoir of Revolutionary republicanism. By crafting governments according to theory, Democrats’ public policy turned out to be riven with inconsistencies, unsurprising for men who philosophized from the stump. Democratic political thought also had to interact with cultural conventions. The otherwise logical extension of the theory of popular sovereignty—that the people rule themselves—ran aground on Democrats’ cultural assumptions, most specifically their racial qualifications for “the people” who were entitled to self-rule. Abstract political theory broke down in practice, leaving Democrats susceptible to conservative critiques of their “wild vagaries and loose theorizing.” Democrats aspired to the status of serious political thinkers, yet the realities of governance and the political process often thwarted their ambitions to realize in full their ideologically-inspired happy republic.⁴

⁴Robert C. Grier to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Philadelphia, September 15, 1859, Jeremiah S. Black Papers (microfilm edition), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; S. S. Nicholas, “Squatter Sovereignty: Response to the Essay on Popular Sovereignty Imputed to the Hon. R. J., December 3, 1858,” in *Conservative Essays, Legal and Political* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co., 1863), 55.

Popular sovereignty was a distillation of Democrats' broader partisan ideology. Its immediate difficulties consequently exposed the larger contradictions reposing within Jacksonian thought. Democrats regarded the individual as the bearer of inviolable natural rights. The ability of politically equal individuals to pursue their own destiny, free from the tyrannical state, led to American progress. Democrats also sanctified self-government on the part of these politically equal individuals. Yet Democrats were unprepared for the democratically-approved abrogation of individual liberty that resulted when individualism and majoritarianism collided. Douglas, for example, articulated a right of self-government that attached to territorial settlers collectively as a "political community." The rights of the community and of the individual, however, need not align. The autonomous political community challenged Jacksonians' assumptions regarding individual rights as well as the type of individual who could exercise those rights. Local democracy permitted variation among self-governing political communities, because these communities set their own ethnic, religious, property-holding, and racial requirements for political membership. A majority could infringe on an individual; it could also disempower white men and empower women, nativists, religious fanatics, or African Americans. 1850s Democrats did not invent these contradictions. But they did make them disconcertingly clear by basing public policy on an ideology that was an unstable mixture of individualism, local democracy, and white supremacy.

Douglas forced Democrats to acknowledge their ideological oubliettes in his public exchanges over popular sovereignty, including a rivalry with Frederick Douglass and a pamphlet war with Attorney General Jeremiah Sullivan Black. These "other Douglas debates" rival the more famous ones between Lincoln and Douglas as an examination of the nature of sovereignty, the constitution of the body politic, and the racial limits of democracy. Disagreements over

popular sovereignty did not simply pit one section's Democrats against the other over slavery. The Douglas debates led Democrats to identify a more fundamental problem—they were peddling a radical concept that impugned their conservatism. Democrats, dissecting their doctrine, abruptly found that they had not adequately defined what they meant by either “popular”—who constituted the people—or “sovereignty”—the scope of power they could responsibly wield.

Democrats routinely boasted of their faith in the “great body of the American people [who] are eminently law-abiding and conservative.” Devolving power to naturally Democratic majorities, they had long promised, would engender stability in an otherwise turbulent society. Diverse Americans, however, embarrassed Democrats by co-opting their doctrine in unanticipated ways. Popular majorities, Democrats learned, were neither necessarily silent nor conservative. Earlier exultations of “the great cardinal principle of freedom—the capacity of man for his own government” took on new meaning for exasperated Democrats watching popular sovereignty unfold in practice. At the end of the decade, Democrats attempted a synthesis of conservatism and majoritarian democracy. The ambiguous results of their debates failed to neuter the fanaticism latent in their own ideology and jeopardized their self-proclaimed role as the conservative party of white supremacy.⁵

⁵J. S. Black, “Preface,” in *Observations on Territorial Sovereignty*, 4-5; “Speech on the Acquisition of Territory, and the Formation of Governments for the Territories.—The Doctrine of ‘Popular Sovereignty’ Proposed and Defended. Delivered in the Senate of the United States, January 12, 1848,” in *Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson, of New York. Including: Addresses on Important Public Topics; Speeches in the State and United States Senate, and in Support of the Government during the Rebellion; Correspondence, Private and Political (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Dickinson), Poems (Collected and Arranged by Mrs. Mygatt), Etc.*, ed. John R. Dickinson (New York: G. P. Putnam and Son, 1867), 1:230.

The “Black Douglass” and the “White Douglas”: Democrats Debate the Racial Boundaries of “the People”

Democrats had to confront popular sovereignty’s repercussions for their vaunted status as the white man’s party. Lodging political power at the local level was meant to ward off uniformity and ensure toleration for eclectic Americans. Yet Democrats pursued two incompatible goals: a racially pure, expansionist republic *and* local self-determination. Local diversity jarred with Democrats’ continent-wide, uniformitarian prescriptions regarding race. By arguing that each self-governing political community could extend legal and political rights to those groups it saw fit and regulate its own race relations under popular sovereignty, Democrats imperiled their maxim that all white men were automatically equal and broached the possibility of non-white political agency.

The political culture of Andrew Jackson’s party required the marginalization of female and non-white Americans. White men interacted as political equals due to their equal mastery over household dependents as well as the political disenfranchisement of non-white men and all women. Democratic political culture nationalized *Herrenvolk* democracy and the tenets of white male mastery beyond the Slave States, so that Democrats throughout the Union assumed these cultural conventions in the 1840s and 1850s. Popular sovereignty was initially offered as a means to reify the immutable demarcations of race and gender upon which Jacksonian Democracy depended. Democrats claimed the policy would guarantee *Herrenvolk* democracy by making the fate of African Americans the province of democratically equal white men. Yet the doctrine simultaneously upset the Jacksonian correlation of white manhood and political agency, because, if “the people” were truly self-governing, they could draw the borders of their political communities in manifold ways. Democrats came to realize that invoking “the people” was hazardous, as the constitution of that entity was not fixed. Permitting the *demos* to define

themselves allowed for local fluctuations in racial categories of belonging, leading the “popular” dimension of popular sovereignty to clash with Jacksonian racial absolutism. In applying majoritarian self-government to white supremacy, Democrats undermined their argument that democracy would conserve the white man’s republic.

No figure personified the unintended consequences of popular sovereignty more than the “Black Douglass” in his debate with the “White Douglas.” Frederick Douglass’s long-running feud with Stephen Douglas exposed the inability of popular sovereignty to make safe a white supremacist political order. Frederick staked a claim for African Americans in democratic politics by lodging a moral critique of popular sovereignty. He used his prominence as an African American political leader to engage Stephen directly and to move in typically white political spaces as he exposed the incongruities of democracy and white supremacy. Stephen and other Democrats, by articulating racial criteria for democratic participation which could be attacked as arbitrary, created a theoretical opening for black political agency which Frederick exploited.⁶

Frederick confronted Stephen as an equal in the political arena to debate popular sovereignty. Commentators rified on the two men’s homonymous surnames, with Frederick regularly eliciting laughs by referencing “his good namesake.”⁷ In 1854 he went to Illinois

⁶On white Republicans making African Americans’ exclusion from popular sovereignty a moral issue, see James L. Huston, “Putting African Americans in the Center of National Political Discourse: The Strange Fate of Popular Sovereignty,” in *Politics and Culture of the Civil War Era: Essays in Honor of Robert W. Johannsen*, ed. Daniel McDonough and Kenneth W. Noe (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 96-128.

⁷Quotation from “Slavery the Live Issue: Addresses Delivered in Cincinnati, Ohio, on 11-13 April 1854,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 2:464. See also, “We Are in the Midst of a Moral Revolution: An Address Delivered in New York, New York, on 10 May 1854”; “John Brown and the Slaveholders’ Insurrection: An Address Delivered in Edinburgh, Scotland, on 30 January 1860,” both in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 2:485, 3:319; and *Frederick Douglass’ Paper (Rochester, NY)*, Dec. 1, 1854.

where Stephen was touting the Kansas-Nebraska Act on the stump. Frederick explained his rationale: “Ebony and ivory are thought to look better standing together than when separated. A white Douglas, canvassing the State for slavery, has suggested the idea of having black Douglass there to canvass the State for freedom.”⁸ Stephen, citing illness, canceled an appearance in Aurora, where Frederick planned to publicly respond to him. Both men left town in the same railway car, allowing Frederick to joke that the senator’s “glowing cheeks” showed he had benefited “for having spent the time in bed that he was expected to spend on the rostrum.”⁹ In Chicago, Frederick and Stephen both attended a speech by Lewis Cass, one of popular sovereignty’s progenitors. After Cass’s remarks, “a scene of confusion and tumult then ensued” when some in the audience clamored for Frederick to speak. Frederick did criticize the Little Giant in his hometown and offered a pointed assessment of his doctrine several days later. He claimed to speak for a different constituency when he defended genuine popular sovereignty against the Democrats’ racially restrictive formulation. Frederick told Chicagoans, “the people in whose cause I come here to-night, are not among those whose right to regulate their own domestic concerns, is so feelingly and eloquently contended for.” African Americans “have no Stephen Arnold Douglas—no Gen. Cass, to contend [...] for their Popular Sovereignty.”¹⁰

⁸*Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Sept. 29, 1854.

⁹*Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Oct. 27, Nov. 3, quotation from Dec. 1, 1854. Despite his joking, Frederick charitably told his readers that the Little Giant was indeed ill, even as his newspaper aired others’ suspicions. Frederick was also sick, but managed to deliver a truncated address in Aurora. On whether or not Stephen was ill, see Paul M. Angle, “The Peoria Truce,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 21, no. 4 (Jan. 1929): 500-5; Ernest E. East, “The ‘Peoria Truce’: Did Douglas Ask for Quarter?” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 29, no. 1 (April 1936): 70-5; Frederic May Holland, *Frederick Douglass: The Colored Orator* (1891; repr., Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970), 239-40; Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 458; William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1991), 188; and John Stauffer, *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Twelve, 2008), 191-2.

¹⁰*Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, Nov. 3, 1854; Douglass, “Slavery, Freedom, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act,” 538-59, quotation on 542. See also, Tekla Ali Johnson, “Frederick Douglass and the Kansas-Nebraska Act: From Reformer

Popular sovereignty positioned African Americans as the objects of democracy, rather than as its agents. Frederick found Democrats' narrow policy a poor descendent of the more expansive theory of popular sovereignty promulgated in the American Revolution. It was a "miserable sophistry," Frederick explained, to hold that whites should legislate for blacks—"they might as well say that wolves may be trusted to legislate for themselves, and why not for lambs." Democrats appeased racism with the idea "that if the people of the territories can be trusted to make laws for white men, they may be safely left to make laws for black men." Rather than recognition of white men's inherent suitability for self-government, such pandering was simply "an appeal to all that is mean, cowardly, and vindictive in the breast of the white public." In order for African Americans to practice meaningful politics, and to purge American democracy of its hypocrisy, they had to be able to govern themselves—they could not be regarded as "intruder[s]" at "the ballot box." Drawing attention to African Americans' political absence, when the very point of "this wicked measure" was to determine their fate, constituted a powerful moral critique of the Kansas-Nebraska Act and popular sovereignty.¹¹

Not only did Democratic popular sovereignty omit African Americans, but the doctrine could also result in the complete abnegation of their rights through enslavement. "The only seeming concession to the idea of popular sovereignty in this bill," Frederick observed, "is authority to enslave men, and to concede that right or authority is a hell black denial of popular sovereignty itself." "Man," he explained, "is the owner of himself; the right to himself is inseparable from himself, and no power beneath the sky can take it from him." Frederick later

to Revolutionary," in *The Nebraska-Kansas Act of 1854*, ed. John R. Wunder and Joann M. Ross (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 113-28.

¹¹Douglass, "Slavery, Freedom, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act," 539, 554, 555; Douglass to Charles Sumner, Rochester, February 27, 1854, in *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1950-75), 2:280.

explained that Stephen perverted popular sovereignty by “confound[ing] *power* with *right*.” Stephen’s construction of popular sovereignty violated natural law, as “by his notion of human rights, everything depends upon the majority.” If the majority had the power to do something, Stephen recognized a right to do it. But such self-rule “depend[ed] upon superior force,” not moral or natural right.¹²

To further illuminate Democratic hypocrisy, Frederick submitted a plan to ensure genuine popular sovereignty in Kansas. “Colored men, Colored Citizens—for such they really are—native born Citizens to boot,” Frederick proposed, “*ought to go* into that Territory as *permanent* settlers.” “When the day of election comes, and these people, with the other settlers of the territory, shall meet to determine what shall be the character of their institutions,” they would have a moral claim to take part in local democracy alongside whites. One of the plan’s supporters predicted that, although Congress had not intended for African Americans to participate, a large number of free blacks in Kansas would force the issue: “‘Popular Sovereignty,’ as expressed by Gen. Cass and Stephen A. Douglas, would at once be invoked in this behalf. It would be pushing this ‘popular rights’ business to its extreme, but it would doubtless go.” Frederick thereby proposed to use the Democrats’ doctrine against them, highlighting its inconsistencies in the process.¹³

During Stephen’s 1858 reelection campaign, a correspondent sent him a recent speech by “the *Black Douglas*,” in which Frederick endorsed Abraham Lincoln. Frederick had joked that “the white Douglas should occasionally meet his deserts at the hands of a black one,” but that in

¹²Douglass, “Slavery, Freedom, and the Kansas-Nebraska Act,” 557; Douglass, “Slavery the Live Issue,” 462-3; “Slavery and the Irrepressible Conflict: An Address Delivered in Geneva, New York, on 1 August 1860,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 3:383-4.

¹³*Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, quotations from Sept. 15, quotation from Sept. 29, Oct. 27, 1854.

this case, “I now leave him in the hands of Mr. Lincoln.” Where Frederick used the holes in Democrats’ theory to press for the inclusion of black political actors, Stephen employed the Black Douglass as a caricature in order to withhold political legitimacy from both African Americans and white Republicans such as Lincoln. Stephen relied on such attacks to shore up the racial lines that Frederick had transgressed. Republican principles led to political equality for African Americans, Stephen warned. Lincoln’s “favorite doctrine of negro equality” would result in “negro citizenship.” Black citizenship, Stephen told white voters, would allow African Americans “to vote on an equality with yourselves, and to make them eligible to office, to serve on juries,” and, most menacingly, “to adjudge your rights.” Campaigning in Illinois in 1858, Stephen recounted that four years earlier he had “witnessed an effort made at Chicago” by Republicans “to put Fred Douglass, the negro, on the stand at a Democratic meeting, to reply to the illustrious General Cass.” The sight of African Americans in the political sphere horrified Democrats.¹⁴

Faced with Frederick’s trenchant challenge to the assumptions of their political thought, as well as his physical presence in politics, Democrats reflexively dismissed all African Americans and their white allies as racially unfit political actors. As a “barbarous race” and a “race incapable of self-government,” African Americans were inherently disqualified from popular sovereignty. Democrats similarly stripped slavery’s white opponents of political legitimacy. They accused Republicans of acting in concert with African Americans in antislavery politics. “Lincoln’s ally, in the person of FRED DOUGLASS, THE NEGRO” served this strategy well, as Stephen regularly ranked Frederick among Lincoln’s prominent supporters.

¹⁴J. R. Vaughan to Stephen A. Douglas, Chicago, August 3, 1858, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Illinois; “Freedom in the West Indies: An Address Delivered in Poughkeepsie, New York, on 2 August 1858,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, 3:233-7; *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, 45, 189-90, 263.

For many Democrats, it was a short step from denouncing Republicans' alleged racial egalitarianism and biracial politics to portraying white Republicans as literal "Black" Republicans—rhetorically transforming white men into black actors. Republicans were referred to as "our Ethiopian enemies" and simply as the "Blacks." Coalitioning with Republicans, what one Democrat in California called "fusion with the Blacks," turned white men into black political actors. Such men surrendered their political legitimacy, because, as Democrats believed, African Americans had no place in American democracy.¹⁵

Frederick Douglass's manipulation of Democrats' ideas was not the only instance of the objects of popular sovereignty threatening to become its agents. Like other critics in the 1850s, Frederick honed in on Democrats' inconsistent application of their ideas. Democrats themselves, in fact, allowed for the possibility of non-white and female political agency with the notion that the determinants of civic inclusion should vary across communities. Yet when faced with the implications of this concession, Democrats fell back on ingrained racial absolutism, much as Stephen had done with Frederick, thereby revealing an inability to systematically address their doctrine's internal contradiction between local democracy and racial uniformity.¹⁶

In what can be taken as an example of theoretical consistency, Democrats applied popular sovereignty to the color line. Douglas explained that "a negro, an Indian, or any other man of

¹⁵*The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, 39, 92, 189, 196, 264, 299; Samuel S. Cox to [Stephen A. Douglas], Columbus, March 24, 1854; J. M. B. Petrikin to Stephen A. Douglas, Muncy, PA, March 26, 1856; George Gillaspey to Stephen A. Douglas, Ottumwa, IA, July 6, 1858; Thomas L. Halbach to Stephen A. Douglas, Rock Run, July 16, 1858; L. B. Mizner to Stephen A. Douglas, San Francisco, October 4, 1858, C. S. Whitney to Stephen A. Douglas, San Francisco, September 12, 1859, all in the Douglas Papers.

¹⁶Concern that popular sovereignty would empower non-white political actors dated back to the doctrine's introduction. See Christopher Childers, *The Failure of Popular Sovereignty: Slavery, Manifest Destiny, and the Radicalization of Southern Politics* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012), 127-8, 131-2, 151, 158-60, 183-5, 192-3.

inferior race to a white man, should be permitted to enjoy, and humanity requires that he should have all the rights, privileges and immunities which he is capable of exercising consistent with the safety of society.” This was Douglas’s response to Lincoln’s “new doctrine,” that the nation must “become all one thing, or all the other,” in their 1858 debates. Douglas had previously conceded as much. In 1857 he lectured, “the safe rule upon that subject, I apprehend to be this, that the African race should be allowed to exercise all the rights and privileges which they are capable of enjoying, consistent with the welfare of the community in which they reside.” “Under our form of government,” he elaborated, “the people of each State and Territory must be allowed to determine for themselves the nature and extent of those privileges.”¹⁷

For Douglas, the alternative to “entire uniformity in the local legislation and domestic institutions of the different States” entailed a diversity of race relations. African Americans should not occupy a fixed status. It did not follow that “because the negro is our inferior that therefore he ought to be a slave.” Douglas argued that Illinois had a right to ban slavery, without conferring political rights on African Americans. At the same time, Illinois could not protest if Virginia enslaved African Americans or if Maine enfranchised them. A broad spectrum of inferiority existed between slavery and equality, and the nationwide imposition of either extreme would prove dangerous. Uniform equality, for instance, would encourage the most harrowing homogenization of all: “repeal[ing] all laws making any distinction whatever on account of race and color, and authoriz[ing] negroes to marry white women on an equality with white men.” It was incorrect “that the States must all be free or must all be slave,” as Lincoln preached; rather, such binaries should be avoided, because, as Democrats had long contended, “diversity,

¹⁷“Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, Chicago, July 9, 1858”; “Mr. Douglas’s Speech, First Joint Debate, Ottawa, August 21, 1858,” both in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, 32-5, 44-8; “Speech of Abraham Lincoln, Springfield, June 16, 1858,” 14; *Remarks of the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on Kansas, Utah, and the Dred Scott Decision. Delivered at Springfield, Illinois, June 12th, 1857* (Chicago: The Daily Times Book and Job Office, 1857), 7-11.

dissimilarity, variety in all our local and domestic institutions, is the great safeguard of our liberties.”¹⁸

Popular sovereignty applied to race complemented Democrats’ emphasis on localism and states’ rights. Each political community could decide the extent of its own racism and the criteria of its own membership, and, for many Democrats, a political community was analogous to a sovereign state. Senator Robert Toombs of Georgia, visiting Boston “to lecture the Yankees,” propounded that only “those upon whom each State, for itself, had adjudged it wise, safe, and prudent to confer it” had the power to elect constitutional “conventions [which] represented the sovereignty of each State.” “Minors, women, slaves, Indians, Africans, bond and free” were prevented from taking part. The scope of disfranchisement Toombs granted a political community was expansive—even white men “were excluded because they had no land, others for the want of good characters.”¹⁹

Giving political communities latitude in defining their own membership prevented uniform sanctions against groups such as immigrants and Catholics and strengthened *Herrenvolk* democracy. The separability of state and federal citizenship and of citizenship and political rights meant that, even if nativist fanaticism overtook one state or the federal government, it would be unable to handicap the foreign-born in other communities. Nativist efforts at the federal level could not succeed, because, while Congress standardized naturalization, the states conferred suffrage. States could enfranchise individuals who were not naturalized citizens.

¹⁸*Remarks of the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on Kansas, Utah, and the Dred Scott Decision*, 7-11; “Mr. Douglas’s Speech, First Joint Debate, Ottawa, August 21, 1858,” 44-8; “Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, Chicago, July 9, 1858,” 31, 32-5.

¹⁹Robert Toombs to Thomas, Washington, D. C., February 9, 1856, Robert Toombs Correspondence, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC; *A Lecture Delivered in the Tremont Temple, Boston, Massachusetts, on the 24th January, 1856, by R. Toombs. Slavery—Its Constitutional Status—Its Influence on the African Race and Society* (n.p., [1856]), 2.

According to Philip Phillips, a fervent anti-nativist in Alabama, the right of states to shape their own body politic was insurance against attempts to “consolidate the government by melting down into one common mould the rights of citizenship.” The distinction between federal naturalization and state suffrage allowed Democrats at the local level to buttress *Herrenvolk* democracy by conferring rights on as many white men as possible.²⁰

But popular sovereignty, and Democratic localism more generally, was a double-edged sword—the discretion given to political communities to combat the nativist degradation of white men could also disempower white men. Rooting citizenship and rights in political communities allowed each polity to proscribe those deemed unworthy of rights, such as Indians, “paupers,” and “persons enlisted in the army of the United States.” Phillips admitted that “it is within the State power to require any length of probation, or to discriminate between native-born and foreigners, or even wholly to exclude foreigners.” Federal or state citizenship, moreover, did not translate into rights when emigrating to a new community. In some states, for instance, “a man without a property qualification could not vote,” even though “the man thus prescribed [*sic*] was a citizen of the United States.” Phillips even hinted that the Slave States and Free States could implement “laws of exclusion” aimed at “native-born citizens” from the other region to insulate themselves from sectional sentiments.²¹

²⁰*Letter on Naturalization and Citizenship, from Hon. Philip Phillips, of Alabama. December 18, 1854* (Washington: A. O. P. Nicholson, Printer, 1854), quotation on 4. See also, *Speech of Ex-Gov. Aaron V. Brown, on Know Nothingism, at Gallatin, July 4th, 1855* (Nashville: J. F. Morgan, Fine Job and Book Printer, 1855), 9-10; *Territorial Government, and the Admission of New States into the Union: A Historical and Constitutional Treatise. By Henry A. Wise, Governor of Virginia* (n.p., [1859]), 119-23; and Martin H. Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas and Antebellum Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89-95.

²¹Phillips, *Letter on Naturalization and Citizenship*, quotations on 4, 5; *Buchanan and Breckinridge. The Democratic Hand-Book, Compiled by Mich. W. Cluskey, of Washington City, D. C. Recommended by the Democratic National Committee* (Washington: R. A. Waters, 1856), 31.

In his supposed willingness to extend rights to racial minorities through the democratic process, furthermore, Douglas can be taken as implying that even white men's rights were neither natural nor inalienable, but were manufactured by democratic majorities. He and fellow Democrats would never have willingly conceded this point, but the logic of popular sovereignty raised such a possibility. If the moral sense of the community ought to determine the extent of African Americans' rights, why not those of white men? Douglas consequently opened the door to Whiggish social organicism, which had always been contrary to Democrats' understanding of rights as inviolable. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Democrats perfected a white man's republic by mobilizing against an organic conception of the polity, in existence since the colonial era, in which one's rights were calibrated to one's social position. White men should not have to submit to a gradation of rights based on factors such as wealth, Jacksonians had argued, as all were inherently equal. Popular sovereignty, however, by prioritizing the political community, threatened a democratically-sanctioned return to an eighteenth-century gradation of rights, an outcome unacceptable to Democrats and antithetical to the philosophical basis of the white man's republic.²²

Nativists co-opted this reasoning to argue that if Democrats could deny certain racial groups political rights, so too could Know-Nothings withhold them from Catholics and the foreign-born, their whiteness notwithstanding. Political rights such as suffrage and office-

²²On Whiggish social organicism, see chapter 4. In her analysis of Douglas's views on race, Jean H. Baker argues that he was a Burkean by citing his notion that rights vary by context and community and his supposed rejection of abstract natural rights. Yet Baker ennobles what was actually a theoretical impasse into a political philosophy by missing the point that, if Douglas was indeed a Burkean, it was only by accident. Douglas never intended to make white men's rights dependent upon organic communities. Douglas placed Lockean individualism on a collision course with Burkean communitarianism, and he and other Democrats ultimately regretted the consequences. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (1983; repr., New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 177-96.

holding, Know-Nothings agreed, were separable from basic legal rights. Just as Douglas argued that African Americans should exercise “all the rights they were capable of enjoying consistent with the good and safety of society,” nativists were “willing to accord to all such privileges as they may have capacity to enjoy—but opposed to the policy that would thrust responsibilities upon raw foreigners, which they neither comprehend nor know how to discharge.” If nativists could not bar Catholics and foreigners from the body politic, whether through legal restrictions or by refusing to vote for them, than neither could Democrats omit racially inferior or otherwise undesirable groups. A Know-Nothing in North Carolina rejected Democrats’ *Herrenvolk* appeals and warned that if office-holding could not be closed to Catholics and foreigners, then neither could it be withheld from “the motley half-breed of Indians, negroes, and Spaniards” in Mexico or from the “inhabitants” of the “Sandwich Islands,” should those areas ever be annexed.²³

Democrats themselves often proved willing to relax the republic’s inviolable barriers to entry in the name of American diversity. Zeal for religious toleration characterized many Democrats, with one newspaper exclaiming in 1850 that “*every citizen of the requisite age, be he Jew, Mahometan; or Catholic, or whether he is poor or rich, is eligible to any office. THIS IS RIGHT.*” Philip Phillips proved his fealty to the “Separation of Church and State” and religious toleration with his efforts on behalf of Jewish Americans. In 1857 a “national convention of Israelites” deputed him to present their grievances against a proposed treaty inimical to their

²³*Remarks of the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on Kansas, Utah, and the Dred Scott Decision*, 10; [F. R. Anspach], *The Sons of the Sires; A History of the Rise, Progress, and Destiny of the American Party, and Its Probable Influence on the Next Presidential Election. To Which is Added a Review of the Letter of the Hon. Henry A. Wise, against the Know-Nothings. By an American* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo and Co., 1855), 203-12, quotation on 204; *Reply of Hon. Kenneth Rayner to the Manifesto of Hon. Henry A. Wise* (Washington, D. C.: American Organ Office, 1855), 4-5, 8, 11-2, quotations on 22.

rights. As their spokesman, Phillips secured President Buchanan's recognition of equality for "American citizen[s], of the Hebrew persuasion."²⁴

John R. Ridge, although professing his own "Douglasism," sent a stinging rebuke to his party's champion. Noticing that Douglas "seem[ed] to put Indians and negroes upon an equality," Ridge volunteered that he was "of Indian descent" and complained that one of Douglas's speeches had "place[d] me in a somewhat peculiar position." Surely, Ridge argued, Douglas did not mean to intimate that "Indians are no better, intellectually, than *negroes*." Douglas must recognize "Cherokees, and other civilized and intellectual tribes of the Western frontiers, as vastly superior, in every respect, to any position of the Negro race." The Democracy claimed to stand fast against white men's degradation. Ridge conveyed to Douglas his hope that "it may not be a degradation [*sic*] in me, as an Indian, to support you." This partisan had a personal stake in Douglas and other Democrats making exceptions to their racial decrees and contending for the manhood of more than just white men.²⁵

Caleb Cushing, meanwhile, defended another group marginalized due to racial prejudice. He charged an opponent with hypocrisy for attacking the Slave Power while clamoring for the "disfranchisement of the Chinese in California." Cushing, who had served as a diplomat in China, was incredulous that this "cultured and lettered race," which was "but a shade in color darker than ourselves," was not given the same regard as "the black savage of Africa." Chinese immigrants were universally despised in nineteenth-century America—a Republican mocked Cushing for dining on "dog's meat" with a "Chinaman," while Douglas refused to "acknowledge

²⁴*The Whig Charge of Religious Intolerance against the New Hampshire Democracy and General Franklin Pierce* (n.p., [1852]), 8; *Letter of Hon. P. Phillips, of Mobile, Ala., on the Religious Proscription of Catholics* (n.p., [1855]), 3; "The Swiss Treaty and the Hebrew Convention," *Washington Union*, November 5, 1857, clipping in bound volume, Box 13, Philip Phillips Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

²⁵John R. Ridge to Stephen A. Douglas, Marysville, CA, September 19, 1858, Douglas Papers.

that the Cooley imported into this country must necessarily be put upon an equality with the white race.” Still, Douglas clarified, each political community ought to make the decision for itself, leaving an opening for more sympathetic Democrats such as Cushing.²⁶

The Little Giant at one point even magnanimously extended popular sovereignty to women. In 1859 Lucy Stone invited Douglas to attend a Woman’s Rights Convention in Chicago. Douglas, demurring, proffered his “deep interest in all that concerns the ladies of our great and glorious country.” “I need not now,” he gushed, “after so many years of faithful labor in the cause of Popular Sovereignty, assure you that you have, in your endeavors to obtain the liberty of governing yourselves in your own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States, the full confidence of my undivided sympathy.” Frederick Douglass publicly reprimanded Stone for inviting a man who “notwithstanding his high sounding phrases about equal rights and popular sovereignty, has chiefly distinguished himself for his utter disregard of such rights.” Only those “whose notions of human rights are not influenced or limited to any distinctions in the forms or colors of mankind” ought to be extended such courtesies.²⁷

Frederick alluded to his namesake’s reputation as a staunch white supremacist. Yet occasionally expansive statements, such as Stephen’s ostensible support of women’s rights and even some Democrats’ advocacy of black suffrage, could discomfit those who preferred their gender and racial cordons impermeable. Frederick Douglass and nativists both implied that the

²⁶Caleb Cushing, *Speech Delivered in Faneuil Hall, Boston, October 27, 1857*. Also, *Speech Delivered in City Hall, Newburyport, October 31, 1857* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, 1857), 23; *An Address Delivered by Hon. William D. Kelley, at Spring Garden Hall, Philadelphia, on September 9th, 1856* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Morning Times, [1856]), 14; “Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, Chicago, July 9, 1858,” 34. Upon Cushing’s death, the auction catalogue of his library advertised that “the collection of Chinese Books [...] is probably the largest in the United States, and includes some of the best publications in that language.” *Catalogue of the Private Library of the Late Hon. Caleb Cushing, of Newburyport, Mass. To Be Sold by Auction on Wednesday and Thursday, October 22d and 23d, 1879, at the Library Salesroom, No. 2 Beacon Street, Boston. Sullivan Bros. and Libbie, Auctioneers* (Boston: W. F. Brown and Co., Printers, 1879), copy in the Caleb Cushing Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

²⁷*Douglass’ Monthly* (Rochester, NY), Oct. 1859.

logic of Democratic ideology could empower non-white political actors. One commentator harbored a deeper fear during the 1854 debates over the Kansas-Nebraska Act: “the doctrine is that these [...] Territories have the ‘inherent right, independent of Congress, to govern themselves, and to establish such domestic institutions as they please.’” This would yield a variety of bodies politic—“in some they would establish freedom, and in others Slavery either black or white, or both.” For this anxious observer, popular sovereignty could lead to white men’s ultimate degradation.²⁸

As their desire for diversity seemed to confuse Jacksonian racial lines, Democrats had to reaffirm white supremacy. In his dispute with Attorney General Jeremiah Black, who contended that only a constitutional convention at the cusp of statehood could rule on territorial slavery, Douglas recommended territorial self-government as the sole preventative of racial disorder. Only territorial governments, he responded, could guard against fanaticism. Without sovereignty, territorial legislatures would be unable to withhold recognition from Muslim “polygamist[s]” or racial “amalgamationist[s].” According to the “Black Doctrine,” territories would be powerless to prevent their engulfment by racial and sexual transgressions permissible in other states. “A white man, with a negro wife and mulatto children, under a marriage lawful in Massachusetts” could claim legal rights in a territory “in defiance of the wishes of the people.” Empowered territorial governments, in accordance with Douglas’s understanding of popular sovereignty, would safeguard slavery and racial hierarchy by closing territorial borders to

²⁸*Speech of General Aaron Ward, at the Great Democratic Mass Meeting, at White Plains, N. Y., on September 16, 1856* (New York: J. W. Bell, Daily News Job Office, [1856]), 10; [?] to [John G. Davis], April 24, 1854, John G. Davis Papers (microfilm edition), Manuscript and Visual Collections Department, William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis. Although there are treatments of Douglas’s racial views, there is no corresponding study of his views on gender and women’s rights.

fanaticism. He glossed over the possibility that his powerful territorial legislatures could, likewise, codify polygamy and interracial marriage if that is what “the people” wanted.²⁹

Douglas and fellow Democrats also entrenched behind a hard racial line with their argument that the signers of the Declaration of Independence propounded equality solely for “white men, men of European birth and European descent, and had no reference either to the negro, the savage Indians, the Fejee, the Malay, or any other inferior and degraded race.” The Founders “referred to the white race alone, and not to the African, when they declared all men to have been created equal.” One correspondent agreed with Douglas by citing “the very fact that *Indians* were excluded from citizenship” as “ample demonstration that the framers of the constitution and the signers of the Declaration of Independence never for one moment thought of conferring political equality upon savage or semi-civilized men.” “Indians and negroes at that day were upon an equality,” and they remained equals in their shared banishment from the body politic.³⁰

Confronted with the logical outcomes of popular sovereignty highlighted by Frederick Douglass and nativists, Stephen Douglas and his party fell back on ingrained racial essentialism to reassure the wary that their doctrine would not destabilize the white man’s republic. Although some Democrats disagreed with parts of his *Dred Scott* decision, most welcomed Chief Justice Taney’s *diktat* that African Americans were not citizens. There were, moreover, cultural prohibitions, even if not legally codified or ideologically consistent, which stunted the straightforward extension of popular sovereignty and the Democracy’s dedication to diversity.

²⁹*Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Rejoinder of Judge Douglas to Judge Black* (n.p., [1859]), 3-6.

³⁰“Mr. Douglas’s Speech, Third Joint Debate, Jonesboro, September 15, 1858,” in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, 127-8; *Remarks of the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on Kansas, Utah, and the Dred Scott Decision*, 7-10; David Christy to Stephen A. Douglas, Cincinnati, July 23, 1858, Douglas Papers.

Cushing, when faced with charges that he favored racial equality given his attitude toward Chinese immigrants, reneged, “I do *not* admit as my equals either the red men of America, or the yellow men of Asia, or the black men of Africa.” Having momentarily forgotten the rules of the northern politics of slavery and race, Cushing atoned, “the Caucasian race are the masters of this country, its sovereigns.” Douglas also relied on racist assumptions which flew in the face of his admission that local communities enjoyed leeway over race relations. Even though popular sovereignty created opportunities for black political agency, the natural inequality of the races, he answered, would simply prevent political and social equality. A reflexive embrace of racial difference, whether justified as divinely ordained, as a “great natural law,” as stemming from “every tradition of our policy,” or as biologically ineffable, was the Democracy’s final redoubt against the logic of its own ideas.³¹

In their war against nativist and antislavery uniformity, Democrats enshrined their own universal notion of belonging—*all* white men had a place in the political sphere. Yet popular sovereignty, the point of which was to forestall fanatical centralization and its attendant homogenization, proved a shaky foundation on which to erect a racially pure *Herrenvolk* democracy. There was no guarantee that local governments would not disfranchise white men or enfranchise black men. Democrats believed in ineffable rights for white men alongside democratically contingent rights for all others. This discordance left Democrats open to attacks by those who argued either that all rights were natural or that all rights were relative, with neither extreme serving as a satisfactory basis for a white man’s republic. Democrats had long bemoaned uniformity. But by relying on a policy that fostered diversity, they inadvertently

³¹Caleb Cushing, *Speeches on the Amendment of the Constitution of Massachusetts, Imposing Disabilities on Naturalized Citizens of the United States* ([Boston]: Office of the Boston Post, 1859), 6-9; *Remarks of the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on Kansas, Utah, and the Dred Scott Decision*, 7-11; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 121-3. On the varied assumptions at the root of Democrats’ racial thought and for the contradictions in Douglas’s views, see Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 177-211.

surrendered the one type of homogeneity they did countenance—uniformity in the racial and gender makeup of their political nation. The Douglas debates over who composed “the people” thereby made porous the racial delineations of Jacksonian Democracy and exposed the radicalism of a supposedly conservative doctrine.

“Dogmas as to Sovereignty”: Democrats Debate the Extent of the People’s Power

When some Democrats shouted that they would “advocate Douglas’ claims for the Presidency, and pure unadulterated Popular sovereignty,” conservatives, both within and outside the Democracy, cringed. Conservatives were alarmed not only by the types of people assuming self-government, but also by the ends to which they were bending their unadulterated power. In addition to defining “popular,” Democrats thus needed to clarify “sovereignty”—just what power did the people have, when could they exercise it, and in what ways, if any, could it be limited? As in the debates over the meaning of “the people,” Democrats struggled to reconcile conservatism with social diversity, majoritarian democracy, and local autonomy.³²

As public policy, popular sovereignty failed to specify precisely when territorial settlers could array themselves in the awesome splendor of sovereignty. Douglas and likeminded Democrats, especially in the Free States, held that territorial legislatures could decide on slavery, which meant that settlers could move against it soon after territorial organization. Many southerners and Buchanan Democrats countered that only a constitutional convention antecedent to statehood could act upon the institution. Slaveholders, unwilling to entrust enslaved property to the democratic vagaries of territorial emigrants, wanted sovereignty defined stringently. Southerners became more intransigent in the late 1850s, with many discrediting Douglas’s

³²Austin H. Brown to John G. Davis, Indianapolis, January 16, 1859, Davis Papers, Indianapolis.

position as “squatter sovereignty,” a derogatory term insinuating the unsuitability of leaving the question to coarse (and potentially free-soil) settlers. A Texan disparaged territorial sovereignty as a bunch of “shadowy pretensions, and incomprehensible jargon about ‘innate rights and inherent sovereignty.’” Henry Wise spoke for many when he expressed his disdain for “‘*squatter sovereignty*:’ an absolute and irresponsible power to those who happen for the time to be settlers of the public lands.”³³

Even as he tried to calm southerners, Douglas exacted loyalty to his formulation. His supporters, for instance, issued a pamphlet comprised of quotations from “the Representative Men of the Party, on the doctrine of Popular Sovereignty in the Territories,” to remind leading southerners that they had earlier approved of territorial self-governance. Douglas also had to restrain southerners’ glee over the *Dred Scott* ruling, which many interpreted as barring territories from legislating on slavery. His forces answered that the Court had only negated congressional power, a point on which all Democrats already concurred, but left a territorial legislature’s authority undefined. In 1854 northerners and southerners had agreed to disagree on whether legislatures or conventions possessed this power, leaving the question to the ultimate arbitration of the courts. *Dred Scott* notwithstanding, Douglas and his allies contended that the “compromise of ’54” still held.³⁴

³³“Letter of Hon. W. R. Scurry, Austin, August 26th, 1856,” in *Rights of the South in Opposition to ‘Squatter Sovereignty.’ Speech of Hon. W. S. Oldham, at the Capitol, Delivered on the 27th Day of August, 1856, and Letter of Hon. William R. Scurry* (Austin, TX: Marshall and Oldham, State Printers, 1856), 24, quotation on 35; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 54-6, quotation on 86.

³⁴*Popular Sovereignty in the Territories. The Democratic Record* (Baltimore: Murphy and Co., [1860]), 1; Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 57-9. On the “Compromise of 1854” and *Dred Scott*, see *Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin, of Louisiana, on the Kansas Question. Delivered in the Senate, May 3, 1856* (Washington: The Union Office, 1856), 7-9; Stephen A. Douglas, *The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty in the Territories* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1859), 25-7; [Reverdy Johnson], *Remarks on Popular Sovereignty, as Maintained and Denied Respectively by Judge Douglas, and Attorney-General Black. By a Southern Citizen* (Baltimore: Murphy and Co. Printers and Publishers, 1859), 15, 44-5; *Speech of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, of Maryland, Delivered before the Political Friends of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, at a Meeting in Faneuil Hall, Boston, on Thursday, June 7, 1860. To Which Is Added the Letter of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, to the Chairman of*

This intraparty feud was not simply a symptom of sectional estrangement within the Democracy. In the wider context of party ideology, the dispute turned on assessments of how much power the people could responsibly wield. Since Doughfaces first introduced popular sovereignty in 1847, Democrats had presented it as a reflection of their larger commitment to the people's democratic power. Even as they backtracked on the extent of this power in an effort to reassure the wary that popular sovereignty was not a destructive force, the party of Jacksonian Democracy could not but speak of the people's sovereignty in rapturous terms. One jurist was incredulous that Douglas persisted in advocating popular sovereignty: "I had supposed he had got up this phrase" to use "till the next election, but sense enough not to attempt to defend the absurdities represented by it, by a written argument." More than a pragmatic policy or campaign bombast, popular sovereignty was a principle in which Democrats were ideologically invested, so that casting it aside or gutting it was unthinkable. At the same time, Democrats were troubled by the subjects to which it was being applied, which included more than chattel slavery in the West. The urgency of the doubts surrounding it increased as Democrats came to realize the fanatical potential of popular sovereignty. Democrats proved unable to portray themselves as conservatives, because they could not curtail the democratic people they had unloosed.³⁵

the Douglas Meeting in New York on the 22d of May, 1860 (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860), 3-10, quotation on 9; and *Speech of Hon. P. Phillips, of Alabama, on the Territorial Bill. Delivered in the House of Representatives, April 24, 1854* (n.p.: Towers, Printers, [1854]), 12-3. James A. Bayard agreed with Douglas that the Court's decision applied only to Congress, although a similar conclusion regarding the power of territorial legislatures was inevitable: "the implication from the language used is that it was not worth an argument. I doubt whether a dozen lawyers of decent standing in the U. S. could be found sustaining Douglas' doctrine of Squatter Sovereignty." Bayard to Thomas F. Bayard, Washington, January 28, 1860, Thomas F. Bayard Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

³⁵Robert C. Grier to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Philadelphia, September 15, 1859, Black Papers.

A convention of Alabama Democrats demanded the “protection of their property in the States, in the Territories, and in the wilderness, in which territorial governments are as yet unorganized.” Squatters in the “wilderness” imperiled more than slavery. The actions of territorial settlers shocked northern and southern conservatives alike. Americans in the territories shrugged off prevailing customs and law, with the result that a host of “institutions which might be against the will of Congress and the entire policy of a Christian civilization” could be enacted under popular sovereignty. A conservative critic of the Democrats and their doctrine concluded that the logic of the Kansas-Nebraska Act led to “Independent Sovereignities” which could “establish [...] any domestic institutions they pleased, matrimony, slavery, polygamy, or socialism; or any religion they pleased, Christianity, Mahometism, Mormonism, or the worship of Juggernaut.” The sovereign people, it seemed, could not be trusted to resist dabbling in fanaticism.³⁶

Territorial turmoil seemed symptomatic of a broader erosion of law and order in American society resulting from democratic overindulgence. Surveying developments from California, a state prone to extralegal vigilantism, Governor John B. Weller “deplore[d] the disposition, so frequently manifested by a portion of the people in different sections of the country, to take the law into their own hands, and place the regularly organized tribunals at defiance.” “The sovereignty of the people is manifested,” he counseled, through “a government of law.” Governor Henry Wise pointed to the “committee of vigilance in the state of California,” as well as to the uncouthness of backwoods settlers, the “state of Franklin,” and the “Dorr revolution in Rhode Island,” as examples of popular uprisings that could endanger slavery.

³⁶*Official Proceedings of the Democratic and Anti-Know-Nothing State Convention of Alabama, Held in the City of Montgomery, January 8th and 9th, 1856* (Montgomery: Advertiser and Gazette Book and Job Office, 1856), 8; George Ticknor Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress over the Territories* (Boston: A. Williams and Company, 1859), quotation on 5, 19-23; [Sidney George Fisher], *The Law of the Territories* (Philadelphia: C. Sherman and Son, 1859), 80-1, quotations on 114-5.

Thomas W. Dorr, boogeyman for antebellum conservatives, approved of popular sovereignty as the Democracy's platform and connected it to his own democratic uprising, enthusing, "we have contended for the sovereignty of the People over all their political institutions." Although some Democrats thrilled at the resemblance between their "doctrine that *The People govern*" and "'the people' led by Gov Dorr," many were not eager to be classed as the fellow-travelers of Dorrists or of any other fanatics roiling American society.³⁷

Some had predicted this denouement before the Kansas-Nebraska Act became law. During the 1854 debates over the bill, one observer warned Congressman John G. Davis, "let Congress establish this doctrine, and how long will it be until our vast domain will have scattered [sic] all over it some fifty or one hundred heterogenous [sic] petty sovrignties [sic]?" Some would be "monarchic," while, "in religion, some would be protestant, some catholic, some mormon, some atheistic, and some hethanish [sic]." Another Indianan concluded that popular sovereignty was a "*Trojan* horse." Trusting the people was just as irresponsible as it was for "a parent to tell his inexperienced and feeble child, to go and do for itself and as it pleased." "The child might do well, yet the chances are that it would go to ruin," he naysaid.³⁸

Utah Territory's "Mormon monstrosities" fulfilled these premonitions. To appreciate the problems of self-government on the nation's political littoral, Americans needed only to glimpse "that portentous cloud which hangs upon our Western horizon,—the Territory of Utah." A

³⁷John B. Weller, *Inaugural Address* (n.p., [1858]), 2-3; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 38, 54-6; Thomas W. Dorr to Edmund Burke, Providence, April 9, 1851, Edmund Burke Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; A. E. to [Stephen A. Douglas], [September 1859], Douglas Papers. Dorr did acknowledge that the power of the people, his own experience in Rhode Island notwithstanding, ought to be exercised with respect "for the duty of supporting constitutions & laws, while they remain such, unrepealed by competent authority." See also, S. S. Nicholas, "Manifest Destiny, January 19, 1858," in *Conservative Essays*, 38-47; Christian G. Fritz, "Popular Sovereignty, Vigilantism, and the Constitutional Right of Revolution," *Pacific Historical Review* 63, no. 1 (Feb. 1994): 39-66; and William M. Wiecek, "'A Peculiar Conservatism' and the Dorr Rebellion: Constitutional Clash in Jacksonian America," *The American Journal of Legal History* 22, no. 3 (July 1978): 237-53.

³⁸[?] to [John G. Davis], April 24, 1854; W. R. Nofsinger to [John G. Davis], Rockville, April 14, 1854, both in the Davis Papers, Indianapolis.

member of a debating club solicited Attorney General Black's advice on their recent "hot dispute," wondering, "if Utah, now a Territory, forms a constitution, tollerating poligamy [*sic*], or forms her code of laws favoring poligamy, 'That, when she applies to be admitted as a sister State, Congress is bound to admit her,' Bigotry to the contrary, notwithstanding." Polygamy seemed to fall within the scope of popular sovereignty's acknowledgement of local control over "domestic institutions," a term usually referring to slavery. While the Kansas-Nebraska Act was under consideration, for instance, Brigham Young teased Douglas that the bill's opponents were linking it the Mormons' "domestic regulations."³⁹

There were, however, cultural standards, dictated by prevailing religious and gender conventions, beyond which Democrats would not venture, even if in strict accordance with popular sovereignty. Mormons' violation of sexual propriety taxed their toleration for diversity. In 1856 an observer in Great Salt Lake City related to Lewis Cass the fruits of his Nicholson letter. "Both Negro & Indian Slavery now exist," and "polygamy now exists to an extent that would make a man of your age blush, and almost disavow the female race." The Mormons hated the American government, he continued, "but endorse the 'Nebraska Bill.'" Democrats could ill

³⁹Wise, *Territorial Government*, 38, quotation on 54-5; Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress*, 5, 19-20, quotation on 33; C. S. Baron[?] Jr. to [Jeremiah Sullivan Black], Rosby's Rock, VA, April 18, 1859, Black Papers; [Fisher], *The Law of the Territories*, quotation on 75, 80, 114-5; Brigham Young to Stephen A. Douglas, Great Salt Lake City, April 29, 1854, Douglas Papers. Utah fell under popular sovereignty due to the Compromise of 1850 which applied congressional non-intervention to that territory. Unlike Utah and Kansas, not all territories succumbed to fanaticism. Nebraska, for instance, experienced an orderly territorial development. Brenden Rensink, "Nebraska and Kansas Territories in American Legal Culture: Territorial Statutory Context"; Nicole Etcheson, "Where Popular Sovereignty Worked: Nebraska Territory and the Kansas-Nebraska Act," both in Wunder and Ross, 47-66, 159-81. Although popular sovereignty's potential for undermining slavery alarmed white southerners, white southern Democrats were some of the staunchest defenders of the autonomy of Mormons against the federal state in the postbellum period. They felt that polygamy, like southern race relations, fell under the purview of states' rights. Gaines M. Foster, *Moral Reconstruction: Christian Lobbyists and the Federal Legislation of Morality, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 54-68.

afford not to agree with Republicans that polygamy numbered among the “relics of barbarism” worthy of eradication.⁴⁰

Democrats took action and extinguished Mormons’ popular sovereignty. They could either condone “the infamous and disgusting practices and institutions of the Mormon government” or “abolish the Territorial government.” In judging that Mormons had proven “unfit to exercise the right of self-government,” Douglas sought to placate critics who blamed his doctrine for these “evils.” The apparent hypocrisy was not lost on Douglas’s foes. “He does not seem to have had the least idea,” Attorney General Black chided, “that he was proposing to extinguish a sovereignty, or to trample upon the sacred rights of an independent people.” Self-rule in Utah reached its nadir with the 1857-1858 Mormon War, when President Buchanan sent “*the armies of the United States marching*” against Brigham Young, “*the satyr of Utah*,” and “*against the Mormon’s harems of Salt Lake*.” Thus did polygamy reveal the difficulties of deploying abstract ideology as public policy in a complex cultural setting.⁴¹

Skeptics felt that, by turning popular sovereignty into governmental policy, Democrats had mangled the grand theory which philosophically undergirded American institutions. The conservative, proslavery Philadelphian Sidney George Fisher explained that “all just and free government must be founded on the consent of the governed,” specifying, “on their consent, not necessarily on their votes.” Like the English and American revolutionaries before him, and

⁴⁰W. W. Drummond to Lewis Cass, Great Salt Lake City, U.T., April 1, 1856, Lewis Cass Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; “Republican Platform of 1856,” in *National Party Platforms, 1840-1964*, ed. Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 27.

⁴¹*Remarks of the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, on Kansas, Utah, and the Dred Scott Decision*, 11-5; Black, “Observations,” 14; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 38. See also, “First Annual Message, December 8, 1857”; and “Proclamation on the Rebellion in Utah. [April 6, 1858],” both in *The Works of James Buchanan: Comprising His Speeches, State Papers, and Private Correspondence*, ed. John Bassett Moore (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1908-11), 10:151-4, 202-6; William P. MacKinnon, “Prelude to Armageddon: James Buchanan, Brigham Young, and a President’s Initiation to Bloodshed,” in Quist and Birkner, 46-85; and Stamp, *America in 1857*, 196-208.

along with many contemporaries, Fisher subscribed to the theoretical supremacy of the popular will, but he did not want that awesome power conjured through direct democracy. Douglas “pilfer[ed] our birthright,” according to one anonymous pamphleteer. He had taken “the doctrine of Popular Sovereignty [which] is the very germ of the Constitution, and the noble offspring of its founders” and had “emasculate[d] it.”⁴²

Recognizing the sovereignty of the people as an instrument of regular governance roused conservative ire, because it threatened to consign society to perpetual reenactments of the state of nature. States of nature are intrinsic to the social contract tradition as society’s founding moments in which individuals, shorn of external constraints and abiding only by natural law, come together to inaugurate social and political order. Popular sovereignty in the western wilderness alluded to such scenes. Former Whig Reverdy Johnson, a Douglas supporter, contended that a territorial legislature’s power over slavery was the only way to avoid primordial anarchy; otherwise, “the territorial State would be almost without laws,—be one of nature.” Should Know-Nothings triumph in their “civil and religious persecution,” Douglas held out hope that Americans could “flee to the wilderness, and find an asylum in Nebraska, where the principles of self-government have been firmly established.” Judah Benjamin referred to the territories as “an uncultivated waste” that was “covered either by the primeval forest, or it is still carpeted by the waving grass, over which no human shadow has been cast since its dewy surface first glittered in the morning sun.” Such imagery suggested that, as Americans trudged ever westward, they would undergo repeated founding moments in the wild.⁴³

⁴²[Fisher], *The Law of the Territories*, 29-30, quotations on 52-4, 80, 116-8; *Douglas’ Doctrine of Popular Sovereignty in the Territories; Its Counterpart. By a Missourian* (St. Louis: R. V. Kennedy and Company, 1860), 40-2.

⁴³[Johnson], *Remarks on Popular Sovereignty*, 16; *Speech of Senator Douglas, at the Democratic Celebration of the Anniversary of American Freedom, in Independence Square, Philadelphia, July 4, 1854* (n.p., [1854]), 7; *Speech of Hon. J. P. Benjamin*, 7.

States of nature tessellating across space privileged societal diversity over uniformity. Yet they also promoted instability when “a rude people, in a wilderness” regularly reforged society. Robert Winthrop, speaking for conservative Whigs, proclaimed that his party “seeks reforms by no riotous or revolutionary processes.” Americans could no longer fall back upon “the great right of revolution,” one means of leaving civil society and returning to the state of nature. Citizens could only look for the “redress of occasional grievances, to the peaceful and legitimate operation of the republican institutions which they founded.” Democratic territorial policy institutionalized the right of revolution through a resumption of sovereignty by settlers in a condition resembling a state of nature, giving Whigs such as Winthrop pause before entering Democratic ranks.⁴⁴

Some American conservatives instead followed philosopher Edmund Burke in his theoretical skirting of the state of nature. The cyclical deterioration of republics had long bedeviled theorists; at the inception of the social contract, republics always already faced declension. Burke, in contrast, worked outside the social contract tradition by envisioning a polity that was not founded at the same moment, did not age as a unit, and, thus, never reached a point when “the whole fabric should be at once pulled down and the area cleared for the erection of a theoretic, experimental edifice in its place.” Selective reinvigoration of the polity’s components obviated the need to relapse into the state of nature, as reform could “be effected without a decomposition of the whole civil and political mass for the purpose of originating a new civil order out of the first elements of society.” Sidney George Fisher, echoing Burke, observed that “happy is that country where political innovations are like those of time or the changes of the seasons, gradual and easy, not sudden and violent.” Seismic departures could be

⁴⁴[Fisher], *The Law of the Territories*, 98; *Robert C. Winthrop on Fusion* (n.p., [1855]), 2.

avoided by recognizing that “the present of a Nation contains a portion of the past and of the future.” Some American conservatives aligned with Burke in advocating evolutionary progress in order to avoid plunging into a state of nature whenever society required change.⁴⁵

Conservatives also took cues from Burke by defining rights within society, as opposed to locating them in nature. There was a difference between territorial settlers possessing the “*abstract right* of self-government” and actually demonstrating “a capacity of self-government.” The latter, hardly an *a priori* right, would have to be inculcated by a “parent and patron power.”⁴⁶ The territories—variously referred to as “republican nurselings,” “foetus of territory,” and “inchoate, or minor states”—required oversight *before* they could assume self-governance.⁴⁷ Territorial settlers had a “right,” not to self-government, but to be governed by the “General Government,” as “a child has a right to the superior judgment of his father.” The people did not enjoy an inherent right to regulate themselves without supervision, but would have to learn self-government through tutelage and experience. The jurist George Ticknor Curtis admonished, “train the people of every Territory, as fast as you practicably can, in the business of self-government.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (1790; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 15-31, 148-9, 190-1, quotations on 19, 111; [Fisher], *The Law of the Territories*, 45-8. See also, “A Disquisition on Government,” in *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun*, ed. Ross M. Lence (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1992), 43-5.

⁴⁶Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, 27-33, 50-5, 85-7, 161-3; Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress*, 21; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 89.

⁴⁷A Missourian [pseud.], *Douglas’ Doctrine of Popular Sovereignty*, 13-4; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 54; H. M., *Reflections on the Powers of the General Government and the Inherent Rights of American Citizens: Suggested by a Perusal of the Constitution and the Congressional Debates in Relation to Territorial Governments* (Kalamazoo, [MI]: Gazette Book and Job Office, 1857), 4.

⁴⁸[Fisher], *The Law of the Territories*, 55, 70, quotations on 80-1; Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress*, quotation on 19-23, 33.

Amidst such handwringing over territorial sovereignty, Stephen Douglas initiated a pamphlet war with the 1859 publication of his article, “The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty in the Territories,” in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*. Having defeated the Buchanan administration on Lecompton and secured his reelection, Douglas moved to establish himself as the Democracy’s leader and his doctrine as the party’s platform looking forward to the 1860 presidential election. One observer remarked on the novel “appearance, in a popular magazine, of an article on a constitutional question, written by a prominent candidate for the Presidency,” underscoring that this debate would combine public policy, partisan maneuvering, and theoretical exegesis.⁴⁹

Douglas’s article, soon republished in pamphlet form, fostered an intercourse “more deliberate” than usually allowed by “electioneering speeches.” “The scribblers of the American Union are in a stew,” Douglas was warned. His most formidable respondent was Attorney General Jeremiah Sullivan Black of Pennsylvania, speaking for the Buchanan administration. Douglas and Black riposted through an exchange of eight texts. “This agitating and important question” had already “commanded the attention of some of the ablest minds in the country,” and it continued to do so with public intellectuals such as Henry Wise, Reverdy Johnson, George Ticknor Curtis, Horace Greeley, and Sidney George Fisher tossing off their own treatises.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁹Stephen A. Douglas, “The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty in the Territories,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, Sept. 1859, 519-37; Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress*, 3-4.

⁵⁰Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress*, 3-4; William A. Seaver to Stephen A. Douglas, New York, October 3, 1859, Douglas Papers; [John A. Rockwell], *States vs. Territories: A True Solution of the Territorial Question. By an Old Line Whig* (n.p., 1860), 1; H. M., *Reflections on the Powers of the General Government*, 3. The order of the Douglas-Black exchange is as follows: Douglas’s *Harper’s* article, republished as a pamphlet, *The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty in the Territories* (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1859); Black’s response, first published in the administration organ, the *Washington, D. C. Constitution*, Sept. 10, 1859, and republished as a pamphlet, *Observations. Senator Douglas’s Views of Popular Sovereignty, as Expressed in Harpers’ Magazine for September, 1859* (Washington: Thomas McGill, Printer, 1859); Douglas’s response to Black’s *Observations*, in a speech delivered in Ohio, “Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, at Wooster, Ohio, September 16, 1859”; Black’s “Appendix” to the *Observations*; Douglas’s *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black* (n.p., [1859]); Black’s “Rejoinder to Senator Douglas’s Last”; and

pamphlet war encompassed all positions on slavery and sovereignty in the territories. Douglas defended sovereignty during the territorial phase. Black responded that only constitutional conventions had power over slavery. While Douglas and Black, like most Democrats, concurred on congressional non-intervention, some commentators preferred that Congress regulate the territories. Some congressional supremacists argued that Congress should legislate on slavery according to the will of the people, while Republicans preferred outright proscription.⁵¹ States' rights southerners, meanwhile, insisted that the federal government, understood not as a supreme power but as acting on behalf of the sovereign states, protect territorial slavery, most provocatively with a slave code.

The flurry of treatises has not received sufficient attention as a theoretical dialogue, nor has it been recognized in its full scope. When they turned to debating popular sovereignty, Democrats and other combatants were primed to do so in the parlance of political theory. Their ponderous pamphlets ransacked natural rights philosophy, common law, colonial history, and the law of nations to bolster pedantic renditions of territorial power. In couching their disagreements in the language of sovereignty, abstract right, and the constitution of the body politic, they were not only wrangling over public policy or party factionalism, but over political ideology and the underpinnings of conservatism and democracy. Democrats in particular were seeking theoretical

Douglas's *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Rejoinder of Judge Douglas to Judge Black* (n.p., [1859]). Black's responses were compiled in *Observations on Territorial Sovereignty, Consisting of Three Several Answers to the Magazine Article, Speeches, and Pamphlets of Senator Douglas, with an Introductory Preface* (Washington, D. C.: Thomas McGill, Printer, 1860). This volume's "Preface" constitutes the final salvo in the debate. All references to Black's pamphlets are to this compilation. For an overview of Douglas's article and the ensuing debate, see Robert W. Johannsen, "Stephen A. Douglas, 'Harper's Magazine,' and Popular Sovereignty," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 45, no. 4 (March 1959): 606-31.

⁵¹For arguments in favor of varying degrees of congressional power over the territories, see Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress*; Horace Greeley, "History Vindicated: A Letter to the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas on His 'Harper' Essay," *New-York Daily Tribune*, Oct. 15, 1859; H. M., *Reflections on the Powers of the General Government*; A Missourian [pseud.], *Douglas' Doctrine of Popular Sovereignty*, 13-24, 41; and S. S. Nicholas, "Squatter Sovereignty: Response to the Essay on Popular Sovereignty Imputed to the Hon. R. J.," 47-55.

reassurance that the force they had unleashed—that of the absolute power of the people—would not delegitimize their conservatism.⁵²

Douglas's treatises reaffirmed his view that territorial settlers had a right to "exercise exclusive legislation in respect to all matters pertaining to their internal polity," including marriage, property regulation, and, of course, slavery. Douglas recognized sovereign power in "political communities," a slippery construction in terms of who comprised their membership and the mechanism through which they could enact their will. He was nevertheless emphatic in his assertions that a political community's "right of local self-government" was "inalienable" and a "birth-right." Douglas sounded a clarion call for territorial settlers' undiluted autonomy, rooted in the natural rights tradition, with communities, as opposed to individuals, possessing inherent rights in territories akin to the state of nature.⁵³

To distance himself from squatter sovereignty, Douglas stipulated that political communities were more than agglomerations of a "few first settlers [who] were squatters on the public domain" able to "make laws binding the people who are to come after them." "This right

⁵²For political pamphlets as simultaneously tracts on contemporary political issues and as treatises on larger questions of political philosophy, see Leo Strauss, "Machiavelli's Intention: The Prince," *The American Political Science Review* 51, no. 1 (March 1957): 13-40. Robert Johannsen provides one of the only detailed discussions of Douglas's article and the responses to it, but without much attention to the substantive ideas involved. Don E. Fehrenbacher briefly discusses some of the constitutional and legal questions raised by Douglas's article. Harry V. Jaffa nicely captures the theoretical importance of Douglas's essay and treats him as a serious, albeit flawed, political thinker. Harold Holzer mischaracterizes Douglas's article by claiming that it represented "the final round of the Lincoln-Douglas debates," when in reality it inaugurated an altogether different debate. Nicole Etcheson examines disagreements over popular sovereignty as intellectually substantive, but, following Holzer, places Douglas in dialogue with Lincoln, not Black and other Democrats. Johannsen, "Stephen A. Douglas, 'Harper's Magazine,' and Popular Sovereignty," 606-31; Fehrenbacher, *The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 514-32; Jaffa, "The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority: Popular Sovereignty in the Territories"—A Commentary," in *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 473-87; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2004), 35-42, quotation on 35; Etcheson, "'A living, creeping lie': Abraham Lincoln on Popular Sovereignty," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 19-25.

⁵³Douglas, *The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority*, 11, 14, 20-2; "Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, at Wooster, Ohio," 203-4, 208-9.

[of self-government],” he specified, “pertains to the people collectively as a law-abiding and peaceful community, and not to the isolated individuals who may wander upon the public domain in violation of law.” The people had to be organized and act through a government. “This right of self-government, being a political right,” Douglas elaborated, “cannot be exercised by the people until they are formed and organized into a political community,” which would occur when “there are inhabitants sufficient to constitute a government.”⁵⁴

By designating popular sovereignty a “political right,” as opposed to a natural one, Douglas imposed barriers to its enjoyment. At the same time, he confused the issue by persistently invoking the “inherent right of self-government.” The notion of expansive, naturally inhering rights collided with an understanding of rights existing only within an ordered community, sanctioned by Congress. Henry Wise noted that care had to be taken when defining “that word *people*.” One definition was that of “a mass of unorganized human beings, collected together by design or accident.” But it could also mean “a mass of human beings, *organized*, by laws in municipalities and communities of government.” Douglas stressed that the people who, under his doctrine, had a right to govern themselves conformed to the latter usage. Yet, after years of exalting the territorial people, and by continuing to present popular sovereignty as a political right which existed only in society *and* as a natural right, he left many unconvinced.⁵⁵

⁵⁴“Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, at Wooster, Ohio,” 208-9, 214-5; Douglas, *The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority*, 40; *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black*, 11.

⁵⁵*Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black*, 11; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 132-5. Harry V. Jaffa contends that a central flaw in Douglas’s thought was that he based his position on inherent, natural rights, yet sanctioned a doctrine that violated equality and natural rights by permitting the enslavement of individuals. Douglas tried to avoid this dilemma by speaking of the natural rights and equality of political communities, not of individuals. Jaffa misses Douglas’s attempt to escape this problem by arguing that each naturally equal political community possessed the right to regulate itself, including determining who did and did not merit inclusion, thereby sanctioning the abrogation of individuals’ natural rights by prioritizing the natural rights of communities. Jaffa does, however, point out an even more fatal flaw in Douglas’s thought. Political communities, as Jaffa reminds us, *do not have natural rights*, because “rights that are inalienable and natural are antecedent to the

One such skeptic was the attorney general of the United States. Sovereignty, Black corrected, did not reside in a territory prior to statehood. Yet, according to Douglas, settlers would find lying on the plains “omnipotent sovereignty [which] is to be wielded by a few men suddenly drawn together from all parts of America and Europe, unacquainted with one another, and ignorant of their relative rights.” Black regarded Douglas’s political communities as governments with unchecked power. Territorial legislatures were “merely provisional and temporary,” but “if Mr. Douglas is right, those governments have all the absolute power of the Russian Autocrat.” On the other hand, when Douglas denied that these legislatures were unlimited sovereigns, Black accused him of lodging sovereignty amidst the unorganized people acting through “voluntary mass meetings or at elections unauthorized by law.” Whether manifested institutionally by means of governmental “despotism” or chaotically through a “mobocracy,” Douglas had erected unrepublican bastions of illimitable power in the territories.⁵⁶

Black’s alternative—that only constitutional conventions could rule on slavery when a territory morphed into a state—was, by comparison, conservative and precise. Black agreed that the territorial people, not Congress, were the final arbiters of their polity’s status. But only a “competent local authority,” not nebulous “political communities,” could make the determination. John Forsyth, trying to tamp down anti-Douglas sentiment in Alabama, explained

formation of political communities.” Thus, an individual’s natural rights trump whatever right a political community claims. Individuals’ natural rights exist in a state of nature, while the rights of an organized political community, by a political community’s very definition, come into being *after* the state of nature. If anything, Douglas’s emphasis on the rights of communities points to a fundamental impasse in Democratic ideology. Democrats spoke in terms of the rights of individuals *and* of the rights of local communities, two tenets which could collide if the right of a community to govern itself entailed stripping an individual of rights or self-determination. This tension continues to bedevil modern American conservatism. Social or traditionalist conservatives prioritize the moral sense of the organic community, while libertarians defer to the inviolability of the individual. Jaffa, “The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority,” 474-82, quotation on 476. On the endurance of this contradiction in American conservatism after the Second World War, see George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (1976; repr., Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996), 141-71.

⁵⁶Black, “Observations,” 11-3; Black, “Appendix,” 16-9.

that “the people of that territory, not as squatters, but as an organized political community” could regulate slavery. Like Douglas, he did not differentiate “an organized political community” from a legislature composed of squatting free soilers. Faced with this imprecision over the location and extent of sovereignty, Black’s model boasted the merits of simplicity. The people, Black insisted, had to “wait until they get a constitutional convention or the machinery of a State government into their hands,” whereupon they earned the status of “competent local authority.”⁵⁷

Throughout the pamphlet exchange, Douglas and his followers qualified the absolute nature of sovereignty in the territories, in order to make the doctrine conservative enough to remain the party’s platform. Yet, due to his ultimate unwillingness to circumscribe local government, Douglas’s rearguard action failed to mitigate the damage already done. Faced with Black’s hectoring, Douglas clarified, “I have never said or thought that our Territories were sovereign political communities.” Although the territories were not absolutely sovereign, Douglas caveated that they did possess “attributes of sovereignty,” a hedge to which the attorney general paid the scant respect it deserved. Douglas, in short, tried to have it both ways, with obfuscations such as: “but while the Territories are not sovereign, they have the inalienable right of self-government—of managing their own affairs and domestic institutions.” The difference between sovereignty and “the inalienable right of self-government” was lost on slaveholders and others looking askance at the confusion in the territories.⁵⁸

Douglas’s zealots also hindered attempts to assuage conservatives’ concerns. Reverdy Johnson, a noted jurist involved in the *Dred Scott* case as well as a conservative Old Whig from

⁵⁷Black, “Observations,” 8-11, 15; Black, “Preface,” 5-6; *Letters of Hon. John Forsyth, of Alabama, Late Minister to Mexico, to Wm. F. Samford, Esq., in Defence of Stephen A. Douglas* ([Washington, D. C.]: Lemuel Towers, [1859]), 2; *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black*, 13-4.

⁵⁸“Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, at Wooster, Ohio,” 209-10, 220-1; *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black*, 2-5, 7-11; Black, “Appendix,” 17-9; Black, “Rejoinder to Senator Douglas’s Last,” 23.

a border slave state, aided Douglas with his own pamphlet. Douglas welcomed Johnson's intervention, citing his "great reputation as a lawyer." Johnson's credentials should have enhanced Douglas's conservatism; instead, Johnson favored unfettered territorial power. He argued that it was best "to leave the question to the Territorial people, and to leave open for emigration the Territory to every citizen of the United States, without being subject, in regard to slavery, or any other domestic institution, to congressional mastery." That Johnson categorized this as sovereignty in a "restricted sense" and not "in its more comprehensive meaning" did not practically diminish the power of the people he had sketched.⁵⁹

Republicans goaded Douglasites into similar statements incriminatory of their conservatism. In 1858 a supporter back home in Illinois warned Douglas that Republicans were challenging Democrats on "whether, under the Dred Scott decision [...] the territorial legislatures would have power to prohibit slavery." He reported to Douglas how he answered the question when it "was poked up at me last night at a public meeting at Plainfield." "The people of the territories [...] were placed upon the same footing of the people of the states," and through their "territorial legislatures," he reasoned, "by virtue of their inherent sovereignty they might exercise all those powers of legislation not inconsistent with the constitution or the laws of the United States." The question he answered was the same that elicited Douglas's Freeport Doctrine a few months later. Douglas responded to Lincoln's identical query by explaining that territorial legislatures, even if lacking positive legislative power, could disallow slavery by neglecting to pass protective legislation. Douglas's retort infuriated some southerners who interpreted the *Dred Scott* decision as disempowering territorial settlers. Many Douglasites

⁵⁹Stephen A. Douglas to Reverdy Johnson, Washington, quotation from October 21, November 4, 1859, Reverdy Johnson Papers (microfilm edition), Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.; [Johnson], *Remarks on Popular Sovereignty*, 17-8, 25.

nonetheless prioritized doctrinal purity over soothing slaveholders. By 1860 Reverdy Johnson, for instance, had moved from grounding territorial sovereignty in law to basing it on the “inherent and paramount power” belonging to “the territorial people as a fundamental and inherent right.”⁶⁰

Johnson also belittled Black’s “competent local authority” by asking if territorial settlers had to wait for “the necromancy of a State Constitution” to commence self-government. Douglas similarly elided the temporally slight yet theoretically vast gulf separating legislatures and conventions. While they meant to suggest that preventing citizens from governing themselves during the interim between territorial organization and statehood was unfair and socially disruptive, many Americans would have answered that a constitutional convention did indeed exert a transformative effect. Henry Wise certainly presented it as a mystical process, by which a territory “ascend[ed] to the high priesthood of political rights.” At this epochal moment, the people “are to put away childish things, and become more than men—an American, self-governed, sovereign people.” Conventions were something special.⁶¹

⁶⁰S. W. Randall to [Stephen A. Douglas], Joliet, August 28, 1858, Douglas Papers; “Mr. Douglas’s Reply, Second Joint Debate, Freeport, August 27, 1858,” in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, 88-9; *Speech of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson*, 8-9. Too much is made of the Freeport Doctrine as a turning point in the sectional crisis. As the letter to Douglas indicates, the Freeport debate was not the first time Democrats had to formulate a response to the idea that territorial legislatures were powerless over slavery. Democrats, furthermore, had argued for years that slavery was a local institution requiring positive police protection. A territorial legislature’s refusal to pass such laws was thereby tantamount to formally excluding slavery, as Democrats, including southerners, had acknowledged even before *Dred Scott*. South Carolina’s James L. Orr, for example, told a northern audience in 1856: “Slavery cannot exist practically where the majority of the people are opposed to it, for they will refuse to pass laws for its protection; nor can it be excluded where a majority are favorable to it, for they will have it protected by necessary legislation. Leave it then to Kansas—they know their wants better than we do; and, eventually, they will settle the question to their own satisfaction.” “Mr. [James L.] Orr’s Speech in Phœnix Hall,” in *Speeches of Messrs. Weller, Orr, Lane, and Cobb, Delivered in Phœnix and Depot Halls, Concord, N. H., at a Mass Meeting of the Democratic Party of Merrimac County* (n.p., [1856?]), 14-5; *Speech of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson*, 11-2.

⁶¹[Johnson], *Remarks on Popular Sovereignty*, 28; *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black*, 13-4; S. A. Douglas to John W. Forney et al., Washington City, February 6, 1858, in *The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas*, ed. Robert W. Johannsen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 408-11; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 91-5.

In distinguishing between conventions and legislatures, Democrats perpetuated a centuries-old Anglo-American innovation that simultaneously acknowledged the sovereignty of the people and constrained its destabilizing potential. In American constitutional thought, legislatures are representative bodies; they do not possess sovereignty, which the people have not renounced. Conventions, on the contrary, are understood to be the people in their sovereign capacity and to constitute moments “when the people of the State were to meet with every attribute of original sovereignty.” Legislatures occupy an inferior status to conventions, which are antecedent to and constitutive of legislatures. Only conventions, as such, can draft and amend constitutions, which subsequently shackle government. At the same time, these portals through which the unbridled sovereignty of the people exerts itself are exceptional and infrequent. The convention/legislature distinction allows for the recognition of the people’s popular sovereignty, without relying on that unstable element for routine governance. In the United States, government lacks sovereignty; the people have it, but lack the mechanism through which to regularly exercise it.⁶²

The difference between conventions and legislatures was important for states’ rights constitutionalism. Democrats, both at the North and at the South, had long defended states’ rights, the main bulwark of slavery. According to the 1856 Cincinnati national platform, for instance, slavery numbered among the “reserved rights of the States.” Some states’ rights advocates went further, arguing that the people were sovereign in their capacity as “the citizens

⁶²Democratic Committee of Publication, *Life of George Mifflin Dallas, Vice President of the United States*, 1844, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Times and Keystone Job Office, 1847), 10. Edmund S. Morgan finds that seventeenth-century English republicans articulated a notion of the sovereign people as separate from the government. However, they pulled back from the logical next step of institutionalizing this sovereignty. American revolutionaries, Morgan and Gordon S. Wood explain, carried the thinking further by institutionalizing constitutional conventions as the expression of the sovereign people. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1988), 78-93, 106-21, 254-62; Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (1969; repr., Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 259-343.

of the several States.” Robert Toombs, for example, based his view of the Constitution on “the collective will of the whole, as affirmed by the sovereign States” through individual state conventions. As John C. Calhoun theorized, “the States [...] were distinct, independent, and sovereign communities,” and “the people of the several States, acting in their separate, independent, and sovereign character” were the agents who ratified the Constitution. This position contrasted with a *national* conception of the sovereign people. Some antislavery politicians argued that Congress could outlaw territorial slavery acting on behalf of the entire American people. While most Democrats, on the other hand, would not countenance nullification or secession, the outgrowths of Calhoun’s states’ rights philosophy, they did accord the states respect, as the people of the states had acted through sovereign conventions when ratifying the Constitution. Sanctifying states’ rights also ensured devolution of power and checked federal homogenization.⁶³

Although hardly eschewing his party’s states’ rights tradition, Douglas deviated from central tenets of this constitutional strain by arguing that territories and states were equally sovereign. Toombs argued that each state was “a separate and distinct political community.” Douglas and his adherents contended that territories were likewise political communities—they were simply “new States” or “territorial State[s].” Sovereign political communities took

⁶³“Democratic Platform of 1856,” in *National Party Platforms*, 25; “Letter of Hon. W. R. Scurrey,” 30, 33; Toombs, *A Lecture Delivered in the Tremont Temple*, 2-3; “A Discourse on the Constitution and Government of the United States,” in *Union and Liberty: The Political Philosophy of John C. Calhoun*, 81-102, quotations on 86-7. For a nationally sovereign people and Congress as their agent, see Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress*, 22-3; John B. Dillon, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Uses of Political Sovereignty* (Indianapolis: Journal Company’s Steam Printing Establishment, 1860); and A Missourian [pseud.], *Douglas’ Doctrine of Popular Sovereignty*, 21-4, 29-30, 36-7, 41. States’ rights constitutionalists still recognized the people as sovereign, albeit in their capacity as the people of a state, not of the nation. Herschel V. Johnson of Georgia, for instance, in countenancing secession, clarified that “the separation of Georgia from the Confederacy must be the act of the sovereignty,” which meant the agency of a state convention, not the legislature. That southern states seceded through the mechanism of conventions showed their adherence to a variant of the theory of popular sovereignty. Herschel V. Johnson to T. Lomax, Executive Chamber, Milledgeville, GA, June 21, 1855, Herschel V. Johnson Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

multiple forms: “the people of every separate political community (dependent colonies, Provinces, and Territories as well as sovereign States) have an inalienable right to govern themselves.” This elastic definition of sovereign political communities was another example of how Douglas’s theory chipped away at the buffers surrounding sovereign power. States, with their own constitutions born of conventions, were granted a venerable status in American constitutionalism, even without a consensus on the extent and implications of their sovereignty. Douglas confused the nomenclature of power in America’s federal system with the notion that other polities were equally sovereign.⁶⁴

Douglas, it followed, also rejected the more extreme states’ rights dictum that states projected their sovereignty into the territories. Radical states’ rights theory mandated that “the federal government, as the general agent of the several States,” guarantee citizens’ ability to carry their home state’s domestic institutions, including slavery, into the “common territories” where “they shall be protected in their persons and property by the Federal Government until its authority is superseded by a State constitution.” Federal protection could take the form of a congressional slave code. When emigrants removed to a territory, their state’s sovereignty accompanied them—a protrusion of states’ rights concocted to install slavery against the will of

⁶⁴Toombs, *A Lecture Delivered in the Tremont Temple*, 2; Douglas, *The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority*, 17-21, 32; [Johnson], *Remarks on Popular Sovereignty*, 14-6, 23; “Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, at Wooster, Ohio,” 208-9; *Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black*, 11. See also, “Letter of Hon. W. R. Scurry,” 32-3; and W. S. Oldham, “Speech,” in *Rights of the South in Opposition to ‘Squatter Sovereignty’*, 13-6, 19. In delineating the rights of these communities, Douglas’s word choice was important. He spoke in terms of the “dividing line between Federal and Local authority,” not “Federal” and “State” authority. Antebellum political writers frequently capitalized “States” in recognition of their important status. Douglas also capitalized “Territories” and sometimes “political Communities.” States’ rights grammarians would have cringed at this sentence-level heresy. Douglas, although expansive in his conception of popular sovereignty, did not speak of a nationally sovereign American people. Rather, like states’ rights theorists who accorded the people sovereignty in their role as citizens of their respective states, Douglas spoke of a multiplicity of sovereign peoples, sovereign in their capacity as members of their respective political communities. To do otherwise would have meant sanctioning uniformity at the federal level. Douglas, *The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority*, 3, 19, 22, 40.

local majorities. For Douglas, in contrast, states' sovereignty yielded to that of the political communities already present in the territories.⁶⁵

“The people of each State possess the inherent right of self-government,” Douglas granted, and they lugged that right with them when “removing to a Territory of the United States.” But in the territory, they ceased to bear that right in their capacity as citizens of their former states. When a Virginian relocated to Kansas, he did not bring his rights as a Virginia slaveholder with him; rather, he bore a fundamental right of self-government independent of his home state. “The inherent right of self-government” that he carried “attaches to the people of the Territory” in their new political community. The federal government, consequently, did not function as the territorial trustee of the Slave States. Attempting to obtrude their power into the territories, the states would find sovereignty already present. Douglas’s dismissal of this variant of states’ rights theory further illustrated how he established alternative sources of political power prior to constitutional conventions and outside of accepted categories.⁶⁶

By equating territories with states and muddying the distinction between territorial legislatures and constitutional conventions, Douglas challenged the Revolutionary legacy of a people sovereign in the abstract by making the people sovereign in practice. The difference between conventions and legislatures, and between states and lesser political organisms like

⁶⁵“Letter of Hon. W. R. Scurry,” 28-32, quotation on 28; Toombs, *A Lecture Delivered in the Tremont Temple*, 2-6, quotations on 6. See also, W. S. Oldham, “Speech,” 16-21. For the contrasting view that Douglas “admitted the extraterritorial force of state sovereignty,” see Jaffa, “The Dividing Line between Federal and Local Authority,” 482-7, quotation on 487. For state sovereignty theory and the role of the federal government as “trustee” (161) of the sovereign states in the territories, see Arthur Bestor, “State Sovereignty and Slavery: A Reinterpretation of Proslavery Constitutional Doctrine, 1846-1860,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 54, no. 2 (Summer 1961): 117-80. Bestor distinguishes between the “defensive” (145) theory of states’ rights, which limited federal power, and the aggressive theory of state sovereignty, which used the federal government to project the power of sovereign states beyond their borders. All Democrats would have concurred on states’ rights, but would have differed on state sovereignty. See also, Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 19-26, 63-93.

⁶⁶*Popular Sovereignty in the Territories: Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black*, 11.

territories, was foundational to American political thought. Black, for instance, was not bothered by the theoretically sovereign people. Most Americans, especially Democrats, assumed as much. The problem was that Douglas had made this “transcendent power,” reserved for occasional conventions or even rarer returns to the state of nature, a component of routine governance.⁶⁷

Douglas responded to these reservations by distinguishing between the people and government—only organized political communities, not the unorganized people out of doors, could wield power. Democrats were comfortable with the authority of the people in the abstract, but governments required restraint. Prior to a constitutional convention, and outside the sphere of congressional suzerainty, however, there was no way to limit Douglas’s territorial legislatures. To Black and others, Douglas had summoned the sovereign people and had equipped them with an unchecked government through which they could act. The people and their legislature were made interchangeable. Douglas not only collapsed the distinctions between conventions and legislatures and between states and territories, but also between people and government—if the territorial people were inherently sovereign, so too were the legislatures through which they transmitted their power.

Americas agreed that republics required the diffusion of power. Douglas and his followers attempted to explain how the people could be sovereign, while the governments they created, although existing prior to constitutional strictures, would still be limited. The pseudonymous “Southern Inquirer” argued that territorial prerogative did not contravene responsible government. He agreed with Black concerning the danger of “omnipotent legislative power, which has no tolerance or standing anywhere except under a despotism.” Still, power did not need to be contained by express charter, as it was automatically curtailed by “the

⁶⁷Black, “Observations,” 11.

fundamental principles of the social compact” and “the genius and character of our institutions.” Reverdy Johnson also postulated that, even without parchment barriers, sovereignty was restricted by its very nature. Anglo-American political thought assumed limitations on sovereignty which were “inherent as the birth-right of the social man.” The American revolutionaries had imparted an understanding of “the implied conditions of all social power, [...] effectual to limit and restrict it as if in words repeated again and again.” The stifling of power was intuitive for Americans.⁶⁸

The celebrants of popular sovereignty were either unwilling or unable to reconcile constitutional limitations with their overriding goal of catalyzing self-government. Their reliance on unwritten and, presumably, unenforceable safeguards did not meet Black’s high threshold. Restraints on power, like the “competent local authority” which held the power, required precise definition. Black lauded the “Saxon race [who] have been laboring, planning, and fighting, during seven hundred years, for Great Charters, Bills of Rights, and Constitutions, to limit the sovereignty of all the governments they have lived under.” To forego this legacy of acknowledging sovereignty while expressly abridging its exercise, and to rely instead on “inherent” or “implied” breakwaters, betrayed the race’s libertarian pedigree.⁶⁹

Douglas, praising the people’s democratic power, and Black, fearing the state’s power, argued within a shared partisan ideology. Jefferson and Jackson had taught Democrats to rhapsodize over the people, but to revile the state. According to the Revolutionary theory of popular sovereignty, however, the people are the state, as the government is the vehicle of their sovereignty, a dangerous proposition that Douglas would have put into practice by treating as

⁶⁸“*Popular Sovereignty.*” *The Reviewer Reviewed. By a Southern Inquirer* (n.p., [1859]), 19-20, 41-3; [Johnson], *Remarks on Popular Sovereignty*, 28-30.

⁶⁹Black, “Appendix,” 16.

synonymous the sovereign territorial people and their legislatures. Democrats instinctively wanted to limit such power, yet handicaps on state power are potential curbs on the people's democratic power. The contradiction between majoritarian democracy and antistatism had long hibernated at the core of Democratic thought. In the late 1850s, in an effort to turn their ideology into workable policy regarding territorial slavery, Democrats surgically disentangled this paradox, with Douglas and Black each voicing one half of the Democratic mind. Douglas stubbornly persisted in praising the people, while Black stubbornly persisted in warning of their excesses. Each already agreed with the fundamental premises of the other, yet spoke past the other by emphasizing only one facet of an ideology that, once rent asunder, could not be logically cobbled back together, at least not in time to unite on a party platform and win a presidential election. Democrats also unraveled the other constitutive contradiction of Jacksonianism, that which existed between the local diversity necessary to stave off fanatical uniformity and the racial uniformity requisite to perpetuate *Herrenvolk* democracy. In the Douglas debates, Democrats laid bare the conflicting assumptions of their partisan beliefs. By exposing these tensions without resolving them, they alarmed other Americans and invalidated their own conservatism.

Conclusion: On to Charleston

The party teetered on the verge of schism in 1858 and 1859 as it limped toward its 1860 national convention in Charleston. Winding down the pamphlet war, Black grandstanded, "I have regarded this dispute as on a question of constitutional law, far, very far, above party politics." Questions of law and principle and those of factions and personality were, however, inseparable for this party of principles and of men. In the infighting resulting from Douglas's

apostasy, Black doled out the administration's favors to "Lecomton [*sic*] Democrat[s]" based on ideological and partisan fidelity to the Buchanan administration.⁷⁰ Rival factions claimed to be true Democrats, with groups even squabbling over who would be recognized as the legitimate Douglas Democrats. Buchanan's opponents railed against the dictation of his "monocratic" administration, while Douglas and his "'Popular Sovereignty' democrats" stood accused of imposing a "new school of politics" upon the party. On the eve of the presidential election, a Democrat could deem another "a political heretic, proscribed, excommunicated, and outlawed" and then resent the same epithet lobbed at him.⁷¹

Despite the factional recrimination, Douglas refused to play the weak-kneed fusionist or the non-partisan *caudillo* by allying with Democracy's enemies or forging his own party. As one sycophant beamed, "your battle is the most noble one ever fought *not out* but *in* the *true* ranks of Democracy." Douglas was the one politician in the late 1850s who could have further muddled the decade's politics by singlehandedly precipitating another round of the partisan realignment. With Douglas seemingly poised to engineer a new coalition, one Republican informed William Pitt Fessenden that he was "not *quite* prepared to give up the old leaders of the Republican party to enlist under a new man though he is a giant." Although some Republicans feared that an impending alliance with him would seduce their party away from its antislavery mission,

⁷⁰Black, "Rejoinder to Senator Douglas's Last," 24; J.[?] H. Brinton to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, West Chester, PA, November 9, 1858; quotation from William Reynolds to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Elmira, NY, November 9, 1858; T. W. Bartley to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Mansfield, OH, November 10, 1858; M. Steever to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Milwaukee, WI, November 29, 1858; George W. Woodward to [Jeremiah Sullivan Black], Philadelphia, December 1, 1858; Isaac Cook to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Chicago, March 14, 1859; William Bigler to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Clearfield, PA, June 1, 1859; Isaac Cook to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Chicago, June 22, 1859; Jonathan W. Gilmore to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Hollidaysburg, September 27, 1859; Flaven Brothers to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Milwaukee, WI, October 4, 1859, all in the Black Papers.

⁷¹A. J. Dickinson to Stephen A. Douglas, Fremont, OH, August 4, 1858, Douglas Papers; *George N. Sanders to President Buchanan* (n.p., [1860]), 1; Henry S. Magraw to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Harrisburg, March 18, 1859, Black Papers; Black, "Observations," 7; *Judge Douglas in Reply to Judge Black*, 21; *Rejoinder of Judge Douglas to Judge Black*, 8.

Douglas never contemplated defecting. The Little Giant censured those who did: “if there are any who choose to bolt, the fact only shows that they are not as good Democrats as I am.”⁷²

Douglas did not feel impelled to leave the Democracy, because his feud with other Democrats took place within their shared political ideology. Douglas minimized disagreements yet still conveyed truth when he thundered, “if there is one principle on earth which binds the Democracy together with more unanimity than any others throughout the entire land, it is this great principle of the right of every political community, loyal to the Constitution and the Union, to govern itself in respect to its internal concerns.” All Democrats respected the broader theory of popular sovereignty—that the people were at least theoretically sovereign and, as a result, entitled to actual democratic self-government. With regard to slavery, Democrats also agreed that the people could create slave states or free states as they saw fit, even if they differed as to how and when the people would reach that decision. As Lewis Cass learned from Jefferson Davis, fast becoming a foe of Douglas within the party, “we do not differ as to the principle of permitting a people to pass upon their constitution and to regulate their domestic affairs in their own way.”⁷³

Contrasting views of popular sovereignty did not definitively drive a sectional wedge into the Democracy. Although Douglas commanded the allegiance of many northern Democrats, others throughout the Free States aligned with their southern counterparts in rejecting squatter

⁷²August Kruer to Stephen A. Douglas, Madison, August 3, 1858, Douglas Papers; J. Lothrop [Lathrop?] to William P. Fessenden, New York, December 25, 1857, William P. Fessenden Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; “Mr. Douglas’s Speech, Seventh Joint Debate, Alton, October 15, 1858,” in *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, 295. See also, *Rejoinder of Judge Douglas to Judge Black*, 14; Henry S. Magraw to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Harrisburg, March 18, 1859, Black Papers; Winston S. Pierce to John G. Davis, Indianapolis, December 14, 1858; W. P. Mulhallan to John G. Davis, Rockhill, IN, December 17, 1858, both in the John Givan Davis Papers (microfilm edition), Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison; and Potter, *The Impending Crisis*, 320-2, 328-31.

⁷³“Speech of Stephen A. Douglas, at Wooster, Ohio,” 200, quotation on 222-3; Jefferson Davis to Lewis Cass, Hurricane, P. O., MS, August 3, 1857, Cass Papers. See also, Black, “Observations,” 15; and Robert Toombs to Lewis Cass, Washington, GA, July 28, August 11, 1857, Cass Papers.

sovereignty and hailing instead Black's "meritable discourse" as "the antidote to the poisonous influence which his [Douglas's] doctrine promulgated—a doctrine leading only to anarchy and revolution." From Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania came affirmation that "Douglass [*sic*], I regard, as simply a humbug, and his doctrine as bosh," while a Michigander hyperbolized that Black's argument "meets the views of three quarters of the Democrats" in his state. During the 1860 election, former attorney general Caleb Cushing told Maine Democrats that they must adhere to his successor's construction that slavery could only be dealt with at the statehood phase. He delivered the requisite paean: "We, in the United States, build up all government on the fundamental idea of the sovereignty of the people." Still, "the mystic name of popular sovereignty" required constitutional trammeling, especially given the sectionalism slowly corroding the Democracy and the Union.⁷⁴

Southern Democrats, likewise, were not unanimous. Not all southerners countenanced the automatic introduction of slavery into the territories, as supported by Black and many in the Slave States, or its positive protection there by means of a congressional slave code, as demanded by more extreme states' rights southerners. The call for a slave code sounded akin to Republicans' argument for congressional supremacy over the territories. Republicans and slave code advocates alike looked to Congress, one Alabamian surmised, because they distrusted the people and "the exercise of popular rights as agrarian and revolutionary—as one of the diseases of free Governments." For this pamphleteer, Cushing's call for congressional intervention in the

⁷⁴Robert Tyler to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Philadelphia, September 13, 1859; quotation from Samuel C. Reid Jr. to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, New York, September 14, 1859; quotation from William H. Bertling to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, New York, September 15, 1859; Robert C. Grier to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Philadelphia, September 15, 1859; H. S. Knapp to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Ashland, OH, September 17, 1859; George W. Woodward to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Philadelphia, September 19, 1859; quotation from Stanley Woodward to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Wilkes Barre, September 19, 1859; quotation from C. B. Benedict to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Niles, MI, September 20, 1859; John S. Bagg to James Buchanan, Detroit, September 22, 1859; Edward G. Loring to [Jeremiah Sullivan Black], Boston, September 26, 1859, all in the Black Papers; *Speech of Hon. Caleb Cushing, in Norombega Hall, Bangor, October 2, 1860, before the Democracy of Maine* (n.p., [1860]), quotations on 2.

territories negated popular sovereignty. “Mr. Cushing,” he charged, “has overlooked the fact that in this country the sovereign power is not in Constitutions and Governments, but in the people.” Ceding Congress the power to enforce a slave code, moreover, gave Republicans exactly what they craved—the admission that the federal government possessed power over slavery. According to a Georgia Douglassite, extreme southerners and Republicans “both are for *intervention*, though for different ends—the one, intervention against, and the other, intervention for slavery.” A slave code would backfire if ever Congress decided to circumscribe instead of safeguard the institution.⁷⁵

Many southerners also continued to back their erstwhile champion, the Little Giant, who had permitted the Slave Power and free laborers to joust as equals in the nation’s hinterland. In his attempt at a Senate seat in Arkansas in 1860, Albert Rust attacked the state’s dominant Democratic clique, the “Little Rock junto and dynasty,” in language similar to that of Douglassites maligning the dictatorial Buchanan administration. Rust transposed national issues onto a state election by supporting Douglas and popular sovereignty and opposing the federal administration, a congressional slave code, and disunion. Alabamian David R. Hundley, in Chicago trying to publish his sociological study of the South, recorded in his diary Douglas’s triumph over Lincoln. Douglas’s essay in *Harper’s*, “an abler article than I expected to find,” he reflected, “won me over to its views.” Although Hundley still anticipated that a “conservative Southerner, would make a better man & a better President,” his hope was to “unite the Democratic party, and show an undivided front to the common enemy.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵Nathaniel Macon [pseud.], *Letters to Chas. O’Conor. The Destruction of the Union is Emancipation. The Status of Slavery. The Rights of the States and Territories* (n.p., [1860]), 12-5, 26-38, quotations on 17, 33; Herschel V. Johnson to Alexander H. Stephens, Spier’s Turnout, July 20, 1860, Herschel V. Johnson Papers.

⁷⁶*Address of Hon. Albert Rust, to the People of Arkansas* (Washington, D. C.: Lemuel Towers, [1860]), quotation on 6; Entries for Jan. 4, 5, 6, 26, Sept. 12, 1859, Daniel R. Hundley Diary, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

Henry Wise's typically eccentric course also poses a challenge to rendering his party's travails in stark sectional hues. During the debate over Lecompton, he broke with "his warm, personal friend" Buchanan in order "to defend popular sovereignty." Wise did not believe that territorial legislatures could touch slavery. But at the statehood phase, the people's sovereignty was inviolable. Wise outlined rigorous standards for assessing the Lecompton constitution, because the people's "sovereign power ought not to be snatched away from them even for a moment." He improved upon the theory of popular sovereignty with his demand that constitutions be submitted to the people for ratification—a sovereign convention was not sovereign enough, and it was on this point that he diverged with Buchanan. A "convention, which is but a representative body" could not animate a constitution; that task fell to "the people, who alone are sovereign." Without a popular referendum, Wise "could not, therefore, sanction the Lecompton farce & fraud which attempted to coerce a people in adopting their organic law." Only the recognition of their popular sovereignty forestalled white men's degradation. Forming a government "without submission to the sovereign people," Wise warned, was "a doctrine fit only for slaves."⁷⁷

⁷⁷*The Lecompton Question. Governor Wise's Tammany, Philadelphia and Illinois Letters, Together with Letters to Charles W. Russell, Esq. by a Virginia Democrat* ([Richmond?, 1858?]), quotations on 49, 66; Wise, *Territorial Government*, 91-110, quotation on 109; *Letter of Governor Wise, of Virginia, on the Senatorial Election and the Kansas Policy of the Administration* (Washington, D. C.: 1857), quotations on 9, 10; quotation from Henry A. Wise to David Hubbard, Richmond, VA, March 3, 1859, Henry A. Wise Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, NC. See also, Reverdy Johnson to Henry A. Wise, Washington, November 6, 1858, original and typescript, Reverdy Johnson Papers; Henry A. Wise to William F. Samford, Richmond, VA, January 27, 1859, Samford-Wise Papers, Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Auburn University Libraries, Auburn, Alabama; Craig M. Simpson, *A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 157-89. Democratic factionalism in the Old Dominion also influenced Wise's course. Wise's position on Lecompton, Douglas, and the 1860 convention were, in part, determined by the contrary positions taken by R. M. T. Hunter and his clique as the two Virginians tried to outmaneuver each other during the 1859 gubernatorial election and as possible presidential contenders. See Henry A. Wise to William F. Samford, Rockbridge Co., VA, August 6, 1857; and Henry A. Wise to William F. Samford, Richmond, VA, November 3, 1858, July 7, October 14, 1859, all in the Samford-Wise Papers.

Although rejecting “squatter sovereignty,” Wise shared with Douglas a reverence for the sovereignty of the people. Wise endorsed Douglas’s return to the Senate as a vindication of “the sovereignty of the organized people, supreme above all mere representative bodies, Conventions or Legislatures.” Properly deployed, the people’s sovereignty was salutary in a republic: “Pure and undefiled republicanism, conservative Democracy, required that it [the Lecompton constitution] should be so submitted” to the people. There was a consensus among all Democrats that the people had the right to create their own constitutions. Even those Democrats who embraced Lecompton grounded their position on the supremacy of the popular will, focused through a convention. Wise’s gubernatorial counterpart in Montgomery ruled that Lecompton was legitimate, written as it was by a “convention [that] was sovereign in its powers.” No Democrat doubted that the sovereign people had a concrete role to play in American democracy.⁷⁸

Wise continued to cultivate his iconoclasm by mediating between the sections. He addressed public letters to northern audiences to support Douglas and oppose Lecompton. He flirted with a Wise-Douglas presidential ticket, provided Douglas would “consent to be *Vice*.” He even convinced himself that his celebrity gave him “more strength in the North than” Douglas enjoyed.⁷⁹ In 1859, in addition to martyring John Brown, he authored the longest and most idiosyncratic volume of the pamphlet war. While subscribing to the view that states could

⁷⁸“Letter of Governor Wise to the Central Committee of the Democratic Party of Illinois,” in Wise, *The Lecompton Question*, 65-7; Wise, *The Lecompton Question*, 4; *Inaugural Address of Gov. Andrew B. Moore, to the General Assembly of Alabama. Delivered on Tuesday, December 1, 1857, at 12 o’clock, M.* (Montgomery, AL: N. B. Cloud, State Printer, 1857), 7-8.

⁷⁹Henry A. Wise to William F. Samford, Richmond, VA, November 3, 1858, Samford-Wise Papers; see the letters in Wise, *The Lecompton Question*; “Letter from Henry A. Wise,” Wise to Austin H. Brown, Richmond, VA, February 15, 1858, in *Popular Sovereignty. Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention, Held at Indianapolis, Indiana, February 23d, 1858, with the Letters of Gov. Henry A. Wise, of Va.; Gov. Robert J. Walker; Hon. John W. Forney, and Others; and the Speeches of Hon. S. D. Johnston, of Kansas; Hon. H. B. Payne of Ohio, and Others* (Indianapolis: Cameron and M’Neely, Printers, 1858), 11. See also, Henry A. Wise to William F. Samford, Richmond, VA, December 2, 1858, Samford-Wise Papers.

project their sovereignty into the territories, he also rejected the nostrum of a federal slave code. Wise hewed a line between “*squatter sovereignty*” and “such state rights as Jeff. Davis proclaims from Missi.” He had lost patience with how frequently “the South has poked its finger in its own eyes” through such brinksmanship.⁸⁰

Like Henry Wise, all Democrats paid homage to the popular will, antistatism, white supremacy, and the benefits of social and cultural diversity borne of local self-government. The problem occurred when putting this unwieldy constellation of ideas into practice in a fraught political landscape. Democrats in Pennsylvania captured the difficulty: “our party generally [*sic*] relies *too much* on the strength and intrinsic value of its principles, or the good sense of the people,” at the expense of “party organization and circumspection.” Conservative Democrats began to doubt their own circumspection when they saw that trusting the people’s good sense threw into question their status as “the great conservative democratic party of the country.” They believed that the expansionist destiny of a white man’s republic was manifest, but the local democracy they relied upon to expand the nation subverted racial boundaries and, thereby, their reputation as guardians of white men’s democracy. Democrats also enshrined the sovereignty of the people, but democratic prodigality hazarded their conservative standing. “The great conservative principle of non-intervention” did not fulfill its promise. The asymmetries that

⁸⁰Quotations from Henry A. Wise to William F. Samford, Richmond, VA, December 2, 1858, January 27, 1859, Samford-Wise Papers. See also, Wise, *Territorial Government*, 69-76, 144, 147-50; Henry A. Wise to William F. Samford, Rockbridge Co., VA, August 6, 1857; and Henry A. Wise to William F. Samford, Richmond, VA, February 9, March 24, April 5, 1859, all in the Samford-Wise Papers; Henry A. Wise to Robert Tyler, Richmond, VA, January 17, 1858, Henry A. Wise Papers, 1858-1874, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond; and Simpson, *A Good Southerner*, 174-5, 180-2.

popular sovereignty exposed in Democratic ideology could not be submerged in a platform or embodied in a single candidate at Charleston.⁸¹

The party realized too late the peril of standing upon a theoretical doctrine as a platform. Fernando Wood beseeched the New York delegation to the Charleston convention to “go beyond and behind all hairsplitting discussion of territorial sovereignties,” pleading, “the danger has become too imminent for us to stop and to discuss the abstract rights of a handful of men who seek homes in the wilderness.” Reverdy Johnson likewise hoped that “inducements to harmony with the democracy” outweighed “dogmas as to sovereignty.” After expounding his own dogma, Johnson concluded his pamphlet by minimizing “all practical, immaterial differences of opinion on this question of popular sovereignty.” Agreeing that at this juncture “the harmony & unity of the Democratic Party was so essential to the preservation of the Union,” Delaware senator James A. Bayard bristled at Johnson’s disingenuousness. Referencing what another critic dubbed Johnson’s “bulky pamphlet,” Bayard chastised, “do you think that an elaborate argument on this Question of Popular Sovereignty, which has been raised, and needlessly raised by Mr Douglas, in support of his theoretical views, [...] is calculated to set aside immaterial differences of opinion?”⁸²

Democrats had done precisely that for which they lampooned unmanly fanatics—they had based their political program on “abstract rights” and “theoretical views.” Where once

⁸¹A. French, E. Joerg, Potter Democratic County Committee to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Coudersport, Potter Co., PA, June 8, 1859, Black Papers; *The Democratic Demonstration at Poughkeepsie. Speech of Hon. R. M. T. Hunter, of Virginia* (n.p., [1856]), 16; *Inaugural Address of Gov. Andrew B. Moore*, 8. For an overview of the 1860 Charleston and Baltimore national conventions, see William W. Freehling, *Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*, vol. 2 of *The Road to Disunion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 288-322; and Roy Franklin Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (1948; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1968), 288-320.

⁸²*Speech of Fernando Wood, Delivered before the Meeting of the National Democratic Delegation to the Charleston Convention, at Syracuse, February 7, 1860* (New York: Office of the Daily News, [1860]), 4-5; [Johnson], *Remarks on Popular Sovereignty*, 45-7; James A. Bayard to [Reverdy Johnson], Wilmington, November 6, 1859, draft letter, Bayard Papers; S. S. Nicholas, “Squatter Sovereignty: Response to the Essay on Popular Sovereignty Imputed to the Hon. R. J.,” 47.

Democrats lauded their principle as a demonstration of white men's masterly prerogative, in 1860 William Lowndes Yancey cast it aside as "the effete doctrine of squatter sovereignty." A pamphleteer writing under the pseudonym "Missourian" asked, "what affinity exists between the vigorous and lusty Constitution, and such hermaphrodite legislation" as the Kansas-Nebraska Act? By linking themselves to a theory that fueled fanaticism and then in arguing about it acrimoniously and publicly, Democrats seemed like the "one-idea Abolitionists," with their "wordy warfare," they had so often mocked. One opponent gloated, "Douglass [*sic*] has fallen into the snare of 'writing a book' the very thing that ancient malice prayed that an 'enemy' might do." Douglas was "flourishing his lance in the empty air"; states' rights Democrats were "fighting a shadow and for a shadow."⁸³

Democrats undermined their coveted status as America's manly, conservative party by brandishing a doctrine that invoked the specter of the people exercising power without restraint. But Democrats also belied their conservatism by choosing to champion a theory in the first place. George Ticknor Curtis, a conservative critic of both Democrats and Republicans, lectured, "when a political party departs from established principles of the Constitution, seeking for new theories [...], it must necessarily become divided against itself in the pursuit of such theories." "Take care," he solemnized, "how you emasculate the Constitution by a doctrine which will return to plague your invention in a hundred ways." Sidney George Fisher, another conservative skeptical of Democracy, called for a "Northern and Southern conservative party, yet to be

⁸³"Speech of the Hon. Wm. L. Yancey," June 23, 1860, *Washington, D. C. Constitution*, June 27, 1860; A Missourian [pseud.], *Douglas' Doctrine of Popular Sovereignty*, 31-2; "Speech upon the Issues and Candidates of the Presidential Campaign. Delivered in Tammany Hall, New York, August 19, 1848," in *Speeches; Correspondence, Etc., of the Late Daniel S. Dickinson*, 1:274; H. O. Laird to Jeremiah Sullivan Black, Greensburg, September 22, 1859, Black Papers; Black, "Appendix," 16; *Letters of Hon. John Forsyth*, 2.

organized.” The Democratic party would not be that party. Reflecting on the Democracy’s self-immolation, he moralized, “ideas, [and] principles, are sharp tools to play with.”⁸⁴

⁸⁴Curtis, *The Just Supremacy of Congress*, 21, 36; [Fisher], *The Law of the Territories*, xxiv, 122.

CONCLUSION: DEMOCRACY AND AMERICAN CONSERVATISM

All you are doing and saying is to America dangled mirages,
You have not learn'd of Nature—of the politics of Nature
 you have not learn'd the great amplitude, rectitude,
 impartiality,
You have not seen that only such as they are for these States,
And that what is less than they must sooner or later lift off
 from these States.

—Walt Whitman, “To a President,” 1860¹

In late August 1864, former United States senator Benjamin Fitzpatrick fretted from his plantation outside Wetumpka, Alabama about his son in Mobile, the coastal forts of which had recently fallen to the United States military. He told Elmore Fitzpatrick that “the fortunes of war may place you in the hands of the enemy.” Fitzpatrick gave his son the names of northern men who would provide “pecuniary or any other assistance” should he find himself in a northern prison camp. His father anticipated that Elmore would be able to call upon former Pennsylvania congressman Charles Brown, Ohio’s George E. Pugh, Indiana’s Jesse Bright, whose long Senate tenure had ended with his 1862 expulsion for aiding the Confederacy, John Kelly of New York, Irish Catholicism’s lone representative in the House in the mid-1850s, and Franklin Pierce, with whom Fitzpatrick had been intimate antebellum friends. All were Democrats, as Fitzpatrick had been before the war, and all, Fitzpatrick was sure, would aid his son, “whatever may be their opinion of this contest” that had disrupted their friendships, their party, and their nation.²

¹Walt Whitman, “To a President,” 1860, in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Francis Murphy (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 299.

²Benjamin Fitzpatrick to Elmore Fitzpatrick, Wetumpka, August 30, 1864, typescript, Benjamin Fitzpatrick Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. See also, Franklin Pierce to Benjamin Fitzpatrick, U. S. Steam Frigate *Powhatan*, December 10, 1857, Fitzpatrick Family Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

Such residual connections between northern and southern Democrats augured well for the party's postbellum suturing. Indeed, the Democracy flourishes to this day. But what of the happy republic which that party had pledged to preserve in the 1850s? After the war, Henry Wise also reached out to an antebellum ally in the former Free States. Having added extralegal revolutionary, secessionist, and Confederate general to his already eclectic political accomplishments, Wise resumed his antebellum correspondence with Fernando Wood, Gotham's consummate Doughface before and during the war. In 1866 Wise beseeched Wood to "relieve my mind and heart of the painful doubt and anxiety which oppress them respecting the fate, not only of the Southern States and people, but of the Republic, and of the civil liberty which it was created to establish and defend."

Unlike what Martin Van Buren had told Thomas Ritchie three decades earlier, this New Yorker confronted his Virginia friend with a harsh reality. Wood explained to Wise that they were living in "an interregnum, to be followed by such measures as will adapt the fundamental form of government to the new order of things; and incorporate into our system the principles thus established by force of arms." Rather than "State sovereignty," there would be "unity" and "consolidation." Rather than "slavery" for African Americans, there would be "freedom." Although he had opposed the war and emancipation, Wood struck an optimistic note: "The new Americanism opens up before us, and common sense demands that we should conform to it." This "new Americanism" would have seemed just one more *ism* to antebellum Democrats, a culmination of fanatics coercively wielding centralized power in order to elevate African Americans upon the ruin of the white man's republic. Postbellum "Americanism" was

antebellum fanaticism triumphant. For many Democrats, to concede these changes was to acknowledge the loss of the republic they had vowed to conserve.³

Much is rightly made of a melancholy Republican's repurposing of the nation at Gettysburg in 1863. But before years of fratricidal bloodshed had wizened Abraham Lincoln into a gaunt prophet of American exceptionalism, Democrats had long boasted that they were the stewards of "the last great experiment of free government." Because they attributed the nation's achievements to their party and its principles, antebellum Democrats equated the destruction of the Democracy with the withering of America's destiny. As Democrats watched their party buckle under the ideological strain of popular sovereignty at the end of the 1850s, they cringed at the thought of "the fondest hopes of the human race blasted forever." "Is it right," wondered an organization of New York Democrats, "that in order to secure the success of an opinion or the triumph of a party, we should peril the existence of the Union and jeopardize the happiness of millions?" George N. Sanders, who, in a more auspicious era, had thrown a dinner party for James Buchanan and Europe's liberal revolutionaries, scolded the president in 1860 for the intestine conflict hazarding party and republic. For crippling the party that spurred the spread of worldwide democracy, Buchanan would "receive the condemnation of the democracy of the civilized world for all time."⁴

³*Correspondence between Hon. Henry A. Wise and Hon. Fernando Wood* (n.p., [1866?]). For examples of the antebellum political alliance between Wood and Wise, see Henry A. Wise to Fernando Wood, Richmond, VA, January 20, 1860; and Henry A. Wise to Fernando Wood, Princess Anne Co., near Norfolk, VA, [February 1860], both in the Henry A. Wise Letters, 1841, 1858-1860, The Library of Virginia, Richmond.

⁴*Address of Hon. Albert Rust, to the People of Arkansas* (Washington, D. C.: Lemuel Towers, [1860]), 16; *Speech of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, of Maryland, Delivered before the Political Friends of Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, at a Meeting in Faneuil Hall, Boston, on Thursday, June 7, 1860. To Which Is Added the Letter of the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, to the Chairman of the Douglas Meeting in New York on the 22d of May, 1860* (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860), 10; *Address of the National Democratic Volunteers. March, 1860* (New York: John W. Oliver, Printer, 1860), 7-8; *George N. Sanders to President Buchanan* (n.p., [1860]), 4.

Faced with the loss of their happy republic due to disunion, war, and emancipation, none of which their party could prevent in its splintered state, Fernando Wood offered Henry Wise and, by extension, all Democrats a choice. Echoing what Democrats had told Whigs in their eulogies of the second party system in the 1850s, Wood pleaded, “the great questions which made issues between political parties have ceased, and a new and entirely different order of public affairs have ensued.” “My desire,” he asserted, “is that we shall realize this change and conform to it. It is folly to fight over the *dead past* when the *live present* and the GREAT FUTURE opens so brightly and beautifully before us.” Striking a tone of American exceptionalism reminiscent of the antebellum party, he implored, “I want America to fill her mission. She is the fixed corner stone of universal liberty throughout the world.” Democrats could continue to play a role in this mission. Another Democrat had assumed as much at the start of the war, announcing, “if the Union is ever patched up again, it must be with the assistance of this party, & it can live only so long as this party or one holding its national principles is a strong power in the nation.” Democrats could remain forward-looking progressives, secure in the confidence that they were the muses of global democracy, or they could atrophy in recalcitrance. Wood offered Democrats a choice, and they squandered it.⁵

Thus did the party of Jefferson and Jackson enter its blighted decades. Rather than adapting to the war’s outcome, Democrats elected to stand athwart history shrilly screaming stop. The Solid South’s rotten boroughs systematically enervated the national party. Neither Populists nor Progressives could shake the Democracy from its thralldom to pitchfork-toting Tillmans and white-plumed Vardamans. The party continued to be that of white supremacy, but

⁵*Correspondence between Hon. Henry A. Wise and Hon. Fernando Wood*; Rufus W. Peckham Jr. to Wheeler H. Peckham, Albany, September 25, 1861, Wheeler H. Peckham Family Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

neglected to pair it with a positive vision of the Good Society. Democratic political economy no longer succored the people. Industrialism's impoverished masses voted for Goldbugs, desperate for the economic levelling once promised by Loco-Focos. Dreary farmers endured the same grim prospects whether they perpetuated stale Bourbon dynasties or elevated New South modernizers, and all the while they yearned for Jackson to break up the monopolies sabotaging their independence and seizing their land. Boy Bryan's oratory did not feed the yeomen when the party eviscerated Populism. Al Smith's urbanity could not save ethnically diverse workingmen when the party sold its soul to a rural, parochial bigotry that would have raised the hackles of Henry Wise.⁶

In much of the nation, the Democracy nourished white men on race-baiting bile alone, an antebellum legacy that the party continued to honor. The abolition of chattel slavery only intensified Democrats' dedication to white supremacy, now that the first barrier to black civic participation had been breached. In 1860 Mississippi's Albert Gallatin Brown, one of Stephen Douglas's antagonists over territorial popular sovereignty, had reaffirmed for the Little Giant his "cordial personal friendship" as well as his "regard for you politically in all things; save *niggers*." Brown mischaracterized the nature of the party's impasse. The Democracy came apart on a narrow, albeit theoretically profound, debate concerning the democratic power of territorial settlers over western slavery. The nation sundered over the morality of slavery in 1860; the Democracy did not. Some northern Democrats would have preferred slavery not spread, but

⁶Jacksonian producerism and egalitarianism, which at times entertained racial equality, at least in economic matters, did endure within the postbellum Democratic party, but more often outside of it, in such forms as the Greenbackers and the Populists. See Paul Horton, "Testing the Limits of Class Politics in Postbellum Alabama: Agrarian Radicalism in Lawrence County," *The Journal of Southern History* 57, no. 1 (Feb. 1991): 63-84; J. Mills Thornton, "Alabama's Presidential Reconstruction Legislature," in *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-nineteenth-century American Political History*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel A. Shelden (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 167-87; and Samuel L. Webb, "A Jacksonian Democrat in Postbellum Alabama: The Ideology and Influence of Journalist Robert McKee, 1869-1896," *The Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 2 (May 1996): 239-74.

would have happily continued living in a slaveholding republic. After the war, southern and northern Democrats easily reunited on white supremacy, about which they had never disagreed.⁷

Just as the party remained that of white supremacy, so too did it continue to offer up local democracy, an increasingly stale shibboleth in the postbellum era. Antebellum Democrats' effusive praise for democracy was not simply humbug slung from the stump to excite voters; rather, democratic self-governance was constitutive of their very identity as white men. Democracy allowed white men to make manifest their theoretical sovereignty and to enact their racial and gender mastery, most poignantly when democratically deciding the fate of those who were not white men. After the war, democracy no longer enabled a conservative defense of white men's political prerogative, but fueled a reactionary crusade, given that black political actors inhabiting the halls of power were no longer hypothetical. Local democracy reached its nadir with majorities using it to harrow minorities with patriotism, Protestantism, and prohibition, and with racial violence and segregation receiving sanction as "home rule." Many Democrats ceased to value diversity as their antebellum forbears had. They turned to the democratic process to enforce uniformity within island communities and to otherwise flail against modernity. Self-rule descended into farce, with the rancor between "Drys" and "Wets," xenophobes and the foreign-born, Protestants and Catholics, and rural and urban constituencies paralyzing the party as a national force. The blunt employment of democracy to defend privilege, which Democrats initiated before the Civil War and at which they became more adept afterward, comprised the party's contribution to American conservatism.⁸

⁷A. G. Brown to Stephen A. Douglas, Terry, Hinds Co., MS, September 10, 1859, Stephen A. Douglas Papers, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Illinois.

⁸Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 44-110.

Democrats redefined American conservatism in the 1850s when they reimagined their preexisting dedication to democracy, localism, individualism, and antistatism as “conservative.” Previously, Democrats had designated majoritarian democracy and the widening of the political sphere to encompass all white men as a “progressive” endeavor, one conceived by Jefferson and consummated by Jackson. The white male individual whom they sought to politically empower was the “liberal” individual of social contract theory, secure in his inviolable rights under a circumscribed state. Majoritarian democracy and liberal individualism, when combined, were radical forces in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, until Democrats turned them into implements of social order meant to prevent the radical, and racially restrictive, republic they had created from becoming any more radical. Democrats, however, proved unable to convince other Americans and even themselves that they were true conservatives. Their fusion of democracy and conservatism could not preserve slavery and *Herrenvolk* democracy, the foundations of their white man’s republic. Majority rule as applied to territorial slavery exposed the precariousness of relying on the people’s democratic whims to achieve stability and forestall innovation. Democrats in the 1850s had somehow forgotten that the self-governing people did not always use democracy to sanctify the status quo.

The Democracy’s failure in the 1850s was one reason for the disrepute into which conservatism fell by the early twentieth century. Yet a reenergized conservative movement was incubating. At the root of its success as an ideologically virile and thoroughly modern political force after the Second World War was antebellum Democrats’ linkage of democracy and conservatism. Like Democrats in the 1850s, the twentieth and twenty-first-century New Right synthesized the seemingly progressive tenets of democracy, localism, individualism, and antistatism, on the one hand, with a conservative tendency to perpetuate existing hierarchies on

the other. Embracing popular politics, mass democracy, and liberal individualism, conservatives reoriented partisan politics, placed conservatism squarely in the American political tradition, and have been far more successful than Douglas, Wise, and Buchanan in turning democracy toward conservative ends.⁹

Democrats breathed new life into American conservatism, at the cost of making democracy and liberal individualism brittle tools of exclusion. Modern conservatives follow the 1850s pioneers by invoking “the people” in order to monopolize rights and reify hierarchy. Conservatives in the twenty-first century exhibit Jackson’s faith in the masses when convenient, because majoritarian democracy can erect insurmountable barriers to reform. Even when the executive, legislature, and judiciary sanction change, the reticent can always fall back on “the people” to halt progress, by employing a populist idiom and demanding that reform be countenanced by the true sovereigns. Just as Douglas made the rights of African Americans the purview of “political communities,” furthermore, individual and minority rights are often given over to the arbitration of local communities, allowing the moral sense of America’s little platoons to democratically dispense rights. Democrats’ liberal individual, who is still often a raced, gendered, and historically-bound entity, has also been appropriated by modern conservatives. The language of color-blind meritocracy and individual competition affirms established inequalities and prohibits an energetic state from dismantling agglomerations of power, something Jackson was willing to do for white men at least. In late-twentieth and twenty-

⁹Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945* (1976; repr., Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996).

first-century America, democracy and individualism have often been called upon to consecrate the present.¹⁰

Yet, as Democrats themselves learned, while democracy is an asset in the hands of the powerful, it can also be a means of advancement for everyone else. By using democracy for the purpose of exclusion, Democrats embedded in American conservatism a potentially subversive element. The party of Jackson in the 1850s teaches us that democracy, like conservatism, is a creature of its context. Depending upon who can wield it, democracy can either empower or marginalize. Regardless of the uses to which it is put, democracy is power. Few have appreciated this truism so well as Andrew Jackson, and few have misunderstood it so brazenly as those who claimed his mantle in the 1850s. Jackson intuitively recognized that the injustice which is most ineradicable, as well as the change which is most far-reaching, is that which is consented to by “the people.”

¹⁰Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 165-93, 221-66; Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace* (2006; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 185-261; Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the “American Way”: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

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