

“The Dupes of Hope Forever:” The Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Movement, 1820s-1870s

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This dissertation illustrates the impact of the Loco-Foco movement (1820s-1870s), most notably its role in the development of “Manifest Destiny,” the Free Soil Party, and the Republican Party. While historians have assumed that the Loco-Foco movement ended with the existence of the original third party in New York (1836-7), I pursue their philosophy and activism throughout the time and space of the late antebellum period. Loco-Focoism can be characterized as radical classical liberalism, including commitments to natural and equal rights, individualism, private property, *laissez-faire*, democratic republicanism, and, often, antislavery. Self-avowed and influential Loco-Focos included Herman Melville, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Walt Whitman, and countless other important figures in antebellum thought, culture, and politics ranging across the continent from New England and the northern border to the Pacific frontier zone and even the increasingly proslavery, anti-locofoco South. This study compiles the largest collection of primary sources related to the movement of any treatment to date, including dozens of newspapers, published books, poems, and pamphlets, public speeches, paintings, and private correspondence collections. This is the first and only history of the Loco-Foco Movement *as such*, and its conclusions offer sharp challenges to prevailing interpretations of the development of democratic-republican government, liberalism, and corporate-capitalism in the United States. While their ideology offered radical alternative models for American political and intellectual life, their efforts at practical politicking created much of the modern democratic, corporate-capitalist nation-state familiar to present-day readers.

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## Introduction: Who They Were and What They Did

### HOPE

When youthful hearts are light and true,  
And all is fair around us,  
The future breaks upon our view  
In every bright and pleasing hue--  
For Hope's sweet spell hath bound us,  
And all seems fair around us.

But ah! too soon we're doom'd to find  
The scenes that look'd so charming,  
Beset with thorns, with snares intertwined,  
That Hope is false, and Fortune blind,  
And dangers most alarming,  
Where all had seem'd so charming.

--William Leggett, "Leisure Hours at Sea," 1825

Yet Hope hath still her pleasing power,  
Although she's a deceiver!  
And e'en while storms above us lower,  
She paints so bright the future hour,  
We cannot but believe her--  
Although she's a deceiver!

Thus we stray on in quest of joy,  
The dupes of Hope forever!  
Earth hath no good without alloy,  
And sweetest pleasures soonest cloy,  
We soonest from them sever--  
The dupes of Hope forever!

The Locofocos were liberal-republican, anti-corporate ideologues and political activists located throughout the United States from the 1820s to the 1870s and this is the history of their movement. Locofoco ideology and politics varied and shifted according to a multiplicity of contexts and individual idiosyncrasies, but those intellectuals and activists explored in this dissertation in some manner claimed a heritage with the circle of individuals originally slurred by their enemies as "Loco-Focos" in New York City, 1835. The Locofoco movement began with the workingmen's and Jacksonian movements in the late 1820s and by 1835, New York City political conflict birthed the Loco-Foco Party. The Loco-Focos battled Tammany Hall and fought for control over the Democratic Party, continuing the work of many from the days of the Workingmen's Party. Over the course of several decades following this formative period in New York, individuals and movements either self- or peer-identified as 'locofoco,' deeply influenced life in the United States and related corners of the world. Ultimately, however, the locofocos

most eager for reform and most convinced of the virtues of democracy and republicanism proved in many ways to be the “Dupes of Hope Forever,” a very young William Leggett explored in verse. As they fought a political and (often) military war on “monopoly” and legal privilege, the locofocos transformed significant portions of the American institutional framework, allowing for much of the rapid industrialization and proliferation of corporations that characterized the late nineteenth-century economy. The radical liberal ideas for which locofocos fought over the decades demanded the liberation of all individuals from legislation conferring artificial rights and privileges on the essentially aristocratic few. This life-long “War on Monopoly,” resulted in a long series of events which in many ways diffused and democratized power throughout the populace. From general incorporation to antislavery, locofocos often claimed revolutionary victories.

Yet, at every turn they were stymied, won only minor political victories, made mistakes, changed their minds entirely, or allowed themselves to be coopted. Loco-Foco political activists generally won few, relatively minor elections and leapt at offers of swift reconciliation with the great political middle and conservative establishments like Tammany. The movement survived reunion with Tammany only to lose military contests in Canada (1837-1839) and Rhode Island (1842). Locofocoism persisted throughout the Old Northwest and New England, while the culture of New York Locofocoism gave birth to the Young America movement, the Dorr War clam bakes, and the loco press throughout the country. Political and ideological momentum built during the period of Dorr War activism (1841-1844) and the militant, expansionist, *hopeful* strand of locofocoism most moved by the Rhode Island affair surged to support Polk in the election of 1844 and the policy of territorial expansionism. Polk, however, refused to provide political support for the Van Burenites and locofocos in New York which could bolster their



power against Tammany conservatives. The locofoco movement fractured during the Mexican War (which many locos thought an immoral conflict manipulated to benefit a planter aristocracy). Most Loco-Focos followed Van Buren, some inclined to the supposedly ideologically purer South (and Calhoun), and others filtered into various party affiliations, including sustained loyalty to the Democracy. Northern locofoco Democrats, antislavery Whigs, and Birneyite abolitionists, all deeply disenchanted with the President, his party, and his war, joined together in another attempt at a third party coalition for the election of 1848.

The Free Soil Party galvanized the greatest margins of any loco-inspired political venture to that point, but Democrats perceived as sufficiently locofoco (like the old Dorrite, Franklin Pierce) were enough to heal the partisan wounds once again dividing Jacksonian Democrats. The slavery issue, however, ultimately defeated these forces for unity throughout the 1850s. The loco wing of the Democracy helped found the Republican Party from 1854-1860 and many supported Lincoln in 1860 and throughout the war. Meanwhile, old locos that stayed Democrats maintained the radical ideology in the Democratic Party. By 1876, many ex-Democrat locofoco Republicans like William Cullen Bryant prepared themselves to vote for Democrat Samuel Tilden. Tilden was a regular Democrat (like Van Buren, Polk, or Pierce) with locofoco ideas (like Van Buren, Polk, and Pierce), and many loco-Republicans abandoned the party of abolition to rejoin the party of popular government. Despite their long history of victories, friendly presidents and vice presidents, impact on the major parties, and their demonstrable ability to affect change in American life, the radically anti-state locofocos gradually lost themselves in a sea of government interventions, corporate-state corruption, state consolidation and imperialism, and widespread intellectual and political support for the use of government power. Virtually every victory achieved was forged through alliance with otherwise-regular Whigs and

Democrats, resulting in a string of moderate reforms and tactical political adjustments to the locofoco message and philosophy. They proved “The Dupes of Hope Forever,” and paved much of the way for the corporate-imperial modern state in America; consequently, the Loco-Focos deserve more of both the credit and blame for the modern American corporate-democratic nation-state than historians have yet recognized.

The locofoco impulse to activism belied a willingness to use one’s power—whatever the form it may take—to shape the lives of others, and a belief that doing so could be beneficial to the cause of Liberty. The chosen tools of locofoco activists were most often democratic elections and charter-granting, corporation-birthing governments, both of which proved as uncontrollably expansionary and corrupting as Leggett’s political writings warned. Locofoco political and social theory demanded an almost anarchic government entirely bound to and by the rights of the people and that can be renegotiated at will according to those governed. As two generations of locofocos compromised and adjusted their ideas to fit their practical demands, however, this radical liberal interpretation of republicanism disappeared from the popular locofoco debate. This conception of the state, how it arises in nature, and how states change from free and republican to aristocratic and tyrannical, virtually disappeared from American life after the Civil War and with it the locofoco movement was all but forgotten. While their compromises in many ways generated the powerful, relatively consolidated nation-state familiar to modern readers, their victories promoted egalitarianism and respect for the equal rights of individuals within American institutions. Their greatest victory when using the political tools of the state was in helping to universalize citizenship to all members of society, notably African-Americans and (eventually) women. The locos’ most tragic mistake was believing that territorial conquest and war could solve social problems better than purely private and peaceful action.

Historians of political and social thought in the Jacksonian period have speculated about the position of the Loco-Focos within American thought, though they have failed to produce a history of the locofoco movement and its impact over time and across space. Historians inclined toward the New Deal coalition of the twentieth century have seen the locos as relatively minor participants within the labor-leftist movement which ultimately interests them. Those clustered around Richard Hofstadter and Joseph Dorfman, however, have interpreted the locos as forerunners to modern libertarians, a sort of Jacksonian Tea Party. Neither group of historians, however, clearly identifies the genuine socio-political alternative offered the American public by the Loco-Focos. Historians on the left have assumed away the existence of true radicalism within locofocoism, while more moderate historians have struggled to identify the locos as unqualified friends of corporate-capitalism. In fact, for at least two full generations, the Loco-Focos spread a radical anti-corporate republican ideology and made significant and under examined marks on American intellectual and cultural history. Politically, however, their movement's success demanded compromise and moderation, tending to produce the exact opposite of loco ideals—the interventionist, centralized, bureaucratic modern state so beloved by Hamilton, Clay-Lincoln Whigs, and professional historians. “The Dupes of Hope Forever,” indeed, the Loco-Focos' own urge to actively, and often aggressively shape their world differed little in substance from the Whig's urge to stimulate growth and transportation through state support, the slavemaster's urge to push slaves to maximize output, or the bank capitalist's scheme to exploit limited liability for a chance at a speculative pay day. In many ways, historians bear no responsibility for neglecting the history of the Loco-Focos. Loco activists themselves, in fact, were often so eager to change History that they ignored or modulated their

own moral philosophy and political economy, repeatedly relegating their movement to a minor story in the epic of American statism and corporate-industrialism.

### The Thick and the Thin: A Word on Method, Terminology, and Argument

“ ‘An ingenious Londoner has taken out a patent for tipping cigars with an ignitable composition capable of being fired by friction, so that when a smoker wishes to light a cigar, he has only to rub the end of it against any hard substance.’ --Exchange paper.

It is a very old contrivance. An ingenious cigar dealer in this city made such cigars here more than twenty years ago, and, in fact, they were the means of the Democratic party being rebaptized by the name of Locofocos. The cigars were called locofocos, and on the occasion of a split among the Democrats, when one faction attempted to defeat the other in Tammany Hall, one night, by shutting off the gas, the darkened party suddenly re-illuminated the Hall by means of their locofocos, and the next morning the papers called them locofocos, for the name was not then very well known, in derision. So the term stuck, and though it was at first only intended for a faction of the party, it soon became a slang designation for all sorts of Democrats, and so spread all over the country.”

--“Locofoco” in James Rees, *Book of Origins*, *Saturday Evening Post*, 10 November 1877

This dissertation attempts to revise our understanding of the Locofoco Movement by constructing its history “from below.” While historians have examined the movement in New York City, ca. 1835-1837 (and to some extent in the literature surrounding Young America), virtually all treatments of Locos approach the movement with a particular construct already in mind. Locofocos are either relegated to the realms of the nascent capitalists, the nascent Progressives, or the curmudgeonly and retrogressive agrarians. None since Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, the Locofoco’s own historian, have attempted to produce a history of the movement which treats locofocoism *as such*. The ideology which animated activists and intellectuals for decades, ca. 1820s-1870s, has never been examined on its own terms, as a significant force or factor of its own, with a life distinct from the many competing ideologies, factions, and associations of the age. This dissertation, accordingly, seeks to correct this mistake and produce the only extant

history of this important movement by constructing it through the lives, ideas, and actions of those associated with the moniker “locofoco.” This study investigates the important figures in what was identified as “locofoco” thought, politics, and culture, arguing throughout that the Loco-Foco Movement cannot properly be understood as *merely* any particular political activity, party, or even a particular intellectual position. Rather, the Loco-Foco Movement included a wide array of political activities, from the original Equal Rights Party (1835-1837) to the Free Soil and Republican Parties; a series of core ideas and moral concepts which different groups of locos adapted to suit different practical needs throughout their lives; a large and inclusive swathe of American society not limited by economic class; and a diverse cast of activists with often-antagonistic methods of affecting reform.

Such a view of the Loco-Focos and their movement necessitates a clear exposition of terms. In this study, “Loco-Foco” shall refer in particular to those who positively, publicly, and regularly identified with the Equal Rights Party or the New York-born ideology of “Locofocoism.” When speaking in general terms about the movement faithful, I will opt for the term “locofoco.” “Locofocoism,” perhaps, requires the greatest explanation. While the ideology to which locofocos ascribed had definite beginnings in the writings of William Leggett throughout the 1830s (see Chapter One below), those who associated with the movement and shared their ideas are also treated as “locofocos,” though most of them never had anything to do with the Equal Rights Party and may have never read Leggett. Locofocoism as an ideology included commitments to 1) Universal, equal, inalienable human rights based in self-ownership; 2) Revolutionary republicanism; 3) The efficacy of democracy in defending individuals’ rights, 4) A “Classical Liberal” or political class conflict analysis; and 5) A philosophy and

understanding of history which positioned the United States at the forefront of Humanity's historical battles for Liberty against the tyrannical forces of Power.

Regardless of how they applied these particular concepts to practical concerns, locofocos shared these fundamental ideas in common and we can trace the extent of the movement by following in tandem the biographies of individual locofocos and the transmission of their key ideas over time and space. Over time and in varying contexts, locofocoism informed the actions of individuals who often came to contrary conclusions, some of which ruptured and split the movement. William Leggett, William Cullen Bryant, and the New York Loco-Focos vigorously supported *laissez-faire*, but the editor of the Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco* declared it the right of every republican citizen to petition his government for the protection of his interests from foreign citizens. The New Yorkers believed that *laissez-faire* was the almost magical ingredient rocketing their city to global importance and offered radical republican arguments for free trade. The Pennsylvanians believed their state depended upon protective tariffs and constructed equally radical republican arguments in favor of guarding traditional, local economic interests. Locofocos skeptical of majoritarian infallibility and their whiggish associates (like Thomas Cole) warned that democracies and republics must constrain themselves within the bounds of virtuous respect for the rights of others (including foreigners ripe for conquest) while the more hopeful, perhaps *naïve* locofocos lusted after territorial annexations to the world's greatest republic. Those who favored expansion built upon the classical liberal theory of history and placed the United States at the forefront of historic battles for Liberty against Power. Those who opposed expansion cautioned their hopeful fellows against further strengthening the Slave Power in the name of building a continental republic. Some locofocos carried their ideas into third party organizations (Equal Rights, Free Soil, Republican, and others peculiar to the states) while many

remained loyal Democrats their entire lives. Most advocated “peaceful” political reform while a significant minority risked life and limb to lead violent revolutions against non-republican governments in Canada and Rhode Island. Many shared the racist sentiments pervasive throughout the Union and considered the plight of slaves, free African Americans, and Native Americans but very little, while an increasingly large number of locofoco northerners included people of all races in their schematics for universal individual rights and supported political and private efforts at affecting abolition.

Modern writer and left-libertarian activist Charles Johnson has drawn a distinction between contemporary libertarians that is especially useful for an historian attempting to understand the progress and impact of the Loco-Foco Movement. Johnson asks modern members of the classical liberal intellectual tradition to consider to what extent they should “concern themselves with social commitments, practices, projects, or movements that seek social outcomes beyond, or other than, the standard” political commitments to small and at least largely voluntary governments. The various stances individuals take will determine their level of ideological “thickness” or “thinness.” “Thin” ideologues do not think it necessary to apply one’s limited political principles to the rest of social and personal life. “Thin” Loco-Focos include political figures like Franklin Pierce and Fernando Wood, both rather tangentially related to the hearts of both locofoco ideology and activism, only narrowly applying what few commitments to radical ideology they did have. “Thick” ideologues, by contrast, apply their political principles throughout social and personal life. “Thick” Loco-Focos included the majority of actual activists and certainly the filibusters and romantic Young Americans. In the Canadian Rebellions of 1837-1839, the Dorr War, the agitation for Texas annexation, the explosion of literary creativity out of New York City during the Young America movement, and

through a host of tangentially related movements from feminism to Spiritualism, “thick” locofocos made significant and overlooked marks on American and trans-Atlantic history. Their high level of thickness implied a great deal of fluidity in their actual ideological identities. Young and old, Walter Whitman thickly applied his locofoco first principles throughout his politics *and* his poetry, as did many of the first generations of American nationalist artists we now call the Young Americans. Throughout this study, we will see a wide variety of thick and thin locofocos, some so thick their identities as “Loco-Focos” become diluted in their related personal quests; some so thin that while they may have paid brief moments of political or rhetorical deference to locofocoism, they in no way adopted the ideology as a package. In the final assessment, we will see that while most identifiably *locofoco* political victories came from the activities of the “thin,” the fruits of thick locofocoism made what many felt were then and perhaps remain today the most significant contributions of their movement. Such things are, ultimately, the reader’s to decide.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, this broad constellation of politics and opinion constitutes a coherent “Locofoco Movement,” from which politicians and policy-makers often drew key portions adapted and adopted to suit immediate political contexts and concerns. The most significant politicians associated with locofocoism courted factions of the radicals depending upon political needs and strategy. Martin Van Buren shared much locofoco radicalism even before the Locofoco Movement began and proved his commitments to antislavery over time. James K. Polk shared locofoco economic views and won office on the strength of his support for locofoco expansionism, despite his firm commitment to slavery and the possibility of war with Mexico. Silas Wright combined a penchant for Free Soil with uncompromised support for locofoco

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Johnson, “Libertarianism Through Thick and Thin,” *The Freeman*, 1 July 2008.



economic policies and may have been elected president by the strength of united locofoco-Democratic votes in 1848 were it not for his untimely death. Franklin Pierce was only loosely associated with locofocos through his support for Thomas Wilson Dorr in Rhode Island, though Pierce greatly benefited from this legacy in the form of locofoco votes in 1852. Fernando Wood built much of his career by supporting locofoco economic policies while eschewing radical, *abolitionist* locofoco votes in favor of racist rank-and-file Democrats. Samuel Tilden, perhaps the last truly *locofoco* figure to measure very highly in national political life, was a life-long locofoco, inculcated in the ideas of radical republicanism as a young law student in Leggett's own New York City. Americans nearly elected Tilden president in one of the most notorious of elections, stained by suppression of the African American vote, fraud, bribery, secrecy, and a potential renewal of the Civil War. These politicians and their ideologically-thin allies in the parties made their careers by courting locofoco faction of voters with bits and pieces of their most treasured ideas and policies, often at the expense of other key elements of locofocoism. Less powerful and influential, though perhaps more purist, locofocos were often, therefore, led astray from their cherished theories as they rushed to implement them in practice.

The Locofoco Movement developed *ad hoc*, according to the needs of radicals and their allies over time and according to local context, sometimes spread across the land thickly, sometimes much more thinly. It included purist thinkers and artistic dreamers, pragmatic politicians and compromising coalition-builders, revolutionaries-at-arms and sincere pacifists, grounded rationalists and spiritual romanticists. Their diverse, powerful, and long-lived popular movement cannot be understood as *nascent* at all. Rather, we must reconstruct the movement as the locos themselves did--through two generations of "Thick" and "Thin" locofoco individuals' lives, ideas, interests, and actions.

## Chapter 1

### “A Glorious Illumination:” The Origins and Thought of the Early Loco-Focos

“So peculiarly exciting are the circumstances connected with the rise, progress, and dissolution, of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights party, of the city of New York, during its eventful life of two years, and so great an effect has that extraordinary movement had upon the Democratic Party of the state and nation, that a faithful history of its conventions, its principles and its deeds, with brief sketches of its active men, will not be uninteresting to the public, nor useless to the future political historian.”

--Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco Party*<sup>2</sup>

#### The Workingmen’s Advocates

“The Loco-Focos had an important mission to fulfil,—‘to bring back the Democratic Party to the principles upon which it was originally founded,’—and they have, in part, already fulfilled it. These Methodists of Democracy introduced no new doctrines, no new articles, into the true creed; they only revived those heaven-born principles which had been so long trodden under the foot of Monopoly, and forgotten, that they were termed ‘the new-fangled notions of Loco-Focoism.’

--Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco Party* (1842)<sup>3</sup>

The Loco-Foco movement, *as such*, had its origins in the Workingmen’s coalition within the democratic left of early Jacksonian politics. Those who came to identify with the term “Loco-Foco” after its genesis in 1835 often voted for Workingmen’s candidates and participated in the politics of George Henry Evans’ wing of the Jacksonians, but where their ideas diverged, so did their practical paths. Historians have studied the labor activism of Evans’ New Yorkers, locofoco John Commerford’s National Trades Union, and the long history of land reformers, labor leaders, and socialists following the Workingmen, but *locofocoism*—which influenced and produced major movements long after the death of the short-lived Equal Rights Party—is

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<sup>2</sup> Byrdsall, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* vi.

tremendously understudied and usually limited to its relationship with labor activism or a nascent capitalism. This chapter will explore the origins of the original Loco-Foco movement and the philosophy which characterized it.

Historians portray the Workingmen as a faction of the wider Democracy, composed of anti-capitalist proto-New Dealers (the Schlesinger view) or petty capitalists attempting to clear the legal and economic path for their own social advancement (Dorfman's view). As Walter Hugins noted, however, neither interpretation is supported by "a systematic examination of the stratification of urban society," and the Workingmen's constituency. As Hugins demonstrates, the Workingmen's movement had inter-class appeal, attracting professionals, specialists, laborers, and even a few political operatives. It was a complex constituency built on a passionate base of ideologues; they had a recipe for a lasting political movement. The Workingmen were the harbingers of Jacksonian Democracy, more so even than Jackson himself, who was "more the product than the prime mover of that social, economic, and political upsurge."<sup>4</sup>

Locofocoism, too, was more product than prime mover. In Hugins' view, the anti-monopolism of the Workingmen was the impetus behind the "Locofoco secession, in which the Workingmen in a new guise renewed their demand for 'equal rights' and reform of the state banking system." After forcing Tammany and the national administration in a more pleasing direction, go the historians' narratives, locofocoism evaporates into nothingness while the Workingmen continued to be active either paving the way for the New Deal or modern capitalism. Historians thus pronounce locofocoism dead as early as 1837. The Loco-Foco brand of radical classical liberalism is neither accorded an independent identity, nor a history of its own. As we will see, however, locos were hardly in lock-step with their Workingmen

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<sup>4</sup> Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 3-7

forebears, and properly constitute a *faction of laissez-faire* republican radicals within the earlier Workingmen's movement. By 1836, leaders like Leggett distinguished themselves from Evans and the two movements distinctly diverged, producing stories which should be told distinctly, though clear linkages remained and will be discussed further in later chapters.<sup>5</sup>

Few historians have attempted to expand the base of primary sources related to the Loco-Foco movement beyond party historian Fitzwilliam Byrdsall's easily-accessible 1842 book and a scattering of letters or editorials from prominent locos. Most historians' accounts of the Loco-Focos trace their secondary source materials to two articles written by a single Progressive historian, William Trimble, in the early twentieth century. The result has been an almost complete neglect of locofocoism as a subject of study.<sup>6</sup> While Hugins' work provides an excellent study of the social composition of the early Loco-Focos, few have considered that locofocoism, the *philosophy*, may have greatly outgrown and outlived the Loco-Foco *Party*. The radicals who relished in the label "loco-foco" bonded through anti-corporate thought and politics, which offered one of the most significant and lasting challenges to the emerging liberal-capitalist social order in Jacksonian America, though it has been largely dismissed, overlooked, or neglected, with few exceptions.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. For a selection treatments of the New York Workingmen's Party and the early labor movement in New York generally, see: Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as A Test Case*, (New York: Athanaeum), 1965; Mark Berger, *The Revolution in the New York Party Systems, 1840-1860*, (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press), 1973; Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1984; Louis Hartz *The Liberal Tradition in Hartz, Louis. The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc. 1955. *America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc, 1955; Hartz, "Seth Luther: The Story of a Working-Class Rebel," *The New England Quarterly*, 13, No. 3 (Sep. 1940): 401-418; Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1768-1850*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984; Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005; Mark Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005; Sidney Lens, *Radicalism in America: Great Rebels and the Causes for Which They Fought from 1620 to the Present*, New York: Thomas Crowley, Co. 1969; Staughton Lynd, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1968; Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City During the Nineteenth Century*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 1997.

<sup>6</sup>Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 3-7.

The 'labor press' of George Henry Evans was the first organ of thought to galvanize a great deal of the budding young activists and intellectual later calling themselves locofocos. Evans' charming and refreshing honesty won many admirers and friends in the late 1820s and early 1830s. According to Byrdsall, "there lives not a more unpretending incorruptible man," than Evans. He was singularly devoted to the work and the cause, a passionate icon for mobilizing working people: "Honest George! We can see him in our mind's eye, in his murky office in Thames street, editor, compiler, printer, &c., of his daily and weekly papers. There was he close at his desk, attending to and contending for all the rights and interests of the working masses of mankind, but neglecting his own rights and interests in money matters." Evans refused to be the passive victim of an unjust society, and for his efforts, he was rewarded with devotion and respect from his reading public. Incipient locos and Workies were "equally hostile to banks and other monopolies," but the two constituencies and ideologies were far from synonymous. Among other things, this dissertation is an attempt to integrate the existing literature on the Loco-Foco movement with an intellectual history that unites the original New Yorkers and a host of later movements, connections largely unexplored or unknown to current scholarship. It begins with a detailed intellectual biography of the leading figure in locofoco thought, William Leggett, "the very Jove of editors," and the founder of a distinct locodom.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Byrdsall, *History*, 13-15.

## William Leggett and the Philosophy of Locofocoism

“To those plodding critics whose literary tastes are more for the antique than the modern, more for the past than the future, and who are more retrograde than progressive in their views, the subject of the Loco-Foco Revolution may have too much freshness in it, may not be sufficiently stale, and, in all probability, they may consider it too early in the day for its history to be written. But it is, in fact, because the Loco-Focos were the political apostles of the future, and were much in the advance of their contemporaries, that their history is the more important to the American people, and particularly to the rising generation.”

--Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, “The History of the Loco-foco, or Equal Rights Party” (1842)<sup>8</sup>

Leggett was most likely born in New York City in either 1801 or 1802, though records leave the question insoluble. The preponderance of his youth was spent in the bustling and ever-growing neighborhoods of Manhattan. He attended Georgetown College in Washington, D.C. at the age of 14 and was a mathematics major. Shortly after he graduated, the Leggett family took to the West and settled in Edwardsville, Illinois. William took to acting and added income to his ailing household budget. In 1823, after publishing a few poems in the Edwardsville *Spectator*, he entered the navy. As a midshipman, he drew the ire of a particularly harsh commander and developed “his lifelong hatred for authority.” It was in the navy that Leggett began his literary career in earnest, composing the poetry collection *Leisure Hours at Sea*. In Summer 1835, the New York *American* attacked Leggett’s character on the basis of testimony offered by John Orde Creighton, Leggett’s commanding officer when in the navy and the chief instigator of Leggett’s 1825 court martial.<sup>9</sup>

In response, the *Evening Post* requested full documentation of the trial from the Navy and published the proceedings in full, “leaving every one to form his own conclusions as to the guilt

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. v.

<sup>9</sup> For the 1802 date, see Hofstadter, “William Leggett,” 582. For the 1801 date, see Worton, “William Leggett,” 2. White contends that Leggett was actually born in Savanna, Georgia on April 30, 1801. Lawrence White, ed. *Democratick Editorials: Essays in Jacksonian Political Economy* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1984), xi; Worton, “William Leggett,” 3-4; Hofstadter, “William Leggett,” 583; New York *Evening Post*, “Naval Court Martial” and “Court martial of Midshipman William Leggett,” 8 July, 2-3 1835; “[Untitled]” and “Naval Court Martial,” 24 July 1835.

of the accused, and the conduct of the accuser.” The court charged Leggett with having disobeyed orders by leaving his ship (then stationed in Gibraltar) during the 27 December, 1824 night shift without leave. He repeated the behavior on 7 January “for the purpose of fighting a duel,” and reportedly attempted suicide “by actually stabbing himself with a dirk” the following day. Creighton also alleged that Leggett regularly engaged in “Ungentlemanlike and unofficerlike conduct,” toward his peers and captain. Specifically, Leggett denounced Creighton as a tyrant “having acted unlawfully and oppressive,” deserving no respect from his men. While *en route* from Gibraltar to Messina in Spring 1825 and prior to the court martial, Leggett “continued to quote several passages of poetry of a highly inflammatory, rancorous, and threatening import, likewise expressive of a malicious purpose against the said John Orde Creighton, and a desire of personal revenge.” In his defensive testimony, delivered at Gibraltar Bay in July 1825, Leggett declared that had he known how poorly average members of the armed forces were treated, “I never, never would have entered the Navy.” Regarding his suicide attempt, Leggett asserted that Creighton’s own “unprecedented and cruel oppression” drove him “into a temporary paroxysm of madness.” “My situation aroused a thousand hideous phantoms,” Leggett explained, “the past--the future--blighted hopes--a sullied name--my grey haired father weeping over the disgrace of his child--a thousand harrowing thoughts of this nature rushed in frenzied exaggeration through my mind. I strove to suppress the rising gust of passion; but the conflict was too strong to be subdued; in a moment of delirious agony the steel was raised--thank heaven! The deed was prevented!” Most of all, Leggett’s defense constituted a war against the privileges granted his commander by virtue of rank as well as the tyrannical prosecution of the law.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

In 1828, Leggett married and established himself in New York City as the producer of the literary periodical, *The Critic*, which suffered from his mismanagement and soon failed. By 1829, William Cullen Bryant invited his friend Leggett to join the editorial board of the *Evening Post*. Leggett accepted the position “on the condition that he should not be asked to write about politics, ‘a subject which he did not understand and for which he had no taste.’” Within one short year, however, Bryant applied Leggett’s sharp tongue and intellect to some of the most abstract concepts in political economy, and Leggett steadily increased his political output. His editorial spirit “was decidedly the contrary of those despicable politicians, who, in their regard for expediency, think they have the right to compromise principles.” Jackson’s Bank War stirred a frenzied opposition among the radical Democrats in New York City against both national and state banking, and they turned to radicals like Leggett for direction and inspiration. He quickly absorbed all the material on political economy within reach. By 1831, Bryant had made him a partner in the *Evening Post* and in 1834, Leggett (disastrously) managed the paper while Bryant tended to business in Europe. In 1836, after a trying battle with a chronic chest illness, Leggett resigned his position with the *Evening Post* to begin his own short-lived papers, *The Plaindealer* and *The Examiner*. His notorious financial mismanagement ultimately claimed both periodicals, but his failing health exacted the highest toll. In 1839, Leggett prepared to depart for the United States of Central America as the Van Buren administration’s diplomatic agent, a sop to the locos who recently reintegrated with the Democracy. It was hoped that temperate climate would prolong his newly-valuable, influential life as much as possible, but before he could leave his city, William Leggett died at the young age of either thirty-seven or thirty-eight. Those touched by his ideas and passion for liberty were transformed in the process and carried figurative pieces



of Leggett with them wherever they went. Wherever the philosophy of locofocoism went throughout the antebellum period, so went the influence and memory of William Leggett.<sup>11</sup>

Leggett was the intellectual leader of the radical New York Democracy and many anti-Jackson, pro-*laissez-faire* Whigs as well. His writings provided the theoretical basis and popular support for many state and national programs including general incorporation laws, free banking laws, the Independent Treasury Act, and even the growing antislavery, Free Soil movement. His social conflict theory and political history often led contemporaries to mistake him for “a Utopian, a disciple of Fanny Wright, an agrarian, a lunatic, and a dozen other hard names.” As the historian Stanley Worton states, “There have probably been few editors so much maligned by contemporaries as he,” and Theodore Sedgwick wrote that “He was abused and calumniated in a manner almost unprecedented even in the annals of the American press.” Even his friends-- Sedgwick especially--called him impractical and excessively unrelenting. They often discounted him as a sort of fad and attributed his success to “the fluidity of the times.” As historian Johnathan Earle explains, “Leggett became more of a hero in death than he had been in life. He was eulogized in verse by Whittier and Bryant, toasted in the White House, and praised in countless Jacksonian journals...In the following decade, praise like this helped Leggett become the patron saint of antislavery Democrats,” including many early members of the Young America movement, anti-British filibusters, the Dorr Warriors in the Rhode Island suffrage contest, and incipient Free Soilers and Republicans. Tammany Hall, which, as we shall see, once

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<sup>11</sup> White, *Democratick Editorials*, xiii-xiv; Hofstadter, “William Leggett,” 583.

expelled Leggett from its community of Democrats, eventually erected a bust in his honor. He accomplished all of this as the leader of a distinctly *locofoco* philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

Leggett's philosophy of political economy was rooted in the Enlightenment liberalism of Locke, Smith, Cobbett, Jefferson, John Taylor of Caroline, Bastiat, Say, Bentham, and Stewart, and during the period in which he wrote, he was inspired by William Gouge, John Vethake, and his good friend William Cullen Bryant as well as the swiftly-developing 'Young America' culture of New York City. Leggett was a fiery proponent of radicalism, rebellion, and revolution and he even named his house in New Rochelle "Aylmere" after the agrarian rebel, Jack Cade, and his assumed name in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*. Leggett thought of the English peasant rebellions as forerunners to Americans' own battles against the assumed authorities of a creeping aristocracy. Words such as "agrarian" and "utopian," said Leggett, were rhetorical devices used by opinion-makers to bully people from sound ideas. By 1837, Leggett believed that "To be ultra is not necessarily to be wrong. Extreme opinions are justly censurable only when they are erroneous; but who can be reprehended for going too far towards the right?"<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Byrdsall, *The History of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party*, 17; Worton, "William Leggett," 38-39, 62; Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, ix; For the impact of general incorporation on the history of the corporation in the United States more broadly, see Edwin Merrick Dodd, *American Business Corporations Until 1860, with Special Reference to Massachusetts*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1954; George Evans, Jr., *Business Incorporations in the United States, 1800-1945*, (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.), 1948; Oscar & Mary Handlin, *Commonwealth: A Study of the Role of Government in the American Economy: Massachusetts, 1774-1861*, Revised Edition, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1969 (Original Printing: 1945); Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought, Pennsylvania 1776-1860*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books), 1948; Milton Heath, *Constructive Liberalism: The Role of the State in Economic Development in Georgia to 1860*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 1954; James Hurst, *The Legitimacy of the Business Corporation in the Law of the United States, 1780-1970*, (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia), 1970. On the Independent Treasury, see: David Kinley, *The Independent Treasury of the United States and Its Relations to the Bank of the Country*, (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers), 1970; White, *Democratick Editorials*, xv.; Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 24-26. See also: Frederick Blue, *The Free Soilers: Third Party Politics, 1848-54*, (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press), 1973.

<sup>13</sup> Worton, "William Leggett," 45-47; White, "William Leggett," 508-509. For historians' treatments of the Jeffersonian tradition broadly, see: Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1978; Henry Steele Commager, *Jefferson, Nationalism, and the Enlightenment*,

From this intellectual heritage, Leggett developed his concept of rights as inalienable and inextricably rooted in property. He believed that people were entitled to the property which they produced and the liberties inherent in the ownership of one's body. He even referred to an "ethicks [sic] of property," or a general attitude of thrift, savings orientation, industriousness, and honesty. Through mutual respect for the just property rights of individuals, conflicts would be avoided and peaceful interactions would abound. He never deviated from defending property rights and interpreted political events through this moral prism. Even during the New York City flour riots, Leggett excoriated the rioters for their destruction of property and upheld the rights of flour merchants to their goods at whatever price was established in the free market. When the aggrieved merchants then petitioned the state legislature to indemnify their losses, Leggett turned his wrathful ire upon them as aspiring violators of the most sacred doctrine of equal rights.<sup>14</sup>

Leggett adapted many aspects of utilitarianism from Jeremy Bentham into his natural rights philosophy. Utility was never Leggett's *standard* of ethics, however, but a reasonable method of determining the *expediency* of following a just course of action—that is, activities which are within one's rights to pursue. Leggett directly rejected the utilitarian standard, saying that "The maxim that *the end justifies the means* is one which we utterly repudiate...The saying

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(New York: George Braziller), 1975; Paul Conkin, *Prophets of Prosperity: America's First Political Economists*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 1980; Russel Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in American Politics, With Selected Speeches and Letters*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund), 1997; Marc Kruman, *Between Authority and Liberty: State Constitution Making in Revolutionary America*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 1997; Henry Farnham May, *The Enlightenment in America*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1976; Peter Onuf, *The Mind of Thomas Jefferson*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 2007; Nina Reid-Maroney, *Philadelphia's Enlightenment, 1740-1800: Kingdom of Christ, Empire of Reason*, (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press), 2001; Norman Risjord, *The Old Republicans: Southern Conservatism in the Age of Jefferson*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 1965; Gordon Wood, *The Idea of America: Reflections on the Birth of the United States*, (New York: The Penguin Press), 2011; Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, (New York: Knopf), 1992; Worton, "William Leggett," 31; Sedgwick, Political Writings, 131-132; Sedgwick, Political Writings, Vol. II, 327.

<sup>14</sup> White, *Democratick Editorials*, 11-15, 43-48, 150.

is in direct opposition to the soundest and most obvious principles of morals, and ought never to be countenanced, in any possible circumstances, nor for the attainment of any possible object.” To Leggett, the only justifiable means were those which were within one’s rights to utilize. He cannot, therefore, be considered a classical utilitarian, though he found the ideas useful when applied within the moral framework of rights theory. Denouncing the “state prison monopoly,” he wrote that he thought the monopolistic use of state prison labor yielded positive utility, however he unequivocally opposed the action as volatile to the equal rights of Americans who would be doing such jobs absent cheap prison labor. The prison monopoly created a series of artificial rights and privileges for capitalist contractors associated with the prisons, rights grounded *merely* in the institutional power of the state rather than the moral enterprise of justly acquiring and employing property. A mass of corruption and exploitation resulted.<sup>15</sup>

Leggett’s social philosophy followed the French classical liberals, and developed from his observations of the effects of monopolies on American society. Leggett believed the fundamental social conflict was between the humble and productive classes and those who, using the tools of government, exercise unjust and harmful power to expropriate the property of the former. He felt that “In as far as inequality of human condition is the result of natural causes it affords no just topic of complaint,” but those inequities which resulted from exclusive privileges granted by government were the prime causes of economic, social, and political inequality. Differences between individuals as decreed by Nature were positively beneficial, the sources of the division of labor, specialization, and other useful properties of human productivity discovered by Smithian economics. Those instituted by the arbitrary will of institutionalized power, however, bred resentment, envy, and violence. Special powers and privileges conferred

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<sup>15</sup> White, *Democratic Editorials*, 311, 315-318, 348; Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 77-78.

by the state through monopolistic corporate charters, partial legislation, and contracting with private entities enriched the powerful few and excluded the many. The most important, determinate, and readily-identifiable social classes, then, were those ordered according to one's access to the powers, privileges, and unequal protections of the state. Leggettian locofocoism minimized social stratification and conflict by reducing the state to minimal functions.<sup>16</sup>

Leggett's exposition of social theory often followed the contemporary political struggle. The political battles of the age did not represent the mere jockeying of politicians for superior posts and positions. Rather, the champions of the Democracy and the champions of aristocratic Whiggery fought minor iterations of cosmic battles between Liberty and Power. He contended that the productive classes were represented in the ranks of the Democracy and the aristocratic users of government privilege were represented in the Whig party:

The one party is for a popular Government; the other for an aristocracy. The one party is composed, in a great measure, of the farmers, mechanics, labourers, and other producers of the middling and lower classes, (according to the common gradation by the scale of wealth,) and the other of the consumers, the rich, the proud, the privileged--of those who, if our Government were converted into an aristocracy, would become our dukes, lords, marquises and baronets.

As historian Lawrence Kohl observed, the political battle was "nothing less than a mortal struggle between slavery and freedom." Leggett's philosophy "included a disposition to see politics as a struggle between good and evil, expressed as the eternal warfare between liberty and power, virtue and corruption." The tool of government allowed a curious fight to take place to decide the question of "whether the democracy or the aristocracy shall succeed in the present struggle." The war would not cease, but merely begin anew when Power regained its strength and reconstituted itself in social institutions. The Jeffersonian champions of the democratic forces once defeated the aristocratic Federalists, but the Whigs claimed the Federalist mantle

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<sup>16</sup> Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 246-249; White, *Democratic Editorials*, 254-257.

under an even more deceptive name. Should the heroic Jacksonians prevail, the villainous residuum of the Whig lines would emerge again in the future. Both virtue and vigilance were necessary to maintain Liberty against the constant threat of Power.<sup>17</sup>

Despite his early tendencies for hero-worship, Leggett's own views on party politics and his conception of liberty showed surprising and significant change over time, both serving to ignite a rift within the New York Democracy. At the beginning of his editorial career, he showed the sure signs of a party man, routinely rushing to the defend Andrew Jackson, parrying Whig charges of executive despotism. He lampooned Henry Clay and virtually ignored inconsistencies in Jackson's policy, especially internal improvements funding.<sup>18</sup> In 1834, Leggett spoke of Jackson as "The child, the champion, and the representative of the great democracy of the United States," "one of themselves," and a sort of demi-god fighting on the front lines of the historic battle for liberty. As his romantic commitments to the cause of liberty strengthened, his faith in the efficacy of party politics and democratic government waned. He claimed that Jackson's populism made him a great president, however, by 1835 Leggett reversed his cry, reasserted his rights-based first principles, and stated that "the broad mantle of THE PUBLIC GOOD...covers a multitude of sins, and...is too often practiced at the expense of other people." As the years advanced, so too did Leggett's conception of what the philosophy of equal

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 242-246. As White notes, "In reading such passages in Leggett (and in the writings of other Jacksonians) it is important to recognize that this is a *political* class analysis, not an economic or social class analysis of the Marxian variety; that is, for Leggett the relevant classes are created by exercise of the political means." White, "William Leggett," 318; See Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 42-72 for a fuller treatment of Democratic social and political philosophy. As will be shown below, this form of conflict analysis was widespread among Leggett's Democratic contemporaries and locofoco activism throughout the antebellum period spread the philosophy even further. See also: Welter, *The Mind of America*, 165-189; Lawrence Frederick Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism: Parties and the American Character in the Jacksonian Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989). 31; Harry L. Watson. *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*. (New York: Hill & Wang, 1990) 10, 44, 47.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 236; Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 197-198. While trumpeting Old Hickory's bravery in vetoing the Maysville Road bill--what Leggett called a "great bribery bill"--he entirely overlooked the fact that Jackson signed far more internal improvement bills into law than did John Quincy Adams

rights implied for and required of its adherents. He sacrificed pragmatism and partisanship for principle and consistency. In 1834, Leggett defended Jackson's tariff policy and made derogatory remarks about Calhoun's nullification movement, lauding Jackson for "checking those...advocates of *disunion*." By 1837, however, Leggett actively called for disunion with slaveholders--a far more radical and unpopular position than that of the nullifiers.<sup>19</sup>

Leggett always remained personally committed to the Democratic Party, though from 1834 to 1837, his politics radicalized and he viewed partisan maneuvering with disgust and indifference. As early as December 1834, Leggett declared that if the Democracy became corrupted by Power and degenerated into a destructor of rights, "the Evening Post would not be long found battling on the side of the democratic party and principles." He asked:

What more wretched slavery can there be, than to be doomed to follow forever in the track of party, to speak not...but what the 'party leaders'...may think or feel; and utter nothing which is not first emasculated of every thought or word which may be supposed offensive to any of their variant views. Can there be in human employment an occupation more degrading than this? In a statement of pure contempt for partisan editors, Leggett seethed "Poor wretches! from the bottom of our souls how we despise them!"<sup>20</sup>

His later writings are challenging expositions of radical liberalism, fusions of maximum *laissez-faire*, political commitments to antislavery, and individualism. He routinely attacked John C. Calhoun and other southern politicians for proclaiming slavery a positive good, and went so far as to compare Calhoun to Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Just as riveting was his staunch defense of former President John Quincy Adams' campaign in the House of Representatives to introduce petitions from abolitionist constituents. When the leading Democratic paper in New York, the *Albany Argus*, nicknamed Adams "The Massachusetts Madman," Leggett rushed to his aid and levied crippling attacks against the *Argus*' version of

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<sup>19</sup> White, *Democratick Editorials*, 20, 233-235; 225, 238. Emphasis added.

<sup>20</sup> Worton, "William Leggett," 255, 302, 77; Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 45-47.

sanity: a slaveholding democracy. Leggett and the *Evening Post* supported Van Buren for President in 1836, but only as a tool for advancing the Democratic Party in a more radical direction. Party mattered not except to the extent that it was an efficient way of grouping together those in favor of the protection of equal rights to battle those in favor of aristocracy.<sup>21</sup>

Historians have argued that Jacksonians harbored ambitions for upward mobility and competed with the Whigs mainly to secure their own offices and status, but locofoco political economy rested on the historical belief that the rich and powerful used policy as a tool to enforce and protect the existing social order. Maximum liberty allowed for maximum development and dissolution of hierarchies. Leggett's conception of liberty was "in the first instance a negative principle: an escape from legal privileges and controls deriving from the state for the power and profit of the few," derived entirely from his moral and social theories. Like his fellow Jacksonians, he held a quasi-religious faith in the efficacy of democratic institutions to promote liberty. Democracy, like Christianity, was a way for Mankind to atone for the sins of Power and cleanse the country's moral slate. Leggett and many contemporaries did not view democracy as an end in itself, but rather an element critical to attaining the greatest liberty possible by removing all artificial privileges and powers granted by the state. In his first edition of *The Plaindealer*, Leggett confronted his audience with his philosophy of government:

In politics, the Plaindealer will be thoroughly democratic. It will be democratic not merely to the extent of the political maxim, that the majority have the right to govern; but to the extent of the moral maxim, that it is the duty of the majority so to govern as to preserve inviolate the equal rights of all...Democracy and political economy both assert the true dignity of man. They are both the natural champions of freedom, and the enemies of all restraints on the many for the benefit of the few. They both consider the people the only proper source of government, and their equal protection its only proper end; and both would confine the interference of legislation

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<sup>21</sup> Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, Vol. II, 170, 215; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 885; Welter, *The Mind of America*, 191-192. Later in his career, Leggett also avowed a Whiggish notion of "principles, not men," after previously denouncing them for the view. Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 91.



to the fewest possible objects, compatible with the preservation of social order. They are twin-sisters, pursuing parallel paths, for the accomplishment of cognate objects.<sup>22</sup>

Though Leggett firmly held that democracy was “the only principle which promises equal liberty, and equal prosperity to mankind,” he sharply qualified his faith. Majorities were often composed of mobs, and mobs could become the most violent, destructive violators of rights. Leggett considered liberty and the protection of rights the highest ends, and applied the means of democracy and political economy to better facilitate the unfortunate necessity of government. It was the duty of the people to virtuously control their government, protect against the encroachments of pretender aristocrats, and thereby preserve liberty and prosperity. Throughout history, those states which exhibited the highest degrees of popular governance also possessed “the most diffused happiness and prosperity, and that the happiest and most prosperous portion of their history embraced that period when their approach to the popular principle was nearest.” Democratic states contain happier populations because they are better equipped to protect natural and equal rights. The state should be entirely negative, conferring no powers and privileges, and protecting equally the equal rights of all. Were that negative barrier breached, Leggett would be forced by his own reasons for maintaining the state, to disavow it, reform it, and reconstitute it—a process the Rhode Island suffragists would test for themselves in 1842 under the leadership of the devout locofoco, Thomas Wilson Dorr.<sup>23</sup>

Leggett’s economic philosophy was of virtually unqualified *laissez-faire*. Nature and Nature’s law governed all things, and what was right must be expedient, *a priori*: “There is no such thing, in morals or politicks [sic]...as impracticable truths.” Further, he declared that

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<sup>22</sup> Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 11-37; Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion*, (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1957), 9-10, 12-23, 146; See also John Ashworth, “Agrarians & Aristocrats:” *Party Political Ideology in the United States, 1837-1846*, London: Royal Historical Society, 1983; Kohl, *The Politics of Individualism*, 48, 179; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 31-35.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 35-38, 49, 52, 166-168.

“What is wrong in principle must continue to be wrong to the end of time, however sanctioned by custom.” Ever fond of Jean-Baptiste Say, Leggett quoted him:

Nothing can be more idle than the opposition of theory to practice. What is theory, if it be not a knowledge of the laws which connect effects with their causes, or facts with facts? And who can be better acquainted with facts, than the theorist who surveys them under all their aspects, and comprehends their relation to each other? And what is practice without theory, but the employment of means without knowing how or why they act?"

This belief is an essential element in what Andrew Lawson has termed “Loco-Foco Romanticism,” and the radical classical liberal interpretation of historical development. The natural world functioned as a perfect machine, and allowing each piece of the machine to function according to its nature would yield perfection. Theory and practice, Nature and prosperity, were one and the same, inseparable. Inequality, poverty, hatred and violence only disrupted the libertarian equilibrium state of Nature when the strong or cunning sought to violate the rules of Nature and invade the peoples’ liberties through extensions of power.<sup>24</sup>

Leggett’s work on political economy is focused on grants of corporate privileges, especially the moral hazards associated with fictive personhood before the law. Corporations, he said, were truly ‘artificial men,’ brought into existence exclusively by breaches in the negative state. They were abominations: artificial entities used by neo-feudal aristocrats for self-aggrandizement. The 1811 New York State general incorporation law allowed “manufacturing concerns capitalized for less than \$100,000,” to operate without exclusionary grants, but practically all other corporate enterprises required a special grant of incorporation from the state legislature. Therefore, ferries, railroads, turnpike roads, banks, and even bridges enjoyed monopolistic privileges, protected from competition by the guiding hand of the state. Such

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<sup>24</sup>Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion*, 141-156; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 165; Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, Vol. II, 117; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 10, 42-72; Lawson, Andrew. “‘Song of Myself’ and the Class Struggle in Language,” *Textual Practice* 18, No. 3 (2004): 377-394.

“special legislation,” used the Power of the State to curtail the people’s natural liberties and establish a monied aristocracy. The resulting corruption,

degrades politics into a mere scramble for rewards obtained by a violation of the equal rights of the people; it perverts the holy sentiment of patriotism; induces a feverish avidity for sudden wealth; fosters a spirit of wild and dishonest speculation; withdraws industry from its accustomed channels of useful occupation; confounds the established distinctions between virtue and vice, honour [sic] and shame, respectability and degradation; pampers luxury; and leads to intemperance, dissipation, and profligacy, in a thousand forms.

Man’s very nature corroded and transmogrified under the influence of Power. Leggett’s solution to the monopoly problem was, naturally, to maintain a limited government with a *real* general incorporation law--a law which would enable anyone who so wished to enjoy the benefits of corporate enterprise that did not violate the rights of others. The privilege-granting powers assumed by the state enabled the aristocratic segment of society, which possessed little to no justly-held wealth of its own, to manipulate and expropriate the property and production of the laborers. Laborers, in turn, use whatever means available and expedient to lash out at their oppressors. Generalized class conflict ensued. Leggett’s plan for general incorporation retained corporate organization, including the private property rights of capitalists, and removed the exclusivity of the earlier system of incorporation. He returned the state to a purely negative role, neither birthing nor restricting any private rights.<sup>25</sup>

Leggett contended that all government-funded internal improvements projects were similar breaches in the negative state which always opened new pathways for exploitation and the aggrandizement of power and wealth. He argued that such projects improperly used the people’s tax money, promoted private interests with public money, created monopolists with the special privilege of building said improvement, and promoted malinvestment coupled with over consumption, causing the business cycle. He excoriated the “Monopoly Democrats” for being,

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<sup>25</sup> White, *Democratick Editorials*, 12, 58, 246-249; Hofstadter, “William Leggett” 587.

against exclusive privileges as monopolies, but in favour of them as means of effecting ‘great objects of public utility,’ ‘developing vast resources,’ ‘stimulating industry,’ and so forth, which is only a repetition of the stale cant which has been used, time out of mind, by those who desired to cheat the people out of their rights for their own selfish ends.

He even extended this anti-monopoly argument to oppose state standardized weights and measures. He was keenly aware that “There is no inspector of yardsticks; and yet we doubt very much if people who buy by the yard do not generally contrive to get good measure.” The primary purposes served by such schemes could only be the establishment of new spoils offices throughout the Union, enriching the well-connected at the expense of the many. When readers asked if his proposal to remove all government funds from internal improvements projects would result in capital shortages, Leggett exhorted his readers, “let no man suppose that the progress of improvement would be retarded by such a withdrawal...It would only be changing the hot-bed system to the system of nature and reason. It would be discontinuing the force-pump method, by which we now seek to make water flow up hill, and leaving it to flow in its own natural channels.” If the market demanded improvements, free individuals in pursuit of their own self-interests would provide them. Any alternative model would promote the growth of a mushroom aristocracy, corruptly sponging funds from the public treasury and distorting markets.<sup>26</sup>

Undoubtedly, historians’ categorization of Leggett as an “agrarian” arises out of such ideas and others perceived as retrograde and anti-expansionary. Glyndon Van Deusen and Marvin Meyers, for example, argue that the hard-money Jacksonians and the Locofocos were *carte blanche* anti-bank, which mistakes the free banking theory. More recently, Sean Wilentz has stated that the “Hard-money men,” Leggett among them, “rejected the idea of a commercial system run wholly by and foremost for capitalists,” and “favored a...more modulated commercial system partially regulated by a democratically elected federal government.” While

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 277-283, 293-295, 307, 346.

this may indeed have been true for actual hard-money Democrats such as Thomas Hart Benton, Leggett's position is quite clear. He favored the complete severance of government and banking in all respects, with no government "modulation" whatsoever. He supported an entirely free market in banking with neither government regulation nor protection nor any support for any social group or involvement in the economy whatsoever, including establishing an official coined money. Leggett was not anti-bank, anti-commerce, anti-industry, or anti-property. He and a great deal of other locofocos did not oppose debt, credit, or paper money *per se*, but rather the iniquitous methods by which they were often foisted on the public. Leggett stated: "We wish neither to pull down the rich, nor to bolster them up by partial laws, beneficial to them alone, and injurious to all besides...All we desire is that the property of the rich may be placed on the same footing with the labours of the poor." This quotation can hardly be read as hostility to wealthy capitalists *per se*, nor agrarian redistributionism. It was a declaration for unqualified *laissez-faire*. If those who chose to invest in capital development became rich from their enterprises and talents, Locofocos declared, so much the better. Their profits would direct the way for further investment, research and development, and production in ways that government simply could not. Indeed, government intrusion in the economy could only produce negative results. This deadweight loss and the very real poverty and oppression it caused drove his deep, guttural hatred for the Second Bank of the United States and the monopoly state banks.<sup>27</sup>

The Bank War was the nexus of the entire Jackson movement; it gave shape, style, and character to the Democracy and allowed a clear delineation of who was a Democrat and who was a Whig. Yet many within the Jacksonian coalition opposed the National Bank's restraints on

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<sup>27</sup> Van Deussen, *The Jacksonian Era*, 48-63; Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion*, 154; White, "William Leggett," 313; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 342. On the subject of free banking, see also Lawrence White, *Free Banking in Britain: Theory, Experience, and Debate, 1800-1845*, Second edition, (London: Institute for Economic Affairs), 1995; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 440; Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 78.

state banks' abilities to issue credit far in excess of reserves, rather than opposing the very concept of government involvement in banking. To Leggett, these enemies from within were the most subversive, untrustworthy politicians of all. At least the Whigs were honest about their intentions to subject Americans to the yoke of aristocracy. These treacherous "Democrats" couched their votes in terms of the same equal rights as did Leggett himself, constituting a very dangerous threat. Leggett was even more severe in his criticism of state banks than the Bank of the United States, stating that he would prefer the evil of one central bank to a proliferation of evil state banks, one Monster over many. With a careful watch on inflation—a phenomena particularly harmful to the working classes—Leggett appreciated the issue-constraining impact of a central regulator of the currency, as opposed to a proliferation of artificially-privileged issuers in the states. Therefore, he was opposed to Jackson's distribution of government deposits into state banks. This, he said, would serve to deepen the coming depression.<sup>28</sup>

Leggett's analysis of the business cycle began with the *theory* that the greater the quantity of a good, the lower the trade value will tend to be and, therefore, the lower the purchasing power of the good. Leggett argued that monopolistic fractional reserve practices would tend to result in rapid inflation, which would lead to rising prices. The rise in dollar prices would lead to an increase in the sale of foreign goods resulting in specie outflows, thereby lowering specie reserves and prompting a bust. Banks, now with far more paper than specie on hand, would curtail their credit expansion. During the curtailment, the precipitous drop in prices and unemployment expose the malinvestment incurred during the artificial boom (such as that in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 119-126, 158-163, 176-180. See also, Peter Temin, *The Jacksonian Economy*, (New York: W. W. Norton), 1969; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 397-398; Ershkowitz & Shade, "Consensus or Conflict?" 600; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 74-83, 112-115; Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 22-24; For the best standing account of the American banking system before the Civil War, see Bray Hammond, *Banks and Politics in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.

internal improvements and western settlement), and the economy spirals to the depths of the bust. He was quick to note the tremendous moral hazard created by government involvement in banking that was ultimately responsible for the business cycle. The artificial credit expansion made “the whole business of the country...stimulated into unnatural and unsalutary activity.” Because the newly-created money was used first by the investor class, Leggett argued, this class enjoyed a higher-value money than did the workers who received the same money later, when its purchasing power was reduced through inflation. This served as a tremendous transfer of wealth from the poor and middle classes to the wealthy, further stimulating damaging behavior. Leggett’s solution to the inherently unstable American banking system, then, was a complete severance of the “Connexion of State with Banking.” “*Church and State*,” he said, “has an evil sound; but *Bank and State* grates more harshly on our ears.” He proposed a system of thoroughgoing *laissez-faire* in the banking sector and the removal of all traces of privilege and special powers. At all levels, the State should keep its own treasury and refrain from distorting capital markets. Leave Nature to Her course, in credit as in all things: “We are unwilling to see it cramped by arbitrary restrictions...we would have it, like the sunshine and dew of heaven, to dispense its blessings equally upon all.” Hardly an agrarian sentiment. According to Leggett’s model, states would neither operate nor charter banks and they should keep their own treasuries.<sup>29</sup>

To this effect, Leggett went to the radical extreme of advocating private coinage. He believed that only the best currencies would be accepted, and it was not necessary for government to enforce a certain money. If markets demanded stable currencies, those least subject to inflationary pressures would prevail; and if markets demanded elasticity in currency,

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<sup>29</sup> Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 41, 102, 248-252; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 63-70, 83-86, 119-126, 180-185.

those banks which most expertly managed their inflation schemes would become most profitable. No bank would enjoy the privileges of government deposits or of abrogating contracts and suspending specie payments. To Leggett's mind, money was little different from language in that both goods necessitate market exchange to function as they are intended. For money to function properly *qua* money, the Congress must relinquish its monopoly powers:

The laws of language are not established by Congress or any other body of delegated powers...What is it then sustains the language in its purity, fixes the meaning of words, and enables us to give to expression a precise and unchangeable import? Every man is at full liberty to be as unintelligible as he pleases...What restrains him from doing so? The necessities of social intercourse: the mutual advantage which all men find in promoting the general convenience. The necessities of commercial intercourse, and the mutual advantage which all men would find in promoting the general convenience in matters of traffick [sic], would lead, we think, to as certain and desirable results in regard to money, as in regard to language.<sup>30</sup>

One of the more initially odd and counterintuitive positions Leggett defended is that which he dubbed "The True Theory of Taxation." Leggett argued in favor of direct taxes to replace indirect taxes like the tariff and an unending variety of state and local fees and taxes. He thought indirect taxation was adverse to the doctrine of equal rights as it did not tax in an equal fashion. Under an indirect taxation regime, one's tax burden was virtually incalculable, whereas direct taxation was "open and honest." The "True Theory of Taxation" would enable the government to eliminate all tariffs as the means of obtaining revenue and, as a result, free trade would flourish and America with it. A direct tax eliminated many, if not most, forms of protectionist corporate welfare. Under indirect taxation, Leggett asserted, government became independent of its citizens as it did not depend upon them for revenues and did not have to directly approach them with the request. This ability to further externalize the costs of government greatly weakened the people and strengthened the government and its crony

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<sup>30</sup> As White notes, "Leggett must be counted among the earliest political economists to extend free-trade logic to coinage," and "perhaps the only writer to call for private coinage earlier was Thomas Hodgskin." White, "William Leggett," 316-317; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 105-109.



capitalists accordingly. Perhaps the best effect of direct taxation was that there would no longer be a need for customs agents, another class of mushrooms aristocrats, petty tyrants using their offices to rule over their fellows. He despised such members of the political class, like his felonious nemesis, Samuel Swartwout. Leggett wholeheartedly mused that “We should be glad to see the custom-house swept off into the sea, and the whole army of collectors, surveyors, tide-waiters, and lick-spittles, of various denominations, swept off with it--or at least compelled to resort to some other method of obtaining a livelihood.” His hatred of the feudal regime of indirect taxation and government beneficiaries overpowered his ability to suggest the concrete form direct taxation should take. Whether governments should tax real estate and personal property, tax incomes, or charge individuals a flat fee, Leggett never specified.<sup>31</sup>

Leggett forcefully opposed government procurement of “public goods,” such as ferries, docks, wharves, piers, pauper asylums, the post office, and public schools (at the national and state levels). His arguments flowed directly from his premise of equal, natural rights. Municipal ownership resulted in political corruption, alienation of the people from their government, and violations of the laws of trade. He believed that “no code of municipal laws can ever answer the purposes of trade as well as its own laws,” and that with municipal ownership, “there will be favouritism [sic] and partiality in the arrangement...and business will be forced from its natural direction to suit the views of speculators, or to gratify the demands of sectional rapacity.” Leggett offered a *laissez-faire* alternative: *privatize everything* and auction

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 38, He did, however, allow for a small tariff at an even rate for all goods if the revenues from direct taxation proved insufficient for the needs of the polity. Though, if the rest of Leggett’s policy proscriptions were carried out in addition to those on taxation, one can hardly imagine such a situation arising under normal peacetime conditions. Ibid. 21-24, 38-42, 367-370; It was widely known that Swartwout thwarted Leggett’s otherwise-likely nomination to the Democratic ticket for Congress by using his extensive network of party connections to make the mails controversy a matter of party loyalty. Swartwout later gained notoriety as the greatest fraudster and swindler the national government had ever encountered (he was alleged to have embezzled roughly \$1.25 million before fleeing the country) and a blight on the Jackson administration. Worton, “William Leggett,” 29-30; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 21-24, 322-324.

all public property to the highest bidders, with preemption rights to those who live contiguous with the material for sale. On October 10, 1835, he replied to an editorial in the *American* which expressed a desire to see the municipality apply tax revenues to the creation and maintenance of “free ferries.” Leggett was incensed: “the epithet *agrarian*, which the *American* has sometimes applied to this journal, was never so much deserved by any political theory we have advanced, as it is by that paper for the projects referred to.” Here he defined an agrarian as one who harbors a desire to “throw down the boundaries of private right, and make a new and arbitrary division of property.” “Of our own political doctrines,” he continued, “we can truly say that they are in every feature the very opposite of agrarianism. They rest, indeed, on the basis of inviolable respect for private right.” State control of public goods represented the resurgence of a feudal order in corporate-capitalist garb, but still “in its nature...agrarian.” Indeed, Leggett warned that the truest agrarianism was akin to feudalism: the great bulk of the population held roughly equal amounts of property (that is, virtually none), and the privileged elite that manage the state were the only ones to ever enjoy luxuries or leisure. He exhorted the *American*:

If free ferries are of advantage, why would not free markets be also? And free warehouses? And free dwelling houses? And free packet ships? And in short free from every thing? The arguments by which alone the *American* can support its theory of free ferries, are equally pertinent and cogent in defence [sic] of a literal *commonwealth*. Who would have thought to see the *American* turn so ultra an agrarian?<sup>32</sup>

On the subjects of public schools and pauper asylums, Leggett was an extreme localist and supported such institutions *only* if funded and managed at the local level. He thought that “compulsory charity,” in the case of pauper asylums, was entirely inconsistent with property rights. “We [Americans],” he wrote, “are for doing everything by law; and the consequence is

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<sup>32</sup> Worton, “William Leggett,” 187, 353-354. White, *Democratick Editorials*, 277-283, 293-295. 301-304, 332-333.

that hardly anything is done well.” Regarding education, Leggett opposed the creation of public universities such as West Point. In 1835, he denounced the New York legislature for their intentions to create a state Board of Education, calling the plan an encroachment upon the rights of local communities. His *laissez-faire* analysis consistently found that poor laws, for example, created more poverty and promoted the subservience of the poor to wealthy capitalist employers or the state—neither of which was acceptable.<sup>33</sup>

Leggett struggled to apply rights doctrine to the issue of copyright, but ultimately considered intellectual property a species of protection for intellectuals. He began by conceding that exterior proprietary rights are extensions of natural right and that everyone has a natural right in that property which he or she has justly acquired. He argued that the elimination of copyright privileges would flood markets with inventions and artistic creations from the resultant increased competition and sharing of ideas. This popular culture bloom would result in a mass of material to publish and produce, making information far more widespread than ever before. After all, “The great good which the invention of printing originally effected, was to diffuse literature, and make books accessible to myriads, who were precluded from them before, by reason of the enormous prices at which manuscript copies were sold.” Lockean models provided the rules for justice, Leggett’s penchant for egalitarianism informed his values, and he employed utilitarian calculations to convince his audience of the inexpediency of intellectual monopolies.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Welter, *The Mind of America*, 276-297; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 289-292, 271-274, 290-291; Worton, “William Leggett,” 129-130, *Ibid.* 184-185.

<sup>34</sup> Although Leggett appears to have been far from certain about his initial opinions on domestic copyright, according to Theodore Sedgwick, “he at all times opposed the introduction of an international copyright law.” Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, viii. For an example of his initial support of domestic copyright, see Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, Vol. II, 88-90; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 391-405.

A letter to the editor challenged his position, asking: do not authors possess a natural right in the products of their labor, taking the form of books, poems, paintings, and similar objects? Leggett answered that “an author has an exclusive natural right of property in his manuscript,”--the physical product--but “The mental process by which he contrived those results are not, and cannot properly be rendered, exclusive property.” Any species of intellectual property which may arise, he contended, must arise from iniquitous legislation. He listed the “innumerable difficulties” in maintaining a position of natural right in “incorporeal property:”

The question first...arises, where does this exclusive right of property in ideas commence? The limits...of incorporeal property are vague and indefinite and subject to continual dispute. The rights...of incorporeal property may obviously give rise to conflicting claims, all equally well founded...How many ideas must be joined together before they constitute a property?

Copyright law “has no foundation in natural right, and is prejudicial to ‘the greatest good of the greatest number.’” Leggett reasserted the primacy of rights theory, squarely differentiating his locofoco tradition from both utilitarian liberals in Europe and the political pragmatists in America. His concern remained the ability of grants of monopoly privilege to create an entrenched and arbitrary aristocracy and the threat they posed to the liberties of the people.<sup>35</sup>

One such threat was concentrated in the postal service, which Leggett criticized as an engine of corruption and machine for the expansion of power. Only a constitutional amendment permanently abolishing all government involvement in the postal service would result in an

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 397-400. He states that “[If] the author has a natural right of property in the products of his intellectual labor, it ought to be acknowledged...If, on the other hand, his right is derived from a law founded on views of expediency, instead of the principles of natural justice, we revert to our first position, that the greatest good of the greatest number would be more effectually promoted by the total abrogation of copyright property...Let the claim of natural right be established, and we should be among the last to invade it; but concede that the question rests on any other basis,” and he can refute the claim. This indicates that Leggett’s prime concern, the concern guiding his philosophical approach to the issue, is whether a natural rights claim can be made in defense of copyright. Leggett appears to be inviting argument on both sides of the issue yet attempting to make clear that he finds the existence of natural rights to be the object of paramount concern. Ibid. 404-405. Leggett stated that “*all is well that ends well* or that *it is right to do evil in the first instance, that good may follow*...are principles which ought never to be countenanced in [his] system of political ethics.” Sedgwick, Political Writings, 265. Elsewhere, Leggett refers to the utilitarian principle that the ends justify the means as an “odious maxim.” Sedgwick, Political Writings, Vol. II, 135. Also see Ibid. 291. White, “William Leggett,” 322-323, 405.

equal, efficient system of postal delivery in the private sector. Echoing Whig critics of executive power, Leggett criticized the appointment powers of the president, saying that far too many people in control of Americans' communications were appointed by this single individual. He asked, "Can any one be so blind as not to perceive...that this is a monstrous power, at all times susceptible of being exerted, with the most dangerous effect, for the advancement of objects hostile to the true interests of the people?" When Amos Kendall and a South Carolina mob took advantage of this "monstrous power" to silence abolitionists mail campaigns, it only encouraged Leggett in his opposition to state postal service.<sup>36</sup>

It is unknown whether Leggett ever shared the racism so popular among his contemporaries, but what is clear is that he always favored the extension of equal civil rights to black citizens. One of his earliest editorials on the subject of slavery denounced local whites for orchestrating an anti-abolitionist riot at the Chatham Street chapel and even urged terribly strict crowd control measures to prevent further harm to the abolitionists and freemen within the city. At this point (8 July, 1834), Leggett was a "forthright opponent of those he called the 'fanatical' abolitionists." Yet, he did uphold the equal rights of African Americans and the rights of immediatists, saying "We are aware that we are taking the unpopular side of this question; but satisfied that it is the just one, we are not to be deterred by any such consideration." Early in his career, Leggett held the common position that slavery was tolerable because, were the slaves to be freed, they would assuredly flood northern labor markets and exclude whites from jobs. Abolitionist activism, however, soon changed his mind and lit a fire in his heart.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 197-199, 304-307.; Watson, *Liberty and Power*, 211; 362-367.

<sup>37</sup> Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 19; Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 36; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 885; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 191-192, 193-196.

In August 1835, the American Anti-Slavery Society flooded the postal system with immediatist literature censored by Charleston, South Carolina postmaster, Alfred Huger. Huger was caught between conflicting obligations. The general government required him to deliver the mail unmolested, and the state government demanded he prevent “incendiary” publications from delivery. Postmaster General Kendall claimed that he could not position himself on either side and did nothing, allowing a South Carolinian mob to burn undelivered abolitionist mail. As passions inflamed against the abolitionists, Kendall decided upon a policy of censorship which quickly became Democratic orthodoxy. Leggett viscerally attacked this policy as a gross abuse of government power saying “If the Government once begins to discriminate as to what is orthodox and what heterodox in opinion, what is safe and what is unsafe in its tendency, farewell, a long farewell to our freedom.” Leggett argued that Democrats were artificially containing abolitionism for the benefit of planter aristocrats, violating the rights of white and black Americans alike. The *Washington Globe* directly targeted Leggett and he was soon “publicly read out of the party by the New York County Democratic organization.” Democratic partisans pressured Bryant to fire Leggett or face the complete loss of party patronage (the funds that kept his *Evening Post* solvent). This viciousness only incensed Leggett’s pen further and drew radical democrats closer to him. The intellectual rift in the New York Democracy, growing over the Bank issue, swelled with Leggett’s antislavery, anti-censorship crusade. Shortly after his “excommunication,” Leggett received a collection of abolitionist literature from readers, and he immediately absorbed and incorporated it into his own thought, comparing abolitionism with his own premises. Leggett concluded: “slavery is an opprobrium and a curse, a monstrous and crying evil, in whatever light it is viewed.”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 198-199, 201-204, 207; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 410-411. For Kendall’s broader role

Reacting against slavery, Leggett turned against the ultimate idol of early American life, the Union. Leggett's romantic vision of American democracy evaporated as abolitionism seized his heart and mind. He eventually argued that if the Union "is only to be preserved by yielding to the claims set up by the south...if we can hope to maintain our fraternal connexion with our brothers...only by dismissing all hope of ultimate freedom to the slave; let the compact be dissolved rather than submit to such dishonourable, such inhuman terms for its preservation." By 1837, he considered "abolitionist" a "title of honour," and incorporated abolitionism into his wider romantic-republican worldview. He found no "truer or loftier [devotee] to the great cause of human emancipation," than the abolitionist. Leggett asserted that, "We cannot give up Freedom for the sake of the Union...No! rather let it be hewed to pieces, limb by limb, than, by dishonourable compromise, obtain a short renewal of the lease of life, to be dragged out in servitude and chains." He violently broke with both major wings of the Democratic Party, calling Van Buren dictatorial for preemptively refusing to sign any bills abolishing slavery within the jurisdiction of the Congress and blatantly comparing Calhoun to Satan.<sup>39</sup>

Leggett anticipated the turbulent, often violent antislavery voices of the 1850s by romanticizing and historicizing the slave, identifying him with all Americans, especially those who refused to subject themselves to the yoke of British neo-feudalism: "The oppression which our fathers suffered from Great Britain was nothing in comparison with that which the negroes experience at the hands of the slaveholders...The banner of our country is the emblem, not of justice and freedom, but of oppression." He boldly and brashly declared support for northern secession, sympathy for the slave, and a desire to agitate slave revolts:

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within the Jacksonian movement, see Donald Cole, *A Jackson Man: Amos Kendall and the Rise of American Democracy*, (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press), 2004; Worton, "William Leggett," 246-253.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 211-218, 221-223, 225.

should the oppressed bondsmen, impatient of the tardy progress of truth urged only in discussion, attempt to burst their chains by a more violent and shorter process, they should never encounter our arm, nor hear our voice, in the ranks of their opponents; and whatever commiseration we might feel for the discomfiture of the oppressors, we should pray that the battle might end in giving freedom to the oppressed.

As he reminded his readers, “The obligations of citizenship are strong, but those of justice, humanity and religion stronger.” In this short period, Leggett constructed an antislavery position adopted by a small and highly radical group of abolitionist disunionists like Ezra Gannett, Philip Cleland, Wendell Phillips, Samuel Hammond, and the Syracuse abolitionists.<sup>40</sup>

The slavery question set Leggett apart from both his Democratic *and* Whig contemporaries more than any other and won him the most loving supporters and devotees. As Jonathan Earle states, antislavery Democrats like Leggett “were both isolated and rare,” in Leggett’s lifetime. Indeed, Leggett’s brand of antislavery not only matched the most fervent of the Democrats, but “it took him beyond the stance of most Garrisonians.” This prompted an antislavery split from both the Democrats and the Whigs. Indeed, Leggett’s antislavery views were critical in establishing what would become the Free Soil Party. The anti-Texas, antislavery followers of Leggett included none other than David Wilmot, whose Proviso helped shatter the Second Party System. Leggett’s passion and flame spread across antebellum time and space through a series of locofoco moments and movements, from Rhode Island clam bakes serving up radicalism and chowder, to antislavery nullification of the Fugitive Slave Act in Wisconsin. The movement never forgot him and his contributions, though he is all but lost to popular memory.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, 228-230; Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, Vol. II, 329; Welter, *The Mind of America*, 336-337, 344, 362.

<sup>41</sup> Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 17-19; See also, Sedgwick, *Political Writings*, iv; Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*, 18, 52, 127.



“Between Man and Monopoly:” Forging a New Democracy

“And now, gentle reader, you are requested to contemplate the glorious spectacle of a little band of men contending against two great political parties, for the sake of principles only. There was no prospect of success as a party, no chance of electing to office...But this little band felt and knew they had a just and righteous cause in their charge...for they were animated by a noble enthusiasm which had its origin from a higher source than self-seeking, office or profit. The difficulties they had to encounter—the sacrifices they had to make, and the slanders they had to bear from every point of the political compass, inspired them to higher virtue and to greater efforts.”

--Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, *History of the Loco-Foco Party* (1842)<sup>42</sup>

The Bank War solidified Jackson’s coalition through the midterm elections of 1834, including the crucial component of New York workingmen and anti-corporate radicals following Leggett and the *Post*. By 1835, however, the Democratic Party in New York City roiled with discontent. The radical liberal ideology of William Leggett’s *Evening Post* drove the debate and defined the conflict. Tammany Hall opposed national banking but remained favorable to state banking. The radicals remained true to their Workingmen’s roots, opposed to all grants of monopolistic privilege and power. As Fitzwilliam Byrdsall argued, both state banks and the national Bank “belonged equally to one system, having privileges of a similar nature, and producing evils upon the community of the same description.” The radicals aimed, as George Henry Evans stated, “to follow up the victory over the now prostrate United States Bank, by a war of extermination against the smaller engines of fraud and corruption.” His main ideological weapons were William Leggett’s twin concepts of anti-monopoly and equal rights. Many in the movement saw themselves as a class set in permanent opposition to the exploitation of government beneficiaries, including the great mass of “spoils system” office-holders and money printers, largely in control of both major parties and their nominating conventions. To purify the corrupt state the radicals had to purge infidel conservatives from the Democracy. Like

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<sup>42</sup> Byrdsall, *History*, 50.

mushrooms sprouting from a fallen log, a new class of aristocratic monopolist-capitalists used their ability to manipulate the constituted authority of the state and sponge the life-force of the working classes. Radicals sought politically viable routes to effectively challenge the emerging social order; however, Jackson's popularity combined with the economic and political power of prominent partisans to create a climate stifling and somewhat dangerous to dissidents. "It was held as an indisputable truth," Byrdsall writes, "that nothing could justify a disorganizer, and that he who attempted for any cause whatever to disturb the harmony of the party, was a monster to be shunned and hated by every true democrat."<sup>43</sup>

William Leggett's conversion to abolitionism, however, was a transgression that conservatives could not abide. In the midst of the mails controversy (August 1835), the *Globe* assailed Leggett for being possessed by "the spirit of Agrarianism," having a "Utopian temper," and constantly "running into extremes." He "knew no medium" on the issue of the tariff—contending for absolute free trade—and "In regard to Banks, no account was to be taken of the actual condition of things in the country, but a universal and immediate annihilation, was the tendency of all the Post's arguments." More significant, however, was the attack upon Kendall and Leggett's new-found and decidedly extreme antislavery. It allowed the conservative Democrats to draw a clear and dogmatic line of separation around Leggett and provide conservative party newspapers a convenient excuse to embargo the radical *Evening Post*: "But he has at last, *and we are glad of it*, taken a stand *which must forever separate him from the Democratic Party*. His journal now openly and systematically encourages the Abolitionists."<sup>44</sup>

Leggett stood as a beacon for all radical Democrats and anti-privilege Whigs, and his persecution provided the image of a martyr sacrificing himself that the truth of his message

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 14, 16-7; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 28-29, 33. Emphases added.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. Frank Blair's Washington *Globe* represented the Democratic Party and Jackson's government in the press. It therefore fell to the *Globe* to punish Leggett's attacks on the administration.

might live. Byrdsall's history romanticized the affair: "While secret meetings were being held by the Equal Rights Democracy...one man with more of the divinity within him, than any man of his era, stood forth almost alone, undaunted by all the *terrorism* of the monopoly system." But the radicals' numbers were dwarfed by the "monopoly dynasty" and most refused to even meet in secret until the excitement and outrage over Leggett's excommunication pushed the movement forward. To avoid scrutiny and detection, the conspirators elected secret delegations which alternatively met at the Broadway House, Constitutional Hall (also on Broadway), and the Bowery's Military and Civic Hotel, which served as a sort of headquarters. Evans provided sage advice from his new home in New Jersey, including the suggestion that radical democrats storm the 1835 nominating convention and overtake the proceedings from the usual Tammany conservatives. The radicals plotted their conquest and created the first sustained activist networks of locodom—the evolving community of radical liberal republicans.

The conspirators were, to a man, Leggett's "disciples." They included: Charles Havens and Charles Moore, "who had caught with youthful susceptibility a scintillation from Leggett's enthusiasm," Philip Milledoler, "chairmen of the young men's General Committee at Tammany Hall," Allen Sniffen, "superintendent of lamps and gas [who] was peculiarly timid on account of his office," labor leader John Commerford, printer John Windt, and the office-holders Henry E. Riell and Alexander Ming Jr., who "formed a noble contrast to the cautiousness of Sniffen." Jacob Clute joined the conspiracy from his seat on the Old Men's General Committee and George W. McPherson from the Young Men's General Committee, both organs of Tammany Hall. Ming was the natural leader of the (dis)organizers, exhibiting an exceptional character and "more of the onward self-risking spirit, necessary to a popular leader, than any of the anti-monopolists." Walter Hugins argued that the Workingmen-Loconfoco movement represented "a

microcosmic cross-section of New York City society,” a splashing of people from across the socio-economic spectrum. They united behind a philosophy and set of principles.<sup>45</sup>

Leggett’s excommunication emphasized in fine the need for the Equal Rights radicals to hijack nominating proceedings and plot in secret. After Tammany Democrats published a slate of candidates for the upcoming nominating convention, “The indications were now sufficiently plain that the Republican Party had become a monopoly aristocratic party,” and radicals planned to reconquer it for the cause of Equal Rights. They substituted their own candidates for the unacceptable Tammany nominees, submitting the factional question dividing Tammany and Equal Rights Democrats to the party voters. Charles Ferris had the advantage of having already served in Congress for a year, after replacing C. W. Lawrence (recently elected mayor of New York City). Job Haskell also brought prior political experience as a member of the New York Assembly in 1835. Haskell’s popularity with the local radical Democrats relied to a large degree on his credentials as a fervidly anti-British veteran of the War of 1812. He displayed a warrior’s courage on the stump and in the state house, “and voted more strictly to the pledge he signed, than any of his colleagues from the city. Many a time during the session, was he in the glorious minority of exactly *one*.” Radicals appreciated his fortitude in the face of a united and powerful opposition. When the full force of the Monopoly Democracy bore down on him, “he adhered with the inflexibility of hardened steel to his pledge, both to the letter and the spirit of it. Honest

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. Hugins has provided a wonderful study of the socio-economic character of the Loco-Focos. While we are unaware of the occupations of the vast majority of locofocos, Hugins estimates that 19% were in professional or clerical trades, 14% worked in the food industry, one-tenth in the building trade, and one-tenth in mercantile trades. We know the occupations of several of those from Byrdsall’s list of original conspirators: Evans was a printer, as were John Windt and Alexander Ming, Jr., John Alwaise was a cabinetmaker, John Commerford a chairmaker, William F. Piatt was a physician, Barnabas Bates was an editor, and Henry Riell a tobacconist. Byrdsall’s own profession remains unknown. Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 38-9, 119-120.

Job!” Haskell voraciously studied military history and regularly delivered public lectures on important generals from Hannibal to Washington.<sup>46</sup>

They expected Tammany regulars to play dirty tricks. Each conspirator attended the convention with pockets full of “Loco Foco” matches and candles. The plan, “which in other circumstances would have excited merriment,” was overshadowed by the solemnity of Leggett’s martyrdom, and “resolved on in serious earnestness of mind and somewhat of solemn mystery.” Finally, on the evening of 29 October, 1835, Tammany Hall hosted the annual Democratic Party nominating convention for the nomination of candidates. Byrdsall explained the process Tammany Democrats normally enjoyed:

On the allotted evening the people assemble; the *trained* troops, punctual to the minute, nominate and elect the officers; the *trained* chairman cannot hear any names but those of the *trained* committee; who in turn make a *trained* report; the *trained* secretary is ordered to publish the *trained* proceedings in the official *trained* newspapers, and the *untrained* people are then permitted to go home.

Not so this evening.<sup>47</sup>

“*The clock has just struck seven,*” Byrdsall tells his readers, “and the doors of Tammany Hall are opening for the democracy. What a mass of human beings rush forward into the room!” In keeping with plans made at the secret meetings weeks prior, “a dense throng collect[ed] in front of the hall, and the leading passage and great stair way to the large room, [was] crowded to a perfect jam, as if human beings were wedged together and bound fast.” A floor fight ensued for the nomination of a convention chair, immediately contested when the Tammany faction attempted to install their man without taking account of the conventioners still surging into the hall. Tammany selected Isaac Varian to the chair and the radicals responded with the verbal nomination of Joel Curtis. Byrdsall’s romantic history constructs the scene like a grand battle

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<sup>46</sup>For the lists of Tammany and Equal Rights candidates, see Appendix, Figures 1 & 2. Byrdsall, 21-23.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

between the forces of history itself, Liberty and Power, Mushrooms and Men. In the fray of the convention, the emergent Loco-Focos found themselves, their fire, and their fury. Alexander Ming, Jr. led the way:

The contest at length becomes more furious; men are struggling with each other *as if for empire*, while the multitude in the body of the room are like the waves of a *tempestuous sea*. But who is he, that man of slender form and youthful appearance, the foremost in the struggle? Equal Rights men, your *chief* should be a man of *stalwart* frame; but there is hope, for your cause is good, and the indomitable spirit of equality is in that slender man. ‘Cheers for Ming!’—What! Is that the office-holder? He who is always up with every *rising of the people*? He openly dares the *majesty of monopoly*, even in its temple;—he disregards the tenure of his office, for the elevating principle of Equality of Rights—the honest *war-cry* of ‘opposition to all monopolies’ have aroused the democratic enthusiasm of his heart, and he counts not the cost. It is so!—he is unconsciously, for the occasion, and the time being, *the natural hero of humanity*, striving with all his energy of character to place Joel Curtis in the chair, as the representative of the masses. Unquestionably *this is a contest for empire between man and monopoly*.<sup>48</sup>

The irregulars were quick to make their voices heard. A banner rushed to the top of the eye line, flashing “*Joel Curtis, the Anti-Monopolist chairman*” to the entire assemblage. Radicals shouted down conservative Isaac Varian’s attempts to read the Tammany slate. A new banner punctured the convention sky, declaring “*Anti-Monopolist Democrats are opposed to Gideon Lee, Ringgold, West, and Conner.*” Another ruefully proclaimed “*We go all gold but Ringgold.*” “But behold,” a spellbound Byrdsall recounts, “there is the broadest banner of all, and it is greeted with cheers. It is the whole of the anti-monopoly ticket for Congress and the Legislature, so that all can see and read where none can distinctly hear.” Yet even in the midst of such confusion and upheaval, “heartfelt cheers are given to that banner which declared for Leggett: ‘*The Times must change ere we desert our Post.*’” The hall drowned in the noise of the locofoco multitude and the “Bank Democrats” realized the game was up. Curtis finally gained the chair and was greeted by two new banners: *Don’t adjourn* and *Sustain the chair*. The conservatives escaped through the back staircases, declared the convention closed, without

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 21-23, 24-5. Emphases added.

nominations, and shut off the gas lights, leaving Tammany Hall black as pitch. “It is half-past seven,” Byrdsall recounted, “and the darkness of midnight is in Tammany Hall. Nothing but the *demon spirit of monopoly, in its war upon humanity*, could have been wicked enough to involve such an excited throng in total darkness.”<sup>49</sup>

“*Let there be light, and there is light!*” A host of fire-fly lights are in the room—loco-foco matches are ignited, candles are lit, and they are held up by living and breathing chandeliers:” the radicals lit their second-class convention with second-class illuminants. Byrdsall vividly described the scene: “It is a glorious illumination! There are loud and long plaudits and huzzas, such as Tammany never before echoed from its foundations.” The radicals breathed life and spirit into the movement at the very moment when their cause thrust them irrevocably into the position of outsiders. “Reader,” Byrdsall concludes the narrative, “if this were not a victory over Monopoly, a blow, at least, was struck upon the hydra-headed monster, from which it never recovered.” The crowd adopted the Equal Rights ticket and passed a series of decidedly Leggettian resolutions. They placed support for Leggett and the *Post* alongside liberal class analysis of the banking system, which was “calculated to build up and strengthen in our country the odious distribution of wealth and power against merit and equal rights.” “Every good citizen,” the resolutions romantically demanded, “is bound to war against them.” After adopting the resolutions, the crowd voted to take their meeting and ideas to the streets and the people. “This was accordingly done, and some thousands of the meeting, bearing torches, candles, &c., marched up the Bowery, cheering their democratic fellow-citizens on the way.” The procession concluded at the Military and Civic Hotel, where “after giving nine hearty cheers,” the crowd melted back into quietude.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 26. Emphasis added.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 27-8.

There were no illusions about whether the Democratic Party was now friend or foe. The morning after the rump convention, the radicals were branded “Loco-Focos” by the anti-Jacksonian James Watson Webb and James Gordon Bennett in the *Courier & Enquirer*, a term supposed to be disparaging to the outsiders. The party machinery excoriated and denounced the irregulars in vicious terms evocative of everything voters might find distasteful, regardless of accuracy or decency. The New York *Times*, “the cherished organ of the oldest and wisest of the monopoly Democracy,” especially heaped vituperative upon the leaders of the rebellion. “But this was not all; for it undertook the Herculean task of castigating the whole of the Equal Rights democracy.” Byrdsall recalled the slew of attacks from the *Times*:

“Disorganizers”—“Intruders”—“Revolters”—“Agrarians”—“Working Men’s faction”—“Rowdies”—“Odds and ends of extinct party”—“Eleventh hour Democrats”—“Sweepings and remnants of all recent factions”—“Renegade anti-Masons”—“Pests of party”—“Bad factionists”—“Fanny Wright Men”—“Noisy Brawlers”—“Political nuisances”—“Loco Foco party”—“Carbonari”—“Infidels”—“Pledge spouters”—“Resolution mongers”—“Small fry of small politicians”—“Small lights”—“Fire flies of faction”—“Unclean Birds”—“Jack o’ Lanterns who shine in an unhealthy atmosphere”—“Noisy discontented politicians”—“Scum of politics”—“Knaves”—“Political cheats and swindlers”—“The Guy Fawkes’ of politics”!!!

“Such,” he continues, “was the language of the organ of the aristocracy of the Democracy.”

Only aristocracy, he said, pollutes men’s consciences enough to inspire the hatred levied against early locodom. “He who cherishes the principles of equality, has no ideas to generate such terms of contempt for his fellow-men.”<sup>51</sup>

The “Old Guard” was happy to have the radicals dissociated from the mainstream and carried on business as usual, declaring the original Tammany slate regularly nominated. Tammany attempted to enforce party loyalty, especially amongst officer-holding reformers to whom party connections were important. The regular Democrat ticket was elected in a clean sweep, defeating both Whig and Equal Rights Democrat contenders. A wave of defectors greatly

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 28-34.



diminished locofoco ranks and seemed to spell the end of any significant challenge to Tammany. Despite the defections, however, Charles Ferris' four thousand votes (out of about 22,518 cast) for Congress on the Equal Rights ticket inspired the remaining locos to organize ward meetings and pass resolutions condemning the actions of Tammany Democrats throughout the Fall of 1835. Ferris and the Loco-Focos claimed 16% of the vote and the balance of power between Tammany's 44% and the Whigs' 40%. The leaders of the radical movement debated the expediency of secession, with locos like Leggett opposing separation (on the grounds that it would dilute the anti-Whig vote) and locos like Byrdsall in favor. The final decision, however, was to await the outcome of the December, 1835 Democratic General Committee elections. The elections came; a majority of Monopoly Democrats were elected. Separation was imminent.<sup>52</sup>

On 11 January, 1836, the Equal Rights Democrats resolved that separation should occur, and on 20 January the locos renounced all connections with Tammany and passed resolutions calling for ward meetings and delegate elections to a county convention. The party was divided from the start. John Vethake, Rodney Church, and Alexander Ming, Jr. voted *against* separation, while John Commerford, William F. Piatt, and Fitzwilliam Byrdsall *supported* the move. The County Convention assembled on 9 February, 1836 in the Eighth Ward, but the list of delegates contained "few of the prominent names conspicuous in the original anti-monopoly movement. Only Alex'r. Ming, Jr., Job Haskell, John Windt, and John Commerford." Those muscled out of their radical activism by the Tammany machine were replaced by Moses Jaques, Dr. Stephen Hasbrouck, Alexander Vache, and A.D. Wilson, among many others. Jaques, President of the County Convention and author of the "Declaration of principles," was their leader. He was history embodied. In Byrdsall's wistful phrasing, Jaques was "venerated by the little band of Equal Rights Democrats—as something more than their leader, their patriarch."

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 31; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 207.

Moses' father was a colonel in the New Jersey militia during the Revolution. The elder Jacques so trusted his ten year-old son that he employed the boy to carry military dispatches on horseback to General Washington. Moses became the stuff of legend, "and since then, the whole life of the man morally and politically has been worthy of the patriot boy of the Revolution." "Such is Moses Jacques," Byrdsall continued, "the patriarchal leader of the Loco-Focos, for they never had in fact any other visible leader among them."<sup>53</sup>

### The Developing Philosophy of Locofocoism

Ye scurvy knaves, with one another you shall not lend, you shall not borrow, you shall not promise, you shall not trust, you shall in no wise deal in the thrice holy and mysterious trade of money. With one another, ye servile rout, the counter-changing craft is sacrilege, the traffick in paper promises is TABOO. If you have money, bring the vile dross *to us*. We will ease you of your fullness. But we warn you, let not your needy brother partake your abundance. Make *us* your almoners. Give *us* possession of the beggar's blessing, the supplicant's tribute, and the suitor's fee. If you would promise, promise *us*. We will make you keep your promises. You are not fit to trust each other in that kind. If you are in want, or in straits, or in danger, come to *us*. Pay us salvage, and we will save you. But see that you help not one another. You are weak, and would let down the rate of usance. You are unskillful, and would ruin 'the trade in money.' If you have treasure that you would lay up, deposite it *with us*. With us it will be safe. You yourselves shall hardly tear it from our custody. But confide not your hard earnings with each other. You are base. You are stupid. You are faithless. *We alone are to be trusted*. This is our advice. Such is our command. Obey and you shall be fleeced so gently that you will not know it. Resist, and our strong men shall go into your houses and take forfeiture of your effects, and if you abide in your obstinacy, they shall strip you of all you have, and shall case you out, you and your children, to want and beggary, if so it seems good to one of us, the Noble Order of Moneychangers by Special Patent from the State.

--"The Restraining Law and Its Abominations," New York *Evening Post*, 31 August 1836

At the moment he was perhaps most needed, Leggett's chronic illnesses rendered him bedridden. The duty of speaking with the public voice of locofocoism fell to a genteel Massachusetts lawyer, a close friend of the ailing editor, and later editor of Leggett's political writings. Theodore Sedgwick's editorials guided radicals into the political battles waged by the

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 36-8, 42-3.

activist corps, and his *Evening Post* helped establish a history of locofocoism that did not, in fact, live and die with the Equal Rights Party or even William Leggett. As the new party developed its organization, the *Evening Post* and intellectual allies continued to articulate the philosophy of radical democracy and a distinct historical vision of revolutionary republicanism in perpetual conflict with the forces of Power and consolidation. The subjects of money and banking, corporate charters and other government grants of privilege, Texas annexation, slavery, and shifting political alignments which shaped history itself were especially important.

Theodore Sedgwick took charge of editing the *Post* beginning with a notice in the 6 January, 1836 issue. Sedgwick continued Jackson's (and Leggett's) Bank War throughout 1836 largely by expanding the battle from the national level down to the proliferation of state banking institutions supported in part by conservative Democrats like those who held sway over Tammany Hall. Because "the spirit of freedom is more readily bribed than intimidated," the primary danger Sedgwick saw was that the established method of bank incorporation limited the power of the poor to regulate their own currency. Private power over the public moneys meant that there was "not an article of merchandise, nor any thing else which is bought and sold, whose price cannot, in a great degree, be made to fluctuate at the pleasure or caprice of this monarch institution. It can therefore levy its contributions upon the *free* democracy of this country, more effectually and more resistlessly, than can be done by any Eastern tyrant over a nation of trembling and spirit-broken slaves." Powers granted to private banks enabled wealthy and politically-connected individuals to pervert the money supply and manipulate the value of the currency. The powerful could then corrupt virtually every institution, and "Then a vassal people need give itself no further anxiety about its future concerns. Its food and its livery would be supplied by the hands of a master, whose self interest would prompt to acts of provident

carefulness and kind indulgence. Then might the bands of the faithful expect their reward for the generous sacrifice of every remnant of republican virtue and manly independence, to promote the misrule of an insidious tyrant.”<sup>54</sup>

The *Post*'s invocation of feudal Europe warned that American exceptionalism could be lost to the creeping progress of Power. “These jarring feudal powers,” Sedgwick wrote, “are already beginning to assume a hostile attitude towards each other, will soon render the interposition of the arm of a lord paramount necessary to protect the people from being continually vexed and harassed by their discordant and petty tyranny.” If a virtuous people, jealous of their liberties, did not counter the movements of monopolists and their political enablers, then a slavish people would call for an Executive tyranny to protect them and destroy the aristocracy. The moral hazard of the corporate device was omnipresent, and “these soulless bodies” engineered iniquitous, protective legislation. Sedgwick argued, however, that one’s rights as a citizen were no greater than one’s rights as a moral agent. Corporate charters served to outsource moral and financial responsibility from the powerful and wealthy, using their businesses as scapegoats. The ability to conjure an artificial man to bear the moral and legal responsibilities of powerful private interests, Sedgwick thought, was illegitimate in a republic.<sup>55</sup>

Yet many locofocos did not oppose paper money or credit *per se*, and like Leggett himself, many favored free banking and free coinage. Leave money markets, like virtually all other markets in American commerce, open to free enterprise and free competition, and the very best moneys that best suited the needs of their customers, would win the market test and persist. Sedgwick’s *Post* argued that “Credit is convenient, useful, necessary, in commercial concerns.” Rather than serving to fuel speculative booms, however, the credit industry should have to serve

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<sup>54</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 6 January 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 6 February 1836, 2.

<sup>55</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 17 March 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, “Frauds of the Massachusetts Banks,” 21 March 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 26 March 1836, 2.

actual market demand as “a representative of property,” or savings in the economy. Even the paper that fueled credit booms, however, could be used for valuable market purposes. In a letter to the editor, “The Country” informed readers that while “it is said that paper money is bad for poor people,” “This I deny.” Rather, “. It is good for poor people, if it be *good paper money*, and if it be not rags.” “The Country” challenged readers to consider that dangerous institutions were only rendered necessary by Man’s own corrupt virtue. “If we must have paper money,” the letter stated, “let it be something that a *man puts his hand to*, and then we shall find out whom to trust.” The moral imperfection of Man rendered institutions prone to corruption and the people prone to exploitation under cover of law. The Country proposed to remedy the problem through class formation and mass action: “There is another thing that we can teach the people who work with their hands,” he concluded, “and that is what Adam Smith taught fifty years ago. That is to *combine*, forever to *combine*, to raise their wages as high as they can. That is, as masters, capitalists, lawyers, doctors, &c. are eternally in combination to get their services for as little as they can, so ought they to.” Paper money may be a necessary evil in a world of chartered banks and global markets, but combinations of power from below could regain control over the People’s money and protect its value and usefulness. Sedgwick’s *Post* proposed that Jackson’s Specie Circular be applied generally, such that all government takings were in specie form, and recommended the immediate repeal of all legal tender laws for paper moneys. “When these changes are effected,” Sedgwick concluded, “private banking will be harmless. Gold and silver will constitute the currency proper, and commercial transactions will be facilitated by the only species of paper that ought to be tolerated in any community.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> New York *Evening Post*, “Duty on Coal,” 6 April 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, “The Currency,” 12 April 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, 31 October 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, “Letters on the Repeal of the Restraining Law,” 12 December 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, “I. Free Banking,” and “II. Free Minting,” 6 January 1837, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 14 April 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, 20 April 1836, 2; New York *Evening*

Locos argued that the corporate device allowed private citizens inordinate power over the public trust and threatened to sink the United States from the exceptional course of revolutionary republicanism back into the depths of European feudalism, a consolidated government of aristocrats upon whose very corporate existence the state itself depended. Despite Americans' blustering language about their grand liberties and democracy, "it is a fact—a strange and melancholy fact...[that] we have, without intending it, been industriously, but most improvidently, building up a Monied Oligarchy, which (because it craftily foregoes the titular distinctions) is permitted to enjoy, almost without resistance, the rank, the influence, the social position and even the political ascendancy of the Nobles of European monarchies." Whig paternalists in particular advanced "the vile plea that we are too stupid to protect ourselves from quackery and fraud," and they may have had a point. The lack of virtue in the public allowed, after all, for the slow creep of tyranny. "In this way," therefore, "the Money Power has been silently transferred from the people to an Order—a small but singularly subtle and sagacious Order—raised not by their own merits, but by legislative prodigality, far above the rest of the community, and invested with lucrative and honourable privileges, which we have, in a moment of unworthy fear, ignobly interdicted to ourselves." The *Post* continued the theme, publishing the list of "shall nots" which opens this section, taking the voice of the banking elite dictating to the people how they must not interfere with the special privileges of their betters, the "Order of American Barons," the scions of European feudalism in the once-republic of the United States.<sup>57</sup>

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*Post*, 22 April 1836, 2; *New York Evening Post*, "The Audacity of the Banks," 23 April 1836, 2; *New York Evening Post*, "Bank and State," and [Untitled], 6 May 1836, 2; *New York Evening Post*, 7 May 1836, 2. *New York Evening Post*, 11 May 1836, 2; *New York Evening Post*, [Untitled], 18 May 1836, 2; *New York Evening Post*, [Untitled], 8 June 1836, 2.

<sup>57</sup> *New York Evening Post*, "Separation of Bank and State," 19 July 1836, 2; *New York Evening Post*, [Untitled], 31 August 1836, 2.

Not only the republic, but the course of history itself was at stake for locofocos. Political power forced class alignments and caused the battles which advanced wider change. The process of political incorporation created “a system, the effect of which is to divide the community into two widely distinct classes, the Chartered and the Unchartered, the former the nobles, and the latter the serfs of our commonwealth.” After decades of stray from the principles of the Revolution, locos implored their peers to retake the power instilled in them by God. “Tyranny is old, but older yet is freedom,” the paper expounded with more than a hint of hope. “Monarchies are ancient, orders of nobility are ancient, but more ancient than all monarchical institutions, than all orders of nobility, than all degrees of human precedence, is that natural equality in which men came from the hands of their maker.” Instead of choosing serfdom, the *Post* implored its readers to embrace those principles which had made American republicanism, democracy, and free market capitalism flourish, and the people along with them. “The liberty of the money market, allowed by law, is the only method of mitigating these evils,” Leggett’s successor argued, “Let there be a general competition among capitalists—let every man who pleases discount notes and make loans, and give any other pecuniary facilities, and let him make his own terms with the person accommodated, and we shall be certain that money will bear exactly the price in market which it is worth, and which it ought to command.”<sup>58</sup>

Partial legislation in the granting of corporate status generated several problems the *Post* recognized including that individuals and associations of common people were hobbled “from their incapacity to act as a body corporate,” and they faced distinctly different liabilities than the corporations favored by the state. The *Evening Post* answered that every individual associated with a corporate organization ought to be able to limit personal liability without having to

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<sup>58</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 4 October 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 2 September 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 28 November 1836, 2.

petition the legislature for a special act of incorporation. Sedgwick and Leggett's plan for general incorporation theoretically made every individual a capitalist able to incorporate and limit liabilities. "Every little village in the interior ought to have its association for Mutual Insurance," Sedgwick wrote, "They should have the power to form contracts of this nature without risking more than they severally choose... We ask of our legislators, therefore, the unrestricted power of managing our own private concerns. We are no longer infants—our leading strings are long since laid aside."<sup>59</sup>

Yet, American politicians fancied themselves liberals advancing human wealth and development. Sedgwick noted, however, that

This sort of liberality is not difficult to practice. It is easy to be 'liberal' to favourites; it is easy to be 'liberal' in granting peculiar privileges to wealthy constituents; it is easy to pass bank charters applied for by person who are expected to use their influence in the re-election of members, or who will show their gratitude by more solid rewards... All the absolute governments of Europe are 'liberal' in granting monopolies; 'liberal' in setting one class above their fellow creatures; 'liberal' in giving their favourites an opportunity to amass fortunes at the expense of the rest of the community... Our legislators are busy in building up A PRIVILEGED CHARTERED ORDER... Our democratick legislature are liberal after the manner of that exemplary democrat the Emperour of China.

A letter to the editor from "Anti-Privilege," on 9 January, 1837, surmised that "the people demand the stolen load; the detected culprit unblushingly draws forth a stone," though perhaps class war could be mediated more peacefully through democratic politics than streets running red with the blood of the chartered. The flour riots of February 1837 clearly displayed the potential for violence. Another possibility explored by radical Pennsylvania Democrats, however, better engendered the *Post's* preferred method of affecting change. "In one branch of the Legislature

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<sup>59</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 5 January 1836, 2; [Untitled], 26 March 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 26 April 1836, 2.



of Pennsylvania,” the paper reported on 18 February, “a bill has been passed to incorporate a Literary Society in Carlisle, call the ‘Society of Equal Rights.’”<sup>60</sup>

Beginning largely with Leggett’s conversion to abolitionism and his excommunication from the Democratic Party, the *Post* emerged as a font of sometimes radical, though often conciliatory antislavery sentiment and theory. During Sedgwick’s editorship, he injected a great deal of eighteenth-century liberalism and Massachusetts abolitionism into the paper’s pages and the minds of his readers. When South Carolina Senator Pickens asserted that the Declaration of Independence was historically naïve and that only societies removed from history could endorse Jefferson’s tenets, a letter to the editor provided a thorough critique of the language and class basis of slavery. “Veto,” actually Sedgwick himself, wrote that “This language, too, fit only for a subject of the government of Russia, and which not the most bigoted Tory in England, nor the most servile royalist in France, would dare to use, is coolly uttered in the language of the United States.” Pickens’ main problem according to Sedgwick, should alarm all Americans: “He cannot separate the ideas of labour and slavery; he makes no allowance for the difference of colour, and he deems every political right enjoyed by a white operative, as much a usurpation, as the same prerogative in his blacks would be. He thinks, in short, that the working classes of the free states should never have been *emancipated*.” Southerners’ disregard for republican theory and practice was not contained by race, and their whiteness would ultimately not protect northerners from the planter elites.<sup>61</sup>

Sedgwick and other northerners jealously guarded what liberties had been wrung from the tyrants of Europe and wanted no part of southern life. Yet, “There is a sort of hypochondriac disease prevailing at the south, particularly among a certain class of politicians,” Sedgwick wrote

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.; New York *Evening Post*, “The Chartered and the Unchartered,” 9 January 1837, 2; New York *Evening Post*, “Equal Rights,” 18 February 1837, 2.

<sup>61</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 13 February 1837, 2.

some months later, “These people appear to think of nothing, see nothing, and hear nothing but abolitionism. Van Buren is in their eyes the Great Abolitionist of the North, who wants to be President merely to take away their negroes by an act of Congress.” The police society of southern slavery corrupted planters’ minds and made them suspicious of all men who enjoyed liberty of conscience, thought, and the press. “They imagine all the people of the northern states to be looking upon their happy condition as the Tempter looked upon our first parents in Paradise,” he continued, “with jealous leer malign, envying the good fortune of the coloured race, under the patriarchal sway of their masters, and only watching for an opportunity to disturb and lay waste a scene of such perfect felicity.” They looked upon “Every travelling Yankee...with doubt and suspicion as a possible emissary of these plotters of mischief,” so much so that the Richmond *Whig* contended that the rise of beet sugar was a great abolition plot. This level of suspicion, Sedgwick believed, had no place in a free society.<sup>62</sup>

When southerners and their northern allies implemented the congressional Gag Rule in 1836, the *Post* declared against any and all compromises: “If the tyrant doctrines and measures of Mr. Calhoun can be carried into effect, there is an end of liberty in this country.” Championing Adams’ war on the Gag Rule, the *Post* argued that southerners’ “fierce, arrogant and almost ruffianly denial of all liberty of action on the contested subject” betrayed northerners who have “for years...been disposed to retain the good will of their southern brethren, by every concession on the subject of slavery.” *Evening Post* readers, however, were far from united against slavery. Responding to a recent speech by William Ellery Channing, “Plain Speech” wrote a letter to the editor with the purpose of reminding readers that “We have no slaves to liberate. The sin, if sin it be, does not pollute our soil.” The editorship, however, continued the assault on southern principles and planter impositions on northern liberties. The paper foresaw

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<sup>62</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 6 July 1836, 2.

that Van Buren would be plagued for years by the political divisions sparked by planter power, and “The game which our old adversaries the nullifiers are playing, appears to be to make use of every opportunity to inflame this local jealousy.”<sup>63</sup>

The proposed annexation of Texas sparked the most important debate over slavery that engaged the attentions of the New York radicals during the important year 1836. Sedgwick began his commentaries on the Texan Revolution by noting the important role freedmen could play in repelling Mexican armies. Texans’ most significant move toward independence could be “to enfranchise their slaves, make them their friends, and put arms into the hands of those who are willing to defend the new republic. It will be next to impossible for the settlers to think of effecting the independence of Texas, and yet retain their slaves.” That is, unless offered significant help from Americans and their slaveholders’ government. Sedgwick favored Jackson and Van Buren’s policy of rejecting annexation until Mexico and Texas resolved their differences, as premature annexation would virtually necessitate war and tarnish the American reputation. He thought immediate annexationists were poised to seize a vast amount of slave territory and bolster the Slave Power in the national government. It was, in effect, a moment with the potential to swiftly and significantly shift political and economic power between the planter class and the northern workingman. A letter to the editor by “Publius” implored readers, “*What do we want with Texas!* We have already millions of acres of uncultivated land, within our own boundaries, of as good quality, perhaps, as any in Texas; the settlement of which would require centuries, if we allow things to take their natural course.” The only possible reason to acquire Texas, Publius thought, was to fuel speculative bubbles enriching the few at the expense

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<sup>63</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 21 April 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 3 December 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 3 February 1837, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 13 February 1837, 2.

of the many, and he concluded that the American republic should remain small and concentrated. Extensions of American power could only corrupt her virtue and corrode her free institutions.<sup>64</sup>

The *Post*, in addition to opposing the institution of slavery, its spread in the territories, and the political demands of southerners on northern liberties, championed equal rights for African Americans throughout the North. “Wickliffe,” author of a 17 March letter to the editor, introduced to readers a story about the New York state legislature withdrawing funds from the black missionary school, the Oneida Institute. Fiery abolitionist Finneyites administered the Oneida Institute, and the legislature proposed defunding the institution because it incubated a radicalism dangerous to pacific relations between the sections and disruptive of normal politics. Wickliffe used the opportunity to publicize the dangers of public educational institutions. “The friends of equal rights,” he wrote, “have never argued any thing but evil from that union of School and State, which has grown up almost imperceptibly among us, and which unthinking thousands now stand ready to applaud; but little was it thought that the bitter fruit would ripen so soon after the tree had taken root.” He found that under such a union, politicians became the guardians of both morality and thought, an extremely dangerous situation for republican citizens. “And by what standards” are the Oneida and other school managers “to be tried,” he asked rhetorically, “Is the treason to consist in preaching against the sale of political indulgences? Or in speaking evil of the Holy Order of Corporations?...Or is the literary fund to be withheld from all who will not abut their lips and steel their hearts as the Juggernaut of Slavery rolls by?” His conclusion wondered, “Is compassion for the bound the unpardonable offence?”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 27 April 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 11 May 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 24 May 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 17 June 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 18 June 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, “Annexation of Texas to the United States,” 29 December 1836, 2.

<sup>65</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 17 March 1836, 2.

The *Post* continued its radical challenge to race relations even after Leggett's dismissal, championing black suffrage and undermining the concept of race. On 7 February, 1837, six days before the flour riot, an editorial advanced a significant challenge to restrictions on black voting and the theories of race so popular in the North:

If the ownership of a freehold estate gives a man a greater interest in his own happiness or makes him a better judge of what is [best for his] community, why not require that every white voter shall possess that qualification? If, on the other hand, the capacity for self-government depends on the colour, why not exclude the African race altogether? Why allow a black man of the full blood, with his two hundred and fifty dollars, to vote, while you exclude the man who is three-quarters white, and who, according to your theory of colour, must be three times as capable of voting intelligently as the full-blooded African? The law, as it now stands, is pregnant with absurdities.<sup>66</sup>

Following Leggett's lead, the *Evening Post* did not politically align itself with the Loco-Foco Party, though it continued to advertise their meetings and encourage readers to push Tammany to nominate loco-friendly candidates. Tammany politicians continued to assert claims to the liberal tradition of Jefferson and Jackson, courting the loco vote. Leggett and Sedgwick's *Post* attempted to navigate a path to positive change between ideological purity and party politicking. Tyranny, he argued, "consists in the multiplication of needless restraints," including those so long supported by Tammany Democrats in the state legislature. Lest remaining liberties be "swallowed up in the same insatiable vortex," articles like that written by "A 'HUGE PAW'" advocated locofoco combination to resist state tyranny and reverse the trend toward neofeudalism in American politics. "If the mechanicks wish to carry out their principles," he argued, "let them unite and 'COMBINE' to elect men to office who are in favour of *Equal Rights*. They have only to say the will do it, and they can do it. Let them rally around the LOCO FOCO flag—that name which the aristocracy have given us in derision, just as the British christened us 'Yankee Doodles.'" The *Post* advertised an upcoming Equal Rights Party July

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<sup>66</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 7 February 1837, 2.

Fourth celebration in Vauxhall Garden, urging readers to take advantage of the free admission and make their voices heard by conservative Democrats. The paper even devoted pages to publishing letters exchanged between loco candidates and the party corresponding committee alongside its regular listings for Tammany meetings.<sup>67</sup>

Though Tammany refused to nominate radical candidates, the more hopeful of locofocos strongly believed that voting was the secret to restoring the people's rights, though it was never seen as the main vehicle for building a movement or creating historical change. "Whoever neglects to exercise the right of suffrage, takes a first step towards a surrender of the government into the hands of a few," a pre-election editorial asserted, and if the non-voter's "example were to be generally followed the country would be ruled, in effect, by an oligarchy." The *Post* blamed Tammany's shadowy nominating process for Democratic losses and pointed out that Whig victories resulted *only* from fusion nominations with Loco-Foco and nativist candidates.<sup>68</sup>

The *Post* maintained intellectual connections between the various branches of the locofoco community and maintained hope in reforming Tammany despite constant setbacks and rather few victories. In July, 1836, Whigs and conservative Democrats labelled the Boston *Reformer* a locofoco paper, a connection from which the editor promptly fled. Sedgwick addressed the issue by clearly defining his terms and sketching the intellectual, if not political,

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<sup>67</sup> New York *Evening Post*, "The Meeting at Tammany Hall," 25 April 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 21 June 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, "LOCO FOCO CELEBRATION," 30 June 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 19 July 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 20 July 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 22 July 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, "ANTI-MONOPOLY DEMOCRATICK MEETING," 29 July 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, "The Party Friendly to Equal Rights," 4 August 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 5 August 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 11 August 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 13 August 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, "DEMOCRATICK MEETING," 5 September 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 29 October 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 2 November 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, "Equal Rights Party Proceedings," 28 November 1836, 2.

<sup>68</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 5 November 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 11 November 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 15 November 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 22 November 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 20 December 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 23 December 1836, 2.

boundaries of his movement: “It is the fashion here to give the name of ‘loco foco’ to all persons who have separated their political creed from all leaven of aristocracy...A loco foco [is] the advocate of the simplest and most equal form of government, the enemy of exclusive privileges, and unnecessary legislation—in short the very character which the Boston Reformer, and we believe justly, claims to itself.” From the moment conservatives like Webb and Bennett attached the label “locofoco” to the radicals, the word was used as a broad smear for one’s opponents for decades. Whenever conservatives like those who produced the *Albany Argus* were scared of locofoco advances, they strove “to frighten the community by describing the length of the horns, and tail, and claws of its monster.” “Seneca” authored a letter to the editor in August, 1836 arguing that historians would see through the attacks and recognize that while in 1835, “the little Loco foco party of New York were much abused, slandered and ridiculed by the Tammany and Whig organs,” by 1836, “the growing party were much wooed and complimented by the Tammany and whig parties.” By 1841, he prognosticated, “the great Loco foco democratick party of the Union elected Thomas H. Benton president of the United States and a Loco foco legislature at Albany were busily engaged in reforming the abuses of legislation of thirty years detestable misrule of the Tammany and Regency faction.” Similar expressions clouded the *Post*’s editorial columns. The “Dupes of Hope Forever,” indeed.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 26 July 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 10 August 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, [Untitled], 12 August 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, “THE CONTRAST! OR THE LOCO FOCOS IN 1835 AND 1836,” 16 August 1836, 2; New York *Evening Post*, “The Whigs and the Loco Focos,” 20 August 1836, 2.

## Chapter 2

### **'Loco-Romanticism' & Young America: Locofocoism, the Equal Rights Party, and Revolutionary Republicanism in the Canadian Rebellions**

“In one of the British Islands, there is a long bay of several miles in width, which is much frequented by sea birds. It is said that the fox in that part of the world envelopes his head in a coiffure of sea foam, which he finds along the shore, and thus disguised he swims out into the bay to get amongst the sea birds, in order to prey upon them; but that sometimes a sudden burst of wind or water deprives him of his head-dress, and exposes Mr. Reynard to the great surprise and disturbance of the feathered community. In like manner, a number of political foxes of like views, had long mingled themselves with the Democratic party, and preyed upon it for very many years, but at length the President’s message of the Special Session discomposed the disguises of these foxy democrats, and exposed them in their true nature of selfishness to the world at large. But they had become so strong, by having perverted, with the spoils of monopoly, many men who were, in early years, true Jeffersonian Democrats, that they were now able to form a part of what Mr. Leggett called the triangular contest.”

--Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, *History of the Equal Rights, or “Loco-Foco” Party*

#### Locofocoism, the ‘Patriots,’ and “Young America”

Abram D. Smith is a forgotten figure in American history, and his barely existent legacy today is a testament to the profound lack of the history of the locofoco movement. In many ways the average American. Smith was born in 1811, just before the post-war boom years of rapid social and economic change, to a family so average that literally nothing further is known about them, in upstate New York (either Cambridge or Lowville, and though they are on opposite sides of Blue Mountain in the Adirondacks, we cannot know which). He was likely raised a Congregationalist with antinomian leanings. As a young man, he experienced and contributed to a wave of nationalistic romanticism, enraptured with the wonders of American republicanism and democracy. He was in all these regards fairly unremarkable, and yet in September 1838, in an Ohio forest, surrounded by blazing torchlight, a circle of revolutionary, filibustering



conspirators elected Abram D. Smith President of the Republic of Canada.<sup>70</sup> Politically, Smith was a locofoco, one of the New York City group's upstate supporters, though then as now, no one seems to have noticed him. Abram's life, ideas, and deeds contributed to a fluid series of movements including revolutionary filibustering in Canada, the concept of Manifest Destiny and antislavery Democrats' initial support for territorial expansion, the Free Soil movement in the Democratic North, and the ex-Democrat contingent of the Republican Party. Smith's biography and his romantic, locofoco love affair with republican life in America stitch together a long series of important moments in history, connected through the previously unstudied locofoco movement. He, and many others, took the ideas of Leggett, Sedgwick, Bryant, a young Walter Whitman, the painter Thomas Cole, and a host of other intellectuals and artists from New York City, and spread locofocoism throughout the country.<sup>71</sup>

Historians of American imperialism have long noted the importance and impact of the Young America movement, in which a rising generation of artists, intellectuals, reformers, and political thinkers, embraced the concept of "Manifest Destiny," or simply those whose work praised or contributed to a romantic, often nationalistic American culture. Though their styles, interpretations, and party affiliations were often different from one another, the Young Americans of New York City began their creation of an authentically American national culture

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<sup>70</sup> Ruth Carolyne Dunley, "A.D. Smith: Knight-errant of Radical Democracy," (PhD Diss.: University of Ottawa, 2008), pgs. 2-3, 33-40. We know so little about Smith simply because there is so little evidence of his existence. Dunley's dissertation is the only major work investigating Smith and his part in some of the key moments and movements in antebellum and Civil War era America.

<sup>71</sup> James Callow, *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press), 1967; Earle, *Democratic Antislavery*, 18; John Bigelow, *William Cullen Bryant*, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers), 1980 (Original Printing: 1890); David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*, (New York: Knopf), 1996; Marshall Tymn, *Thomas Cole's Poetry: The Collected Poems of America's Foremost Painter of the Hudson River Schools Reflecting His Feelings for Nature and the Romantic Spirit of the Nineteenth Century*, (York, PA: Liberty Cap Books), 15-24; Truettner & Wallach, eds. *Thomas Cole: Landscape into History*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1994; Robert Shalhope, "The Radicalism of Thomas Dorr," *Reviews in American History* 2, No. 3 (Sep. 1974): 383-389.

by consistently expressing the romantic elements of American life. The most hopeful of locofoco-oriented Young Americans argued for the territorial expansion of free, republican government with its blessings, and locofoco democratic publishers like John L. O'Sullivan embraced a romantic vision of America's "Manifest Destiny" to expand the reach of republican institutions across the globe.<sup>72</sup> These most hopeful of locofocos, those who retained an abiding faith in the morality and efficacy of democracy, believed so strongly that they supported violent efforts to extend republican government, often arguing that long-term benefits would outweigh any immediate costs. Locofocos and American political culture quickly and easily coupled this missionary mentality with hefty doses of racism, nationalism, and opportunism. The dominant historical narrative of Manifest Destiny and the movement for territorial expansion, however, has concentrated entirely on mainline Democrats' warhawk racism and Anglo-Saxonism. The Loco-Foco political movement and its intellectual connections to the Young America ideologues and activists, however, provide historians with a terribly overlooked source of support for territorial expansion. The classic, "Anglo-Saxonist" interpretation of Manifest Destiny has buried the

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<sup>72</sup> For treatments of "Manifest Destiny," see: Robert May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002; Michael Morrison, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997; Anders Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny: American Expansionism and the Empire of Right*, New York: Hill & Wang, 1994; Reginald Stuart, *United States Expansionism and British North America, 1775-1871*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation*, (New York: Knopf, 1963); Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920, Vols. 1-3*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1958; Robert Scholnick, "Extermination and Democracy: O'Sullivan, the *Democratic Review*, and *Empire*, 1837-1840," *American Periodicals* 15, No. 2 (2005): 123-141. For the intersection of the "Young America" and Loco-Foco movements, see: Edward Widmer, *Young America: The Flowering of Democracy in New York City*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Andrew Lawson, "'Song of Myself' and the Class Struggle in Language," *Textual Practice* 18, No. 3 (2004): 377-394; Charlene Avallone, "Catharine Sedgwick and the Circles of New York," *Legacy* 23, No. 2 (2006): 115-131; 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 (Summer 2010): 253-278.

liberal-republican, locofoco origins of Young America expansionism and the activist activities that spread their romantic sense of historical mission throughout the electorate.

Historian Edward Widmer produced the most significant revision of the racial interpretation of Manifest Destiny, separating Young America into two distinct movements with only loose bonds connecting them. Young America I was composed of artists, intellectuals, activists, and reformers many of whom were inspired by and active participants in the Loco-Foco movement. They derived their social and political philosophies from the great classical liberals, radicals like Thomas Paine and William Leggett (of equal stature and importance in the minds of most Young Americans), and they united behind an almost mystical faith in America's destiny in world history. Locofocoism provided cast and character to Young America I (Widmer's phase) and provided the intellectual and moral basis for the concept of Manifest Destiny. The ranks of Loco-Foco Young Americans and Young Americans importantly affected by locofocoism included writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, John L. O'Sullivan (who coined the term "Manifest Destiny"), Walt Whitman, William Cullen Bryant, publisher and *literati* Evert Duyckinck and his "Tetractys" group, William Gilmore Simms, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Park Godwin, Corenelius Matthews, John Greenleaf Whittier, James Russel Lowell, and John Bigelow; the painters William Sidney Mount, Thomas Cole (philosophically closer to the Whigs in his skepticism of democracy, but a close friend of Bryant and someone from whom the locos in fact learned), Asher Durand, Francis Edmonds, and F. O. C. Darley; the scholars and thinkers David Dudley Field, Orestes Brownson (for a short time), Theodore Sedgwick II and Theodore Sedgwick III, and William Allen Butler, the lawyer and political satirist; the publishers J. & H. G. Langley; activists and politicians like Gansevoort Melville, Churchill C. Cambreleng, Silas Wright, Fernando Wood, Franklin Peirce, Hannibal Hamlin, Samuel Tilden, Thomas

Wilson Dorr, and too many more minor figures to list here. This massive and influential cohort of locofoco-influenced figures, with John L. O'Sullivan's *Democratic Review* leading the charge, produced a national culture distinct from European antecedents. They were by no means all locofocos, much less members of the Equal Rights Party, but the Loco-Foco and Young America movements developed in tandem, each deeply affecting and influencing the other.<sup>73</sup>

Historians' interests in the Loco-Foco Movement virtually disappear with the "collapse" of the Equal Rights Party, ignoring the remainder of the locos' lives in the process. Walter Hugins, for example, limited his investigation of the Loco-Foco phenomenon to asking the question, "Were the Locofocos—and the Workingmen's parties which preceded them—a 'nascent proletarian party'? Was this movement in any sense anticapitalist, a 'conscious class alignment between capital and labor'?" and "Were the Workingmen, in short, representatives of a self-conscious working class, organized politically for radical economic and social ends?"<sup>74</sup> Hugins' otherwise excellent 1960 social history of the New York Workingmen's Party included extended commentary on the locofocos, including an entire chapter addressing "The Workingmen as Locofocos." By 1835-6, Hugins wrote, "the Locofocos emerged as a reincarnation of the Workingmen's Party." The locofocos were mere extensions of the Democratic Workingmen and his narrative naturally concludes with the political history of the Loco-Foco Party. Locofocoism has, therefore, occupied the historiographical space Trimble,

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<sup>73</sup> Widmer, *Young America*. This is not in the least an exhaustive list, and indeed there are many intellectuals addressed within these pages that Widmer does not consider. A cohesive study of loco-Young America would assuredly include historians like Catharine Williams and Frances Greene. Many other studies have investigated the intellectual connections between Young American artists. See also: Peter Bellis, *Writing Revolution: Aesthetics and Politics in Hawthorne, Whitman, and Thoreau*, (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press), 2003; Charlene Avallone, "Catharine Sedgwick and the Circles of New York," *Legacy* 23, No. 2 (2006): 115-131; Charles H. Brown, *William Cullen Bryant*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons), 1971; Linda Ferber, ed. *Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape*, (New York: Brooklyn Museum), 2007; Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.), 1956; Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*, (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press), 1990.

<sup>74</sup> Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 81.

Schlesinger, Hofstadter, Dorfman, and others have prepared for it: it becomes an important phase in the growth of the labor movement or the Jacksonian Democrats, but remains a mere phase of something larger than itself. Historians have left the story of locofocoism dead after a single attempt at political activism.<sup>75</sup>

This chapter proposes to correct this wrong by uniting the political history of the Equal Rights Party with the intellectual and cultural history of the locofoco movement, providing the basis for a dramatically explosive and expansive Loco-Foco and Young American coalition of radical, revolutionary republicans. With the movements of young professionals and activists like Abram D. Smith, locofocoism stretched geographically across the Canada-US border, from the clam baking political fairgrounds of New England to the fiery Free Soil territories of the Old Northwest, and reached temporally from the late 1820s to the 1870s defections of many Republican locofocos back to the Democratic Party of Samuel Tilden. Hugins concurs with Bray Hammond that radical Jacksonians like the loco-Young Americans ushered in the “age of triumphant exploitation,” with their democratic methods of protecting the equal rights of the people. In Hammond’s words, the Workingmen and Locofocos “put forth the promise that anyone could be a capitalist, an investor, or a speculator,” and indeed a revolutionary hero. The importance of locofocoism was not limited to mere political gains or machinations, and “cannot be measured by election returns.” “Of greater significance,” Hugins argued, “was its leavening influence upon the New York Democracy, modifying both the personnel and the program of the Tammany party. Its impact upon politics in the Empire State was echoed by political

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 36-48. See also: David Brown, *Richard Hofstadter: An Intellectual Biography*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 2006;

developments elsewhere, and by the 1840's the Locofoco strain had come to permeate the national party organization."<sup>76</sup>

*Locofocoism*, therefore, greatly outlived the Equal Rights Party and continued to birth and shape other social, political, and intellectual movements over the decades. Historians' treatments of locofocos have prized their political activism without according their movement a life beyond mere politics. The result has been the virtual erasure of an entire movement in nineteenth-century American history. Walt Whitman, himself a Leggettian locofoco and Democrat-turned-Republican, once declared that the era we now comfortably assign to Jackson in fact belonged to William Leggett.<sup>77</sup> The "Age of Democracy," I would like to suggest, could almost as well be known as the "Age of Locofocoism."

#### Equal Rights Ascendant: The Rise & Fall of an Independent Loco-Foco Party

Throughout the Winter of 1835-6, the newly-minted Equal Rights Party quickly set about establishing a party structure, including the election of officers, a finance committee, and a party constitution. Moses Jaques, the boy-hero of the Revolution, was elected Treasurer and would retain that office until his departure from New York City in 1837. Fitzwilliam Byrdsall was then chosen as the party's Recording Secretary until new elections on 5 June, 1837, when he declined to be a candidate. Party meetings proceeded in egalitarian fashion, with each man in attendance given an equal opportunity to express his views without prejudice. "Hence," Byrdsall recalled, "there was no such thing as attempting to put a man down at a Loco-Foco meeting, for each auditor felt that the rights of the speaker and his own rights, as well as political position, were the same, and exactly equal; and as each man knew that his rights were regarded as sacred, that he

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 202-3.

<sup>77</sup> Welter, *The Mind of America: 1820-1860*, 10.

would be listened to by all.” Freedom of expression and democratic organization became the great idols of the Equal Rights organization to the extent of religiosity. Advocates like Byrdsall drew direct comparisons to the trials of early Christians, writing “The Founder of Christianity was born in a manger; and it is perfectly in character that the principles of christian democracy should be proclaimed in such humble places as the Military and Civic Hotel.” Locofocoism, like Christianity, was a moral and spiritual movement more so even than an attempt at affecting political change: “But the principles taught by Him who associated with publicans and sinners, and which were advocated by the Loco Focos, are the same, and they are eternal.”<sup>78</sup>

Preparing for the upcoming local elections of 1836, the Equal Rights Party eagerly sought high profile nominations. Locos selected William Leggett for the mayoralty, though his ill health and management of the *Evening Post* prompted him to decline. Alexander Ming, Jr. was nominated in Leggett’s stead. The Loco-Foco slate ultimately divided the City Council between Whigs and Democrats, with eight members from each party. The radicals felt quite comfortable in their growing power and influence in city politics, and believed that “The Loco-Foco movement...[wounded] the official and political organization which sustained the system in the city.” Tammany and its supporters remained intractable opponents of the locos, however, leading Byrdsall to conclude that “They had to *feel* before they would believe...Such was the dim sighted democracy of these ‘dimmycrats.’” The Tammany press condemned the radicals as “enemies of the laws of God and man,” “destructive Agrarians, seeking an equal division of property.” Nothing contained in expressions of loco philosophy, however, bore out such claims. Locos allied themselves with the new General Trades Union, led by John Commerford, who rose to prominence with his defense of Geneva shoemakers recently charged under anti-conspiracy laws for demanding higher prices for their goods. This moment of reunion between the

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<sup>78</sup> Byrdsall, *The History of the Loco-Foco Party*, 43-6.

Workingmen and their new Loco-Foco allies in city politics prompted the call for state convention in Utica, held on 16 May, 1836. John Commerford himself joined established locofoco leaders like Alexander Vache, Moses Jaques, Alexander Ming, Jr., Levi Slamm, and Fitzwilliam Byrdsall on the convention floor. The meeting passed resolutions requiring all delegates to sign the party's declaration of principles and appointing a search committee to scout suitable presidential and vice presidential candidates. After more than a month and sixteen meetings, the County Convention concluded its business and the presidential search committee promptly sent letters to Richard M. Johnson and Martin Van Buren, whose response provoked a great deal of skepticism. Byrdsall's minority report vouched for Johnson, whom he deemed "in full accordance with our Declaration of Principles...a true patriot and honest man." Though Byrdsall judged Van Buren's reply as equivocating and obfuscating, the search committee prepared to submit to the will of the convention voters.<sup>79</sup>

The Declaration of Principles itself was a thorough expression of radical republicanism tempered by the constraints of democratic politicking. They claimed the mantle of Thomas Jefferson and began their list of principles with the belief that "The true foundation of Republican Government is the *equal rights* of every citizen, in his person and property, and in their management." The Declaration of Principles delivered a rendition of Leggett's political philosophy which concluded by denying the legitimacy of "all laws or acts of incorporation" which were deemed insulated from further legislative interference. The document demanded a radically inactive and eternally-changing state apparatus with no sovereignty or existence distinct from that of the people, and the Equal Rights Party demanded that its candidates approve the Declaration. Richard M. Johnson endorsed it and discussed his own politics at length. Van Buren's letter somewhat tersely referred the locos to "a public course of no inconsiderable

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 50-6.



duration...and to a succession of public declarations heretofore made.” He intimated that he would have more to say on the matters of money and banking, but eager listeners would have to wait to hear them discussed any further. Van Buren’s equivocation prompted the purist wing of the party to insist on a Johnson-Van Buren ticket. Ultimately the party decided to nominate *no one* for either office, and that “each member be left to make his own choice.”<sup>80</sup>

When the locofoco penny papers the *Democrat* and the *Union* failed for lack of advertising revenue in the Summer of 1836, Loco activists turned their energies to the upcoming state convention at Utica, begun on 15 September. Ninety-three delegates from throughout the state gathered at “the handsome little Court House of that handsome city having been freely offered for the use of the Convention,” and began the proceedings by electing convention officers. The already widespread geography of locofocoism showed in the selection of officers, which included Robert Townsend Jr. from New York, John Colkins and J. C. McCully from Genesee, one E. Dorchester from Oneida, and W. C. Foster from Monroe. The convention unanimously adopted a resolution to officially establish a separate party organization, the Equal Rights Party, and passed a “Declaration of Rights” strikingly similar to the previous Declaration of Principles. Isaac S. Smith of Erie County was selected the gubernatorial candidate and Robert Townsend, Jr. was chosen to run for Lieutenant-Governor. The convention represented the time-honored combination of Evansite Workingmen and Leggettian Loco-Focos, together under the banner of Equal Rights, joined in a “War on Monopoly.”<sup>81</sup>

Smith, “a man of well known respectability and intelligence,” was raised in antinomian fashion by Quaker parents and became ostracized from his religious community because “At a hotel or boarding house where he resided, he opposed the ceremonial practice of saying grace, at

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 57-61.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 65-70; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 41-42.

meal times, and this so exasperated the christian meekness of the divine who said grace...that a prosecution was commenced.” Robert Townsend’s birth and class also shaped much of the man. A self-proclaimed working man, Townsend was the son of “a confiding girl,” who was “deceived by a gentleman of high respectability,” and Townsend was born out of wedlock. “While the world’s law stigmatized him, nullius fillius, the son of a nobody, and outcast,” the prevailing social and political orders failed to prevent his father from becoming a State Senator. The father who abandoned Townsend “lost not his caste in society, notwithstanding his real guilt, and the shame and misery his heartless conduct inflicted.” The scarlet letter of his father’s actions plagued Townsend throughout his life and he came to think of society as both his liberator and his great oppressor. He used the pain accrued through a lifetime of ostracism to fuel his passionate politics and activism. Though “there was only hard toil for him, with no kindred genial associations of the past, or present, and no bright prospect of any kind in the future, to cheer that toil; and he became hopeless—dispirited,” Townsend persevered and made a way for himself through apprenticeship. His testimony and tribulations “produced deep sensations and tears amongst his auditors.” Despite his impact on the convention, he declined the nomination and Moses Jaques became the candidate for Lieutenant-Governor.<sup>82</sup>

The Utica convention sat for three days, and Byrdsall claimed that “A body of more intelligent men rarely if ever met.” The atmosphere of the courthouse rippled with a spirit hopeful for the cause of reform and even in the ability of the Equal Rights Party to transform Tammany Hall. Speeches like that by Moses Jaques presented a thoroughgoing radical liberal critique of the corporate state and a vision of America’s virtually stateless republican destiny. “There are two opinions abroad in the world,” Jaques wrote, “The theory of the one party is, that man, by reason of his ignorance, and of his corrupt nature, is not capable of self-government; it is

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 69-71.

therefore necessary that he should be restrained by force...The other theory...is that man is a rational and moral being...That by nature he is also a social being, and that on entering into society he does not give up any of his natural rights.” The address continued, offering a classical liberal view of social conflict: “Of one fact this Convention is convinced, and that is, That most if not all the wrongs and evils, if not the crimes, in society, proceed from bad legislation, the injustice of courts of law, and the licentious and evil example of rulers.” Unjust departures from Natural Law on the parts of politicians, judges, and the corporate creatures of legislatures were thus responsible for the great bulk of human suffering and the slow pace of social and economic progress. Steadily eliminate the massive edifice of national and state impositions against the rights of the people, and peace and progress would be the rewards. “In a Republic,” Jaques began his concluding remarks, “but few laws are necessary, and those few plain, simple, and easy of comprehension.” Jaques’ locofocoism demanded a virtually stateless society in which the state possessed no corporate existence distinct from individuals, each of whom bore their own responsibilities as moral agents and enjoyed inherent and universally equal natural rights. Such a state could not accumulate power of its own or pose a threat to democratic society.<sup>83</sup>

Upon closing, the convention published its proceedings and Loco-Focos mobilized for the upcoming elections. An advertisement from the Equal Rights Party in the *Ithaca Herald* stated that “The Mechanics, Workingmen, and all opposed to Monopolies, and who are in favor of Equal Rights, Equal Laws, Equal Justice, are requested to meet at the Tompkins House, this (Wednesday) evening at half past six o’clock to discuss measures of importance relative to their interests.” A subsequent meeting in Tompkins on 22 October resolved “That we cordially approve of the doctrine of Equal Rights, as laid down at the Convention of Mechanics, Farmers and Workingmen, held at Utica on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of September, 1836, and that we will

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* 71-77.

use all honourable means to sustain and establish the same.” The meeting then seconded the Loco-Foco, Smith-Jaques ticket in the gubernatorial contest. Democrats in New York City responded similarly.<sup>84</sup>

Party activities continued throughout 1836, and the larger events like that on 4 November at the Military and Civic Hotel were social gatherings and sources of intellectual entertainment as much as they were attempts to elect candidates. That evening, speeches by labor leader John Commerford, Levi Slamm, and the various candidates invoked the ideas of Paine, Jefferson, and Leggett while claiming the legacy of the Revolution. Edward Curtis “spoke of Revolutionary reminiscences in his own paternal home. Of his father, a blacksmith, and a patriot of the Revolution.” Curtis assured his constituents-to-be that he would never betray their cause and “If he ever did, might his right arm be withered!” Greeted with applause, he concluded that though some call him a Whig, he positively self-identified as an Equal Rights Democrat. For locofocos, Curtis’ apparent ideology counted for far more than his likely party affiliation. In fact, a host of Equal Rights candidates were jointly nominated by the Whigs.<sup>85</sup>

The general election bore mixed fruits for the locofoco coalition, a broad swathe of ideologically-united activists and voters affiliated with the Loco-Foco Party, the holdouts like Leggett and the *Post* who continued to support Democratic candidates, and the increasingly-important contingent of anti-Jackson Whigs. Edward Curtis was elected to Congress largely by virtue of his three partisan affiliations, as were Eli Moore and C. C. Cambreleng, both nominated by Tammany as well. Tallmadge was chosen State Senator by the Locos, the Whigs, and the Native Americans, Townsend and Roosevelt were elected to the State Assembly, James Gulick enjoyed support from all parties and easily sailed into the office of County Register, Isaac Smith

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<sup>84</sup> Ithaca *Herald*, “Equal Rights,” 12 October 1836, 3; [Untitled] 26 October 1836, 3; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 41-43.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 92-4.

received 3,496 votes for governor (1,400 of which came from New York City), and Moses Jaques gained 3,532 votes for lieutenant-governor (over 1,400 of which came from New York City). Though both Smith and Jaques were resoundingly defeated, Tammany won only six out of thirteen slots in the City Council (the remaining seven positions claimed by Whigs and Americans, usually in concert), evidence to the radicals that locofocos controlled the balance of power. The party presses increased hostility toward the disorganizers.<sup>86</sup>

The locofoco self-image gradually became that of the ever-vigilant band of radicals fighting against all the powers of partisan establishments, reinforced by political successes both actual and perceived. True to Leggett's youthful prognostications, the Equal Rights Party locofocos proved "The Dupes of Hope" in case after case. Edward Curtis, the newly-minted United States Congressman affiliated with the Loco-Foco Party, the Whigs, and the Native Americans, quickly endorsed establishing a new National Bank "to the amazement of the Loco-Focos, and satisfaction of the Whigs." He was reelected in 1838 and 1840, "by fair means or foul," and was appointed Collector of the Port of New York by William Henry Harrison only to be later removed by John Tyler. Ogden Hoffman "voted like a genuine Whig in Congress," and was appointed U.S. District Attorney for the New York Southern District in 1841. Frederick Tallmadge "went to the State Senate and served his term of years, much to the satisfaction of the Whigs, and but little to the satisfaction of the Loco-Focos." Eli Moore and C. C. Cambreleng were truest to the Declaration of Principles. Moore failed his bid for reelection in 1838 but was appointed by Van Buren to be the Surveyor of the Port of New York until removed from office by Harrison. Cambreleng was "decidedly the ablest member of Congress from this city during very many years," and his success emanated from his attention to the will of his constituents. He later served as Van Buren's minister to Russia, attended the 1848 Baltimore Convention as a

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. 94-5. For the full election information, see Appendix Table 5; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 207.

Barnburning Van Buren delegate, joined the Free Soil secession that year, and participated in the reunion of New York Democrats behind Pierce in 1852. Assemblyman Robert Townsend, Jr. “went to the House of Assembly...from the work-bench; and he who had worked honestly as a mechanic, knew not how to do otherwise than work honestly as a legislator.” Whigs and Democrats alike targeted Townsend and thwarted his bid for reelection to the state legislature. Clinton Roosevelt shared the same fate.<sup>87</sup>

Historians writing about the Jacksonian era from the mid-twentieth century, including Schlesinger, Hofstadter, and Bray Hammond, pointed to the influence of precisely this locofoco wing of the Jacksonian coalition to explain the Panic of 1837. Peter Temin utilized cliometry and macroeconomic theory in his 1969 revisionist treatment of the Panic, arguing that while Jackson’s Specie Circular arrested the boom and effectively popped the 1830s bubble, doing so lessened the depth of the ensuing depression and cannot be blamed for the Panic. More recent treatments have focused on the transatlantic nature of the phenomenon, the role of imperfect information, and the importance of communications lags in causing the Panic. There were, in fact, *many panics* scattered throughout the Atlantic world, each caused, experienced, and reacted to differently according to context. As early as 1834, the Bank of the United States contracted note issues, hoping to prevent an over-extension of credit (or, as Jacksonians charged, to punish the president for killing the bank). Filling the void left in the credit market, tremendous amounts of capital in the forms of British investment and Mexican silver flowed into the United States. Investors funded a slew of canal and railroad projects, injecting specie into banks’ reserves, providing the basis for further loans and price inflation. Biddle’s bank therefore stood unable to halt or manage the boom, which continued unabated until late 1836 after President Jackson ordered that only specie be accepted for the sale of public lands. Significant communications

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 95-8.

lags between economic actors across all corners of the Atlantic disjointed investor's positions from their knowledge, increasing the level of risk associated with bills of exchange while those exchanging them remained relatively unaware of events in London. Should the British lose confidence in American markets, curtail their investments, and demand payments on loans, those very American debtors in places like New Orleans would have no way of knowing for several weeks. Effective 15 August, 1836, the "Specie Circular" both slowed the speculative boom in western lands and sapped specie from circulation, prompting price deflation in key commodities like cotton.<sup>88</sup>

Rather than explaining the Panic of 1837 with recourse to macroeconomic models of cotton prices and specie flows, Jessica Lepler's recent (2013) study argues that such models fail to capture the human element of panic. "National economic development was an illusion," she states, "The boom of the 1830s was actually the product of individuals forging local ties to transnational finance for personal profit." These individuals linked together in vast networks connecting the countryside to urban trade hubs, the most important of which were London, New York, and New Orleans. British bankers interpreted the Bank War and Specie Circular as political warnings to curtail investment and "initiated conservative policies designed to protect against a panic. These policies started the pressure of 1836, a transatlantic contraction of credit." Of particular importance to the London *Times* was a speech delivered before Congress by Churchill C. Cambreleng on 27 April, 1836. Cambreleng rose in opposition to distribution of the surplus to the states on the grounds that such a policy would further encourage the state of wild speculation in the economy. Cambreleng's assessment of the bubble and British bankers' concurrence with his views inspired a shift in the Bank of England's policies regarding American

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<sup>88</sup> Temin, *The Jacksonian Economy*, 11-17, 23-24, 48, 67-68, 83-89, 120-124, 136-147, 172, 177; Jessica M. Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837: People, Politics, and the Creation of a Transatlantic Financial Crisis*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 1-7, 8-42, 44, 48-54, 58-59, 67-69, 100-104.

investments. After Jackson announced and implemented the Specie Circular in June-August 1836, the Bank of England temporarily ceased discounting notes from seven major American banks as of 25 August and Liverpool cotton prices sharply declined. New Yorkers did not hear of the decision until 27 September, through the *Herald*. On 15 October, the news reached New Orleans from New York in the form of “sparse references,” rather than truly actionable information. As a result of this communications lag, hopeful lenders and debtors in the United States continued to contract loans secured with cotton throughout the Fall. Though the Bank of England reversed their policy and resumed discounting American notes, the news did not reach New York until well after news about the decline in the Liverpool cotton price. As Lepler explains, “English pessimism had defeated American optimism, but it was too late for businesses that had already gambled on continued flush times...The falling price of cotton, an unintended consequences of the BOE’s policy, might indicate to Americans that Britain’s central bank was attacking America’s most important cash crop.” The credit market remained constrained throughout the Winter and poor harvests helped contribute to a temporary rise in the price of wheat, especially in urban markets like New York City. Debtors securing loans with cotton failed to meet their obligations, banks throughout the country faced failure should there be runs on their vaults, and banks from London and Liverpool to New York and New Orleans suspended specie payments throughout early 1837 in sporadic, locally-defined fits of panic.<sup>89</sup>

When the flour shortage of Winter 1837 struck New Yorkers, the locos applied liberal critiques of the corporate state: inflation of the money supply by government-sponsored banks was causing the rise in prices and exacerbating the plight of the poor, many of whom responded in the riot against property-owners and merchants on the evening of 13 February, 1837.

According to Byrdsall’s rendition of the flour shortage, “In the old times, the price of a bushel of

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.



wheat was paid to the working man for each day of his labor, so that he was no sufferer, when wheat rose in price,” but with the advent of the Market Revolution and the rise of wage labor unattached to commodity prices, “the high price of the staff of life, works no increase of wages of labor.” One’s ability to labor no longer provided self-sufficiency equally throughout the population. The rich, in particular, were well positioned to exploit the people using the state, and Byrdsall denied that there was any genuine shortage of wheat. “A portion of the high price,” he argued, “could be safely charged to the working of the bank monopoly system.” A simple phrase expressed the idea in Park Meeting banners: “As the currency expands, the loaf contracts.” The Locofoco Party turned to the streets, raising great park meetings and town hall political conventions aimed at agitating the monetary and trade issues, especially attacking the state banks and the Tammany Democrats who hypocritically supported them. Prominent locos Moses Jaques, Daniel A. Robertson, and Alexander Ming, Jr. called for the meeting in a public handbill. Robertson later relocated to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he edited *The Elevator* and continued the fight on behalf of the radical, *locofoco* republicanism he advocated at the Park Meeting. The handbill read as follows:

BREAD, MEAT, RENT, AND FUEL!  
*Their prices must come down!*



The VOICE of THE PEOPLE shall be heard and will prevail!  
The people will meet in the Park, rain or shine, at 4 o’clock, P.M., on Monday afternoon, to inquire into the cause of the present unexampled distress and to devise a suitable remedy. All friends of humanity determined to resist monopolists and extortioners are invited to attend.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the “intensely cold and extremely windy” weather, “a dense multitude of many thousands” gathered to hear speeches and resolutions drafted by Alexander Ming, Jr., which began in revolutionary tenor:

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 99-100; 106-7.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for the *many* to declare hostility against *the rapacity of the few*, who willfully impoverish and *oppress* them, a decent respect for the opinions of mankind demands that those grievances [be heard]...Every article of necessity—bread stuffs, flesh meats, fuel and house rents, are at exorbitant rates; and an increase is demanded beyond the means of the working and useful classes of the community. *Conspiracies, combinations, and speculations* have been fostered until an unnatural state of things exists, jeopardizing human life itself, the liberties, independence and happiness of the people; but before remedies can be devised for evils which afflict the body politic, *the root from which those evils emanate* must be laid bare. The voice of the people emphatically declares, and facts demonstrate, that *our monstrous banking system is the prime original cause* of the present state of things (emphasis added).

The meeting resolutions distinctly separated the classes according to access to state power in excess of one's equal rights. Included in the oppressor class were members of government and the private entities (whether individuals or corporations, and especially banks) which benefited from their influence over the state apparatus. The other class comprised those oppressed by the state in virtually any and every way—the great mass of the people, exercising virtually no power over the state but their vote, itself often meaningless. The resolutions attacked bank beneficiaries as mushroom aristocrats, using the power of the state to feed themselves on the labors of the poor. Powerful people were able to disproportionately wrest powers and privileges from the people's government, perverting the economy as well as the public morality. "The bank oligarchy is the worst that ever existed upon the face of the earth...That banks are, in fact, *legally authorized banditti*...filching from the industrious the fruits of their labor, and *making the rich richer and the poor poorer*...The effect of banks on the community is to create the necessity for alms-houses and state prisons; to make business men gamblers, bankrupts, knaves, or vassals, and working people slaves, paupers, or felons." The flour shortage resulted from the distorting effects of government influence of the money supply on commodity prices, including protecting banks whose profligate lending policies forced them to curtail specie payments during the crisis. The resolutions concluded with a call for enacting a "People's Veto" of the privilege of

suspending specie payments during the ongoing business panic. In the language of the resolutions themselves, “Resolved, That the ‘People’s VETO’ is to demand of the banks gold and silver for their ‘promises to pay,’ and thus make these soulless corporate extortioners pay their debts to the people as promptly as they compel payment from the people.”<sup>91</sup>

The resolutions demanded the outright abolition of “ALL our public bodies” which are designed to raise revenue “with the least practical delay, and in place thereof a system of direct taxation substituted,” with Leggettian arguments advanced in support. Indirect taxes, they argued, obscured the tax burdens of the poorest and illegitimately raised prices of necessary items like flour. In the name of the meeting’s presiding officer, Moses Jaques, the crowd passed a memorial to the New York State Legislature stating that the crowd was “suffering under a vast accumulation of distress and privation, produced by that curse of modern times and modern legislation—the Paper Money System.” “By its ‘stimulants,’” the memorial continued, “gambling speculators have raised the prices of real estate to such a height, that rents are beyond the means of the honest and industrious classes; by its ‘facilities,’ avaricious monopolists have obtained possession of a large proportion of the necessities of life, and are demanding the most exorbitant prices.” The crowd then issued their demands:

1. The speedy prohibition of all bank notes under the denomination of one hundred dollars.
2. The abolition of all indirect taxes, and the system of finance resting on public debt; and in lieu thereof, substituting direct taxes on real and personal estate.
3. The abrogation of all inspectorships over articles of commerce.
4. The repeal of all laws under which the Common Council of the City of New York restrain or prohibit the freedom of trade; and all other laws by which they levy indirect taxes on the people.<sup>92</sup>

At the end of official business, “a stream of population, which had come down Chatham Street, entered the Park,” and an unknown man mounted the stage and incited what Byrdsall

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 108-113.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 102-3.

claims were non-LoCo elements of the crowd to riot, breaking into a large flour merchant's shop and stealing his merchandise. Jaques apparently interposed himself and removed the man from the stage, but not before, as the mayor's statement later claimed, "'a body of nearly one thousand persons separated from the general mass,'" and proceeded to loot Eli Hart's retail outlet. Hart's store and his business effects were virtually destroyed, including the loss of five hundred barrels of flour and at least one thousand bushels of wheat. Police arrested fifty-three rioters and "A portion of the city press would not let such a chance escape of attaching infamy to the Loco-Focos." Conservative Whig and Democratic presses "subsidized by the advertising and other patronage of the monopoly and commercial aristocracy," placed the riot squarely on the shoulders of Alexander Ming, Jr. (whom they supposed was the unknown man). Police arrested fifty-three rioters, none of whom were identified as Loco-Focos. The authorities, unable to place blame for the riot upon any particular individual, cast about for an enemy to persecute. "Ming was the only one that could be got at," Byrdsall stated, and he was immediately replaced in his post at the Collectorship of the Port of New York with Samuel Swartwout. Upon appeal, the new Van Buren administration reinstated Ming. Conservatives contended that Loco-Focos still bore the burden of the flour riots for having dared to call the meeting in the first place.<sup>93</sup>

Radicals called another meeting for the 6 March, despite "threats of military force," and the crowd was reportedly even larger than that of 13 February. Byrdsall endorsed estimates of forty thousand, and "certainly over thirty thousand." Ming, probably a result of increased popularity from his recent persecution, was chosen presiding officer and the meeting report was written by one John H. Hunt, "one of the most ultra of democrats in all his principles, differing in this respect from all his kindred," (including a brother who served as a Whig Assemblyman from Alleghany County). Though Hunt was "not easily excited into action," he spent successive years

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 103-8.

producing pamphlets like “Slavery of Poverty.” Hunt’s report presented a clear and concise articulation of locofoco class conflict theory and political thought, showing the importance of locofocoism as an ideology and inspiration to action of all kinds, rather than as a narrowly political movement. He began by noting that “To explain fully the causes and operation of any evil under which the community may be suffering, it is necessary to call attention to the constitution of society itself.” In a truly free society, unhampered by restrictions on trade of any kind, “high prices could be produced only by *scarcity*, and scarcity only by bad seasons, war, or other calamity, or improvidence.” The only sickness or calamity present in American society, however, was “that heart-sickness which must ever be felt by all who are conscious menials of speculators and drones,” and therefore other causes for price inflation must be discovered.

Hunt’s analysis placed philosophical premiums upon the rise of wage labor, capitalism, and the corporate-interventionist state:

In perhaps all densely populated countries, that earth from which everything must draw its subsistence is considered the exclusive property of a chosen few, not one in fifty having the legal right to plant a fruit tree or a potato patch to keep his family from starving.—Those who are thus excluded from the common bounties of the great Creator, are consequently compelled either to return the glorious gift of life, or else to support it by selling their strength and skill—their only property—to the highest bidder. The price of strength and skill, or labor, is naturally governed by the relative number of those who are struggling to sell, and those who wish to buy. In a new country, where the possessors of strength and skill are greatly needed to erect mills and dwellings, and to fit the wilderness for the cultivator of the ground, they enjoy nearly as much of the fruits of their labors as the land owner, and are esteemed according to their virtues. But the forest once subdued, their services become less needed, while their numbers continually increase; and the landowners, no longer eager competitors for the services of the laborers, are surrounded and courted, and flattered, by miserable competitors for servitude.

The result of this process of regulation, dispossession, and subjugation was a proliferation of “surplus poor,” even touching the artisanal and mechanic sectors of the labor market, and Hunt contended that “we see before us only the prospect of being slaves so long as we are able to toil, and paupers when we can toil no more.” Well-meaning immigrants would then be used up by

the grinding process of ‘modernization,’ and those whose “industry and skill could never buy in the land of their fathers...find themselves doomed to share and to augment our evils.” Hunt reserved his most acidic rhetorical bile, however, for “the curse of *Paper Money*.” By this final conspiratorial combination, that between legislators, bankers, and industrialists, “a leagued band of paper-promise coiners, exert absolute control over the whole wealth of a country! They can print off the nominal value of our whole wheat crop in a few minutes; and as they draw compound interest on all the DEBTS they owe, the more they owe, the greater their income, and the more absolute their power.”<sup>94</sup>

Meanwhile, locofocos and their detractors in the state legislature battled over policy and political supremacy in the Democratic Party. When conservative Democrats failed to appoint Clinton Roosevelt, recently elected to the state Assembly by the Equal Rights Party and the Whigs, to the chairmanship of the state bank investigating committee, his locofoco supporters authored a public letter in his defense. The new chairman suspected that Roosevelt himself was the author and antagonist and determined to discover the authorship of the piece. The committee then ordered, through the Sheriff’s office in New York City, Moses Jaques and Levi Slamm (both of whom signed the petition) to appear in Albany on 25 February to discuss the matter. Jaques and Slamm, while not opposed to the summons as such, demanded that the legislature defray their expenses. Outraged at the response, the committee pronounced them in contempt of the summons. The men were arrested, imprisoned in Albany, and questioned. On 8 March, they offered a statement of protest to be read into the record which was interrupted by several members on the grounds of irrelevance and impugning the “*honor and dignity of the House*.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 109-111.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid. 114-124.

The House, confronted with continued resistance, finally voted to discharge Slamm, though they insisted on holding Jaques for further questioning. He spoke to the House of Assembly denying charges of ambition and agrarianism, getting up mobs and corrupting men's thoughts for political gain. "Such has been the fate of all reformers, in all ages, and in all countries," he continued, comparing himself to Jesus Christ: "The first and greatest reformer in history gives us much account of, was reviled and evil spoken of: he was called a thief, a vagabond, a disturber of the peace, of society, a babbler: they charged that he was an associate of publicans and sinners, that he was a madman; that he taught doctrines were loosening all the bonds of society, and turning the world upside down...and for his firmness in resisting the oppressions of the money-changers, the Pharisees and the Regency of that day, he was persecuted to death." The New York State Assembly played the part of a Roman Empire or, perhaps worse, the British monarchy, which drew its power from rights usurped from the people. He concluded with a brief family history. Jaques' family settled in the New Jersey *circa* 1640, survivors of a long line of Huguenots virtually exiled after Henry IV repealed the Edict of Nantes,. "My father," the boy hero asserted, "at the commencement of the revolutionary war, with his little band of Jersey blues, under the command of the illustrious Washington," fought for Long Island and retreating with the army across the river to New Jersey once again. He continued serving until war's end, "when, Cincinnatus-like, he retired to his farm, with a shattered constitution and an impaired fortune. From him I inherited a love for freedom." This very heritage compelled him to defend his liberties as vigorously as possible. "He gave the members the best lesson," in Byrdsall's estimation, "they ever received in American constitutional Democracy, vulgarly called Loco-Focoism." Byrdsall concluded his narrative of

the kangaroo court by revealing that it was he, and not Jaques, nor Slamm, nor certainly Clinton Roosevelt, that wrote the original petition.<sup>96</sup>

Loco-Foco ward and park meetings roared in support of the persecuted brethren; locos passed resolutions condemning the House and even composed a song of support presented in the Appendix. The party defiantly nominated Jaques to the Mayoralty in the upcoming elections and Slamm continued his role as a popularizer of locofoco ideas and writing. The New York *Herald* adopted yet another pseudonym for the Loco-Foco Party to mark the increased role Slamm would play within the organization and movement from the moment of his persecution. They suggested calling the locofocos “Slamm Bang & Company,” as Byrdsall stated “for the sake of ludicrous euphony.” For his part, Byrdsall resented Slamm a great deal and considered him an opportunist using the movement primarily for his own aggrandizement. “Mr. Slamm is deficient in logical as well as philosophical powers of mind...he has more perception than thought, which is of great advantage to him as the Editor of a paper...he has none of that reflective foresight which sees the future that is growing out of the present.” Slamm especially exploited populists and romantics within the locofoco coalition, and swayed with the winds of popularity. “Whatever or whoever is the popular rage of the day, has charms for him, and if he can, he will use the same to promote the present success of himself or party—and he looks not beyond,” Byrdsall claimed in his 1842 history. “Such,” concluded the assessment, “is Mr. Slamm, whose name, luckily for him, was given to a political party. But so it often is;--‘some men are born great, and some have greatness thrust upon them.’” Perhaps more than any other man in 1842,

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.



Slamm became the primary advocate of locofocoism in New York City and helped shape the movement through the next decade.<sup>97</sup>

On 3 April, 1837, Seth Luther, Levi Slamm, and John Hunt hosted another great park meeting steeped in the language of class division and conflict. Hunt's resolutions argued that "The world has always abounded with men, who, rather than toil to produce the wealth necessary to their subsistence, have contrived to strip others of the fruits of their labor, either by violence and bloodshed, or by swaggering pretensions to exclusive privileges." He compared modern social conflict with clashes between rulers and ruled throughout the ages:

Aristocrats have discovered that charters are safer weapons than swords; and that cant, falsehood, and hypocrisy serve all the purposes of a highwayman's pistol, while they leave their victims alive and fit for future exactions. Our fathers performed their duties well; but we have neglected ours, and hence our suffering. We have suffered our political power to fall into the hands of men who fatten on the diseases of the body politic, and whose trade requires them daily to defend guilt for a share of its plunder, or to exact money for advocating the cause of the innocent.

The resolutions finally called upon working people to combine their strength, eschew violence, and reassert their power through the democratic system by supporting the likes of Moses Jaques, "the revolutionary patriot," for mayor.<sup>98</sup>

Jaques received over four thousands votes (about 12% of the 34,999 votes cast) for mayor in the Spring 1837 elections, once again positioning the Loco-Focos in control of the balance of power between Tammany's 39% and the Whigs' 49%. In Byrdsall's estimation, "it is clear that M. Jaques would have been elected Mayor, had the monopoly Democracy supported him." Democrats lost the city government in a clean sweep, provoking further fury from the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. 133-5. For an example of the locofoco popular reaction to the inquisition of Jaques and Slamm, see Appendix Figure 3.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. 135-7.

conservative press and continued impertinence from the Equal Rights Party. Locos continued to organize and combine, calling yet another park meeting on 3 May, 1837.<sup>99</sup>

The New York City bank runs during the Panic of 1837 began four days later on 7 May. The banks were terribly unprepared to pay their liabilities in specie and the city officials feared popular violence when “promises to pay” were disregarded out of necessity. The mayor ordered that “Watchmen and marshals were stationed within and near the banking houses, and the militia at those places from which they could be most readily withdrawn for efficient duty.” By 10 May, the banks suspended specie payments entirely. In the state legislature, the same banking committee that interrogated and jailed Moses Jaques and Levi Slamm, charged with investigating the health of “every Bank in the state,” determined that each and every one was sound and “well” or “ably conducted.” The financial calamities of May 1837, in Byrdsall’s estimation, provided the public a thorough demonstration that “the much extolled credit system was in reality a system of debt.” Labor and productivity remained central to locofoco political, economic, and moral philosophy. “The monstrous credit system of England,” Byrdsall concluded, “has grown out of her enormous national debt, which must some time or other be exploded by National Bankruptcy or Revolution.”<sup>100</sup>

The banking system against which the Locos now protested, Leggett and others argued, was only restrained by democratic expressions of sensible control over the paper emissions of banks. During his two-month term as governor of New York in 1829, Van Buren signed the “Safety Fund Act,” which compelled all newly-chartered banks in the state to participate in an oversight program conducted by a state board of commissioners empowered to investigate any

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<sup>99</sup> 139-142; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 207.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 142-4. On the Panic of 1837, the bank issue, and political alignments, see: William Shade, *Banks or No Banks: The Money Issue in Western Politics, 1832-1865*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 1972; James R. Sharp, *The Jacksonians Versus the Banks: Politics in the States After the Panic of 1837*, (New York: Columbia University Press), 1970.

member banks' accounts. The act also required banks to pay a fee to the safety fund "based on a percentage of their capital but also to pay specie for all of their paper money on demand. Should banks default on specie payments, however, as happened in 1837, "depositors and bank note holders would be paid from the fund," then replenished by fees collected from member banks. By compelling banking corporations to pool risk, the Safety Fund "represented a middle ground between the theories of political economy of the hard-money Loco-Focos and the commercial Democrats, who advocated for state-chartered banks. It created state control over banking and protected citizens from bank paper while allowing new banks to be chartered."<sup>101</sup>

The Panic of 1837 deeply wounded locofocos in their daily lives, pushing ever larger numbers to voice their anger at park meetings. Moses Jaques permanently moved back to his New Jersey farm in early May, intending to remain there throughout his old age, and Byrdsall declined to even run for party Recording Secretary. Despite losing such a prominent figure as Jaques, however, nominations, party elections, and official business pressed onward. At a 5 June meeting, Daniel Gorham succeeded Jaques as party Secretary, Alexander Ming, Jr. replaced Byrdsall as Recording Secretary. The meeting then confirmed another state convention at Utica and issued another call for a park meeting to address the high price of flour in the wake of the state suspension law, to be held 24 June, 1837. The ensuing park meeting featured the "largest concourse ever assembled in the city of New-York" and gathered in front of the City Hall. The main address called for a strong and powerful response to the dark days of 1837: "The time has come when the scattered, disheartened friends of natural right, and the banded, artful, but dastardly upholders of legalized crime, *must meet in open conflict*. We have borne the load of continually accumulating oppression till our powers of endurance are exhausted." Combination, manly virtue, and an unbendable political will could effectively meet the powers of the banks.

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<sup>101</sup> Lepler, *The Many Panics of 1837*, 159-163, 176, 184.

The final check on the power, influence, and destructive capacity of the banking aristocracy, was “simply *to let credit alone*: to leave each man’s credit to stand solely on its own bottom, without any attempt to strengthen or weaken it by legislation; and, by our constitution, to perpetually prohibit the law from ever interfering in any shape with any contract of debt, either to enforce or to annul it.”<sup>102</sup>

Throughout the Summer of 1837 Van Buren proved himself antagonistic to any variety of government involvement in the market, and it appeared to many that locofoco policy proposals were ascendant. “The course of the administration of the general government,” Byrdsall explained, “in maintaining the specie circular, and refusing the notes of the suspended banks in payment of the national revenue, placed the Democratic government of the State, and the Democratic administration of the United States, in the attitude of contrariety to each other.” While Loco-Foco influence at the national level had reached its greatest point, Loco-Foco party organization was incapable of matching it. The 11 September Utica convention suffered “owing to the neglect of duty on the part of the Central Committee of Correspondence,” which failed to announce the date of the convention to the corresponding committees throughout the state. Consequently, the wrong date was published in the *Utica Democrat*, and “most of the counties were unrepresented.” The majority of convention business was absorbed in drafting a new party constitution which attempted to concisely define locofocoism. In Byrdsall’s summation, “In its definition of right...it declares the fundamental principle of Christian Democracy,” namely a mix of the Golden Rule and the Kantian moral imperative: “Loco-Focoism is, that ‘those acts are naturally, politically, and morally, right, which may be done by all, without injury to any.’” The key provisions of the resulting constitution demanded equal laws, the abolition of corporate charters, and the protection of justly-acquired property. Article VII, which addressed individual

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 146-152.

rights and prohibitions, again demanded equal laws which treated all citizens equally, the abolition of exemption laws, that “Prisoners, except for murder, shall be bailable without delay,” that prisoners “shall have the right to demand immediate trial or liberation, and to be immediately tried or liberated,” demanded the abolition of capital punishment with banishment or life imprisonment in its stead, the abolition of debtor’s prisons, and the public-private sector collusion in the state prison labor system. Rather, all prisoners put to hard labor in the manufacture of consumer goods would have the proceeds of their labor used for poor relief.<sup>103</sup>

The triangular political contest Leggett wrote of manifested itself in the divide between the Democratic Young Men’s committees (friendly to locofocoism) and the Old Men’s General Committee (friendly to Tammany), and the mainline Whigs. The Young Men and the Loco-Foco Party found themselves so strongly in agreement with Van Buren’s message that “union began to be talked of.” Nonetheless, the time for reunion was not yet ripe and locos were willing to test their strength in yet another general election. The Equal Rights Party nominated their own slate of candidates for the upcoming general election, but many became convinced that Tammany could be beaten. At a 24 October general meeting, “a proposition was presented...to effect the united support of the Democratic family in favor of one ticket.” In many respects, love for Van Buren the man defeated love for the movement. “It was manifest that the party, in its opposition to monopolies,” Byrdsall explained, “was anxious to sustain the President in the warfare of the Banks against him; and it was upon this sentiment that some men, for reasons best known to themselves, went to work to dissolve the party.” Tammany, in turn, nominated five locofoco candidates: James L. Stratton, John H. Hunt, Robert Townsend, Jr., Levi Slamm, and

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 152-167. For overviews of the Van Buren administration, including the ascendancy of many locofoco policy proposals and the locofoco wing’s influence over Van Buren’s political career, see: James Curtis, *The Fox at Bay: Martin Van Buren and the Presidency, 1837-1841*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky), 1970; Joel Silbey, *Martin Van Buren and the Emergence of American Popular Politics*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 2002; Edward Widmer, *Martin Van Buren*, (New York: Times Books), 2005.

William Skidmore, for Assembly. The Conference Committee then offered a series of justifications for reunion on 27 October, and requested resignations from candidates not jointly nominated by Tammany. Job Haskell refused resignation, igniting a battle between party unionists and those who wished to maintain a separate organization. A vote of seventy-one unionists against twenty-two separatists confirmed Byrdsall's worst fears: that "these pledge-makers [became] the most violent and shameless of pledge breakers. What were the influences which had come over them!"<sup>104</sup>

Reunionist sentiment sent attendance at Loco-Foco meetings plummeting and Tammany adopted a Declaration of Principles "essentially the same as our own," though only the nominating committee (and neither of the general committees) did so. The Loco-Foco Party then itself split between a unionist majority, called "Buffaloes," and a minority of separatists, the "Rumps." It was a bitter and venomous divide, and "Even the use of the venerable room in the old Military and Civic Hotel, became a matter of rivalry and strife." Byrdsall wrote with great sadness that "The awful schism between the Buffaloes and Rumps was remarkable for its virulence and violence," with charges of corruption and suspicious motives flying from all sides. The schismatic Loco-Foco Party eventually even refused to meet in the same room. The Rumps composed an address to their fellows, admonishing Buffaloes and the unionist enterprise for its foolish hope that Tammany could be trusted. The Rumps then nominated their own ticket for local offices, marked by an important shift in style shown in Appendix Table 6. Candidates were presented not merely by name, but by occupation as well. Job Haskell received the greatest number of votes—a mere 371. Byrdsall mourned, "Mr. Slamm was chosen to be the executioner of the final act, by those who conspired for the purpose." Elected Recording Secretary after the November elections, it was Slamm's constitutional duty to call party meetings, which he

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 170-7.

neglected to do until “Gradually, the Loco-Focos of both sections became merged in the Democratic Republican party.” The separate organization thus died, though Tammany remained unable to win the November Assembly elections, gaining back only seven out of the twelve-percent share of the vote claimed by Loco-Focos in the April race for mayor.<sup>105</sup>

But locofocoism did not die with the Equal Rights Party. Those whom Tammany resorbed “brought not only their ‘new fangled notions’ with them, but also their significant designation as a party.” They had shown enough strength to be feared if not properly respected. As Walter Hugins has argued about the Workingmen-Locofoco coalition in New York, both Tammany and their radical opponents “drew upon essentially the same segments of society,” necessarily resulting in a dilution of Tammany’s power when challenged by a third party. The Workingmen-Locofoco war against Tammany amounted to more than a mere battle over the leadership of the Democratic Party in New York City, it was the prelude to a decade-long effort to reform the constitutional order of New York state according to radical principles, culminating in the constitutional convention of 1846. In the short term, the Equal Rights Party forced “Tammany Sachems to dilute both their platform and their personnel. Campaign promises were made--and often kept--to aggrieved factions, and political preferment or a share of the party patronage offered to their leaders.” The new Tammany-Workingmen-Locofoco alliance lasted a decade, ruptured only by the powerful influence of the slavery and territorial issues. Wistful over the political losses of his cause and the decay of locofoco camaraderie they engendered, Fitzwilliam Byrdsall mourned the emptiness of the Military and Civic Hotel, old secret meeting-place of the original loco conspirators:

There were no more meetings held there by those enthusiasts, and no enthusiastic cheers resounding within its walls; neither was there any more transparencies with terse mottoes and inscriptions, to adorn the venerable casements. The old mansion became deserted and cheerless;

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 178-187; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 207.

for there was only one Loco-Foco, Robert Hogbin, who made it his haunt as usual. He was the last of the political covenanters, and the only one who went there regularly, month after month, on the evenings appointed by the constitution for the meetings of the faithful; and he would bide there, solitary and alone, until ten o'clock, the hope within him that the Loco-Focos would gather themselves together in the Babylon of their captivity, in order to direct their steps back again to the renewal of their venerable temple. But they never returned. The old Military and Civic Hotel fell into decay, and at length was pulled down. Poor Hogbin saw it lying prostrate in its last ruins, and he turned away and wept.

But Loco-Focoism did not die. It lives forever in Christian Democracy,—that Democracy which, while it concedes the majority the powers of government, does not allow to it the right to do wrong, but restrains it by constitutions drawn from the paramount laws of God, and the principles of Christianity.<sup>106</sup>

Byrdsall published his history in 1842, perhaps in part inspired to do so by a contemporary awakening of locofoco activists—the Dorr War in Rhode Island.

#### Locos Go North: Filibustering Young Americans in the Canadian Rebellions

“My own name is Miller. I am a citizen of the United States, and until little more than a day since was a British slave.”

--Linus Miller, American law student imprisoned in Van Dieman's Land, ca. 1842<sup>107</sup>

Abram D. Smith, who became the President of Canada, found himself at home as an early devotee of locofocoism. In their two-year existence as a third party, the Loco-Focos were able to secure enough success to become a powerful and influential philosophical and political force within the national Democratic Party. More importantly, they spread their philosophy throughout the Democratic networks of New York, especially areas in the north of the state like that which was home to the perfectly average Abram D. Smith. The romantic, passionate, and thoroughly *American* radicalism of the Loco-Focos was especially captivating to youths like Smith, who saw the world around them transformed by the invisible hands of free people living

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 188-189; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 215-216.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Jack Cahill, *Forgotten Patriots: Canadian Rebels on Australia's Convict Shores*, (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio), 166.



virtuous republican lives. The world of the transportation, communication, and market revolutions transfixed, awed, and inspired budding Young Americans like Smith and they set out to shape it into their own creation.<sup>108</sup>

The budding Young America movement was steeped in what literary scholar Andrew Lawson calls “Locofoco romanticism.” Loco-Romantics combined the German idealism of Hegel, Fichte, and Herder (largely filtered through the Concord Transcendentalists) with the American context of wild, rugged individualism on a vast, open, democratic frontier in human history. The result was a fervent belief in classical liberal class theory and the liberal theory of history, which held that history progressed through the conflicts between the forces of Power and Liberty. To loco romantics, the spirit of Liberty pervaded and defined American life and the United States was destined to lead the forces of Liberty into the future. Historians have generally portrayed the sense of mission associated with Manifest Destiny as a *racialized* Anglo-Saxonism to the neglect of a *non-racialized* sense of classical liberal, revolutionary-republican mission. To the Locofoco romantics of Young America, hope for the future depended upon a particular vision or theory of historical development and intellectuals’ abilities to inform Liberty’s warriors of the present. Abram D. Smith and his Brother Hunters fancied themselves such soldiers of history.<sup>109</sup>

While training for his law degree, Smith exhibited the Young American spirit of jubilant republicanism by celebrating Independence Day in legendary style. With an adequate supply of food, liquor, and firearms, the young man rowed to an isolated island in an upstate New York

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<sup>108</sup> Andrew Bonthius, “The Patriot War of 1837-1838: Locofocoism With a Gun?” *Labour* 52 (Fall 2003): 9-43; Dunley, “A.D. Smith,” 64-70.

<sup>109</sup> Lawson, ““Song of Myself,”” 381-5; Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952; McNeill, ed. *Lord Acton: Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.

lake one 3 July. Alone with his thoughts and the sky, Smith drank the night away. Rising at dawn, he fired his holiday salute and continued for several hours. He then delivered a reading of the Declaration of Independence, engaged in some general carousing, many alcoholic salutations to revolutionary heroes, and a well-deserved and day-long nap in his boat. His was the sort of liberty that has made early America a now-mythical place of coonskin caps, jugs of whisky, and a lack of constituted authority for as far as the eye could see. This scene became the stuff of legend in the legal circles within which the young man circulated, and appears to have been the sole remnant of Smith's legacy that survived the man in the minds of his contemporaries.<sup>110</sup>

In 1836 or 1837 (the record is unclear), during the height of Equal Rights Party agitation, Smith took his romantic radicalism to the Old Northwest, as did so many other average upstate New Yorkers of his day. The Smiths settled in Ohio and Abram threw himself into Democratic politics. He was elected city councilman from the Cleveland First Ward in 1837 and that summer delivered speeches from the local courthouse of the "ultra Locofoco kind," in the words of a local paper. Smith transplanted Leggett's New York locofocoism to Cleveland, preaching the radical message to Ohio Workingmen. As his biographer argues, "Smith's involvement with the Locofocos was...no political flirtation, but rather a lifelong commitment to the left wing of the Democracy--and very often to the far left." By day, Smith practiced law and attended to his municipal duties, performing respectable middle class work in a bustling western city. By night, however, he studied the secret codes and hand signals of the Brother Hunters, "a vast secret revolutionary society." Under cover of darkness, Smith escaped his perfectly normal life and stole away to the forests. There he communed with his fellow 'Brother Hunters,' breathing new life into the revolutionary heritage that so captivated their imaginations. They plotted to

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<sup>110</sup> Dunley, "Chapter 2: The President of Canada" in "A.D. Smith," 2008.

violently overthrow the British imperial government in Canada and the man they chose to lead them as their President, Abram D. Smith, was suddenly anything but average. He was President of the Republic of Canada.<sup>111</sup>

Strung across the northern border was a loose network of locofoco-minded revolutionaries which called themselves “Patriots,” and met like Smith and his Brother Hunters (called the *frères-chasseurs* in Lower Canada) in secret and solitude, spinning their conspiratorial webs to fulfill America’s place in history. From Maine and Vermont to Michigan and Ohio’s Western Reserve, the Patriots engaged in military drills and preparedness, passed locofoco meeting resolutions condemning British imperialism in Canada and the evils of aristocratical government; they even established newspapers and a bank of issue to espouse and fund their cause. They laid lasting and intense political social networks, and some even crossed the border to join Canadian forces in ill-fated rebellion. The rebellions in British Canada emerged from the long-term transformation of the Canadian economy and Canadian perceptions of the exploitative nature of British imperial policies. Inspired by the triumphs and vision of Jacksonian democracy, especially the iterations espoused by the Loco-Focos, republican-minded Canadians protested the legally-privileged land monopoly of the “Family Compact” regime in Upper Canada. As the ongoing Industrial Revolution produced a population of ‘surplus poor,’ many of whom immigrated to the open frontier of Canada, poor settlers quickly discovered the severe limits placed on their liberties and potential for economic independence. Imperial law relegated the choicest and largest tracts of land to a privileged clique of aristocrats, the so-called “Family Compact.” Historian of the Patriot convicts, Jack Cahill, describes the Family Compact as “a relatively small, tightly knit group of men that included the leading members of the

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<sup>111</sup>Ibid.. For a history of the Hunters in Ohio, see Oscar Kinchen, *The Rise and Fall of the Patriot Hunters*, (New York: Bookman Associates, 1956).

administration—executive counselors, senior officials, and some members of the judiciary.” This lucrative web of access to power ensured that “Its members controlled the machinery of government...[and] made sure that like-minded friends and relations received the lesser appointments throughout the province. So the main Compact spawned local ‘family compacts,’ consisting of sheriffs, magistrates, militia officers, customs collectors and other officials.”<sup>112</sup>

The Canadian Reformers adapted and adopted a locofoco anti-corporate, anti-monopoly, anti-privilege philosophy of political economy which aimed to sever the colonial relationship altogether, including very real legal ties to England’s aristocratic, feudal, corporatist past. Their American allies sought to banish the British lion from the continent and perhaps embrace a series of sister republics in the Canadas. The rebels of 1837, led by William Lyon MacKenzie in Upper Canada East and Dr. Charles Duncombe in the West, were terribly disorganized and diminutive. Indeed there were likely many times more American locofocos ready to invade Canada and fight the British than there were rebellious colonists. Nevertheless, “At night, in the forests,” Cahill states, “Mackenzie’s ‘Patriots’ tried to drill as military units, using ancient weapons to shoot at pigeons, and pikes forged by village smithies.” The initial rebellion collapsed after a series of British victories and the rapid dissolution of most rebel units. “The result was the hanging of many men and the banishment of many more, those forgotten by history, to the end of the earth in chains.” Those not released from lack of evidence were executed or sentenced to transportation to Van Dieman’s Land. The revolution continued,

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<sup>112</sup> Stanley Ryerson, *Unequal Union: Roots of Crisis in the Canadas, 1815-1873*, (Toronto: Progress Books, 1973; Albert Corey, *The Crisis of 1830-1842 in Canadian-American Relations*, (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1941; Jack Cahill, *Forgotten Patriots*, 2. For general histories of Anglo-American diplomacy over the northern border, see Francis Carroll, *A Good and Wise Measure: The Search for the Canadian-American Boundary, 1783-1842*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001; Stuart, *United States Expansionism*; Jane Errington, *The Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology*, Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1987; Colin Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada, 1837-8: The Duncombe Revolt and After*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 1982.

however, and Patriot Hunters on the American border invaded Canada only to be defeated at the Battle of the Windmill, just outside of Prescott, Ontario, in November 1838. Two hundred American Patriots battled British imperial troops for several days and by the end 157 were taken prisoner, of which 140 were court-martialed, 11 executed, and 60 transported to Van Dieman's Land. Loaded onboard the *Marquis of Hastings*, a rotted and barely-seaworthy prison hulk, 230 "felons guilty of every crime imaginable," including Canadian rebels and filibustering Americans suffered scurvy and "a four-month voyage as horrific as any in the history of the convict ships." Thirty of these prisoners died in transit, their bodies cast overboard to be eaten by sharks and forgotten by time. The survivors were consigned to the brutal prison labor regime of British Australia. There they continued the intellectual and social cooperation began in the loco networks of North America, their stories now the stuff of legend amongst sympathizers.<sup>113</sup>

American locofoco filibusters connected the struggle in Canada with a wider attempt to rid the world of British aristocracy. Escapees like James Gemmel and Benjamin Wait recorded their experiences for the voracious locofoco readership in cities like Levi Slamm's New York. Slamm's *Daily Plebeian* regularly published "Letters from Van Dieman's Land" alongside attacks on the latest extensions of the British Empire and the remnants of feudal corporatism in Rhode Island. At this early stage, however, most locofocos were decidedly in favor of *peace* as a means to their ends, and eschewed the use of force. Even in Canada, the object seems to have been to display enough power to rouse the populace to mass defiance and thereby set the British at the impossible task of governing a population which refused to be governed—a true reprisal of the American Revolution. The Van Buren administration entirely disavowed the filibustering

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<sup>113</sup> Cahill, *Forgotten Patriots*, 8; "Two Years in Van Dieman's Land. By James Gemmel, One of the Captives: Letter II, *Daily Plebeian*, 1 July 1842, 1; Edwin Guillet, *The Lives and Times of the Patriots: An Account of the Rebellion in Upper Canada, 1837-1838 and of the Patriot Agitation in the United States, 1837-1842*, (University of Toronto Press), 1968 (Original Printing: 1938).

radicals, averting an international fracas and potential war. Many locofocos articulated the radical liberal-republican case against friendly relations with Great Britain through the ratification of the Webster-Ashburton Treaty and beyond, citing the cases of British tyranny in Canada, Ireland, and against the Chartist movement as reasons for adopting a militant, anti-British posture. The violent and destructive counterrevolutionary backlash against rebels and their sympathizers in Canada bolstered the loco case against the British. Loyalist counterrevolutionaries “burned houses, destroyed farms, looted stores and terrorized people,” leading an estimated 25,000 refugees (including the parents of Thomas Edison) to flee Canada for the United States, where filibustering, locofoco-oriented Young Americans like John L. O’Sullivan and Levi Slamm welcomed them with open arms. Abram D. Smith, the President of the Republic of Canada, apparently avoided conflict, transportation, and execution, though the impact of his election must have weighed on his spirit for the rest of his days.<sup>114</sup>

Patriots like Smith fought *for* locofoco principles derived from the radical liberal traditions of the French *laissez-faire* economists and social thinkers, the English Classics, and good, old-fashioned American republicanism. They fought *against* the world’s most powerful government of the day, the global icon of the Money Power, the preeminent monarchical, aristocratic, corporation-mongering organization on the globe: imperial Britain. Equal rights and anti-monopoly were the cornerstones of locofoco thought, and British rule in Canada was

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<sup>114</sup> Cahill, *Forgotten Patriots*, 8; “Our Name,” *Daily Plebeian*, 28 June 1842, 2; “British Politics,” *Daily Plebeian*, 2 July 1842, 1; “State of Parties in England,” and “Arrival of the Caledonia,” *Daily Plebeian*, 7 July 1842, 1; “Chartism in Britain,” *Daily Plebeian*, 20 July 1842, 2; “European Correspondence,” *Daily Plebeian*, 25 July 1842, 4; “The ‘Patriot’ Prisoners,” *Daily Plebeian*, 14 September 1842, 2; “Great National Demonstration,” *Daily Plebeian*, 13 September 1842, 2; [Webster-Ashburton Correspondence], *Daily Plebeian*, 14 September 1842, 2; “Excursion to Port Arthur,” *Daily Plebeian*, 13 October 1842, 4; “Escape from Van Dieman’s Land,” *Daily Plebeian*, 1 October 1842, 2; “To the Reformers of England” by John Greenleaf Whittier, *Daily Plebeian*, 31 December 1842, 4; [Untitled], *Daily Plebeian*, 25 May 1843, 2; Ryerson, *Unequal Union*; Colin Read, *The Rising in Western Upper Canada, 1837-8: The Duncombe Revolt and after*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982); Cahill, *Forgotten Patriots*, 20-35.

based on an incestuous system of aristocratic land monopoly and class legislation, preventing the development of the provinces and stifling economic growth. Canadian radical Reformers were steeped in locofoco thought and leaders like Mackenzie even dabbled in Loco social circles while exiled in New York City. Throughout the 1830s, American locofocos and Canadian radicals exchanged ideas and fused their movements together. Locofoco filibustering in Canada continued the dissemination of radicalism throughout the Old Northwest during the secret meetings of Brother Hunters and in the pages of the Patriot press. These Loco-Romantic revolutionaries shaped and contoured the minds of Young America I. The “Patriot War” was consistent with a powerful strain of loco philosophy, part of the Loco-Foco political movement, and an attempt at republican revolution. When seen in this light, it becomes a single battle in the developing war between locofoco Young Americans and the vestiges of feudal, privilege-based corporatism in the world of the Market Revolution. With the dissolution of the rebellion, the Canadian Reformers moved toward national union to oppose British domination, and Americans turned their militant gazes to eliminating the edifice of aristocratic tyranny yet remaining at home.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ryerson, *Unequal Union*.

## Chapter 3

### **‘Waking the World:’ Loco-Young America and the Rhode Island Rebellion**

“The London Athænaum [sic] for January 7<sup>th</sup>...contains a frank confession of the duplicity and treachery of the British authorities towards the Afghans...Negotiations were opened with the invaded and injured Afghans, and a treaty concluded and solemnly ratified, by which the British forces solemnly pledged themselves to evacuate Cabul...

But the Afghans doubted British honor. Mahomed Akber Khan, to test the sincerity of the English army, pretended to propose to the British Envoy a secret scheme by which Shah Soojah, the puppet of the foreigners, was to continue to act the mock king, and themselves remain in possession of Cabul, and break their treaty...[T]he British Envoy was a consenting party to these disgraceful proceedings, and gave a written sanction to the arrangement...

*Who can wonder that they seized and slew the principal traitor? Who can regret the fearful retribution which was inflicted on the abettors? One thing is to be deplored—the greediness of gain, the lust of power, that can induce men, pretending to be Christians, and full of truth and integrity, to degrade themselves and assume the character of knaves and cheats.”*

--Levi Slamm, ed. *The New York Daily Plebeian*, 25  
February, 1843 (emphasis added)

### Beyond the Equal Rights Party: Locofocoism Nationwide

*“Let every tub stand on its own bottom.”*

--Motto, Swanton (VT) *Loco Foco* (1839)

“Unawed by the influence of the rich or the great, the people must be heard, and their rights vindicated.”

“The Liberties of the Country are safest in the hands of the Farmer and Mechanic.”

--Motto & Emblem Slogan, Montgomery (AL) *The Loco-Foco* (1840)

As a result of the somewhat tidy collapse of the Equal Rights Party in New York and the triumph of important locofoco policies in the Van Buren administration (most notably the Independent Treasury, soon repealed by the Whigs), historians have almost stubbornly refused to continue investigating the political history of locofocoism and the Loco-Focos. As we have seen with figures like the illusive Abram D. Smith, many individuals identified as “Loco-Focos,”



actually moved west with their ideas. Many more exposed themselves to Leggett's writing, the activism of the New Yorkers, and the publications of *Young Americans*. The movement spread throughout the country, reaching from the farthest corners of rural New England to the mayor's office in Montgomery, Alabama. While most Loco-Focos supported Van Buren in 1840, it was always an unstable alliance and new controversies easily shook the Democratic coalition. Van Buren's unwillingness to support the Canadian rebels prompted many border locos to briefly abandon the party, locally and nationally. After the Equal Rights Party resorbed into the Van Buren Democracy in 1836-7, a discernible and distinct intellectual movement bearing the name "locofoco" continued. Historians have neglected to sufficiently broaden their treatments of Loco-Focos from the narrowly political, and have virtually forgotten that they continued to exist as historical agents animated by a very particular set of core ideas and attracted to a variety of related causes. Throughout the country, from Vermont to Alabama, very real people identified with the work begun, philosophically and politically, in New York City. For conservatives, Whigs and Democrats alike, "locofoco" remained a convenient and combustible catch-all word for fanatics and disorganizers nation-wide.

In Alburgh, Vermont, a small town on the northern border with Canada that juts into Lake Champlain at its most northern reach, the publication of a paper from nearby Swanton caused a small panic in August 1839. "The 1<sup>st</sup> No., of the Loco Foco has thrown Alburgh into great commotion," the Swanton *Loco Foco*'s publisher reported to his readers in the following issue. The citizens who gathered to fuss over the new paper's appearance were apparently "those who get their living out of the surrounding workies...they are a kind of leech upon the farmers of Alburgh, who add nothing to the common stock, but depend upon making the people support them for their wit." The editor devoted the final page of his paper to the Alburgh community

and its neighbors in Grand Isle County on the lake, the “Grand Isle County Loco Foco.” The Swanton paper urged “both whigs and democrats” to attend an upcoming meeting at Phelps’ Inn to plan for “the honest freemen of this town [to] raise up in their might and proclaim their abhorrence and detestation of those party corruptions” that many felt had overtaken local politics in Alburgh. The *Loco Foco*’s mission for Grand Isle County mirrored the Equal Rights Party’s own purpose, inspired by the conflict against the Tammany conservatives. The “junto of city politicians” should be turned out and replaced in a wave of voter-enforced purification of the local party apparatus. “The town possesses many intelligent, strong-minded, thrifty farmers,” the *Loco Foco* concluded, “and the wonder is that they have not killed off this nest of city desplicables by voting them out of office before now.”<sup>116</sup>

The four existing pages of the Swanton *Loco Foco* speak to our historical memories of the locofoco movement—barely existent. Yet it reported on the extent of the movement from its own corner of Vermont to Pickensville, Alabama. The *Loco Foco* supported the Democratic Party because it saw the Whigs as the party of corporate interests, usurping powers from the people and granting them as exclusive legal privileges reserved to corporations, including governments. Whigs supposedly friendly to banking reform after the Panic of 1837 were still worthy of suspicion for their political philosophy. After all, Whig politicians, their “political *Deity*” the banks, “and soulless irresponsible corporations” never seemed to suffer the consequences of immoral behavior. A truly republican government implied accountability and responsibility for individual agents, but in Vermont, “The *cottage* is sure to suffer for every corrupt act which passed in the *palace* at Montpelier.” Institutionalized power tended to grow detached from the sovereign citizens and transform into an entrenched aristocracy whose

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<sup>116</sup> “For the Loco Foco,” *Loco Foco*, Swanton, Vermont, 22 August 1839.

blunders harmed “every peasant in the most remote corners of our State.” The *Loco Foco*’s solution to political and social evil was a restoration of popular republicanism: “Then let the laboring men combine—let them reform the Legislature—let them elect such officers as are in favor of Bank reform, and ALL will be right.” When local Whig editors scoffed at the *Loco Foco*’s motto, saying that the *Loco* meant “to make every man as *poor as himself*,” the *Loco Foco* angrily lashed out against the culture of classism in rural New England, “a horrible sentiment—an anti Republican doctrine which gnaws like a death-worm at the root of American institutions.” Rather, as the editor’s father told him when he was a boy, “‘VIRTUE *alone should make a man* RESPECTABLE.’” “His instruction,” the writer recalled, “was the *only* legacy he had to bequeath us, and that we have treasured up.”<sup>117</sup>

The backlash against the Canadian rebellions and American filibusters animated the contest in Vermont politics for locofocos. The remaining issue of the *Loco Foco* began with a poem by “the celebrated Ben Brace,” attacking Whig governor Silas Jennison for his treatment of Canadian refugees. The paper reported of a recent town meeting of “the REAL Democratic Freemen of Swanton,” at which seventy-five individuals composed resolutions condemning leaders of both parties for their handling of the Canada affair. “We disapprove of the course taken by the President, Silas H. Jennison and other Government Officers in relation to the Canadian troubles,” and “we have and will support the cause of the Canadian Patriots, or any other people, engaged, as we believe they are, in a just and righteous cause.” The commotion in Alburgh, no doubt, arose from conservatives’ fears of ex-Patriots identified with the new *Loco Foco*. Why else, the *Loco* wondered, should “this place so famed in the annals of Canadian revolt...arouse them?” The demonstration of Vermont locofocos’ willingness to engage in

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

armed revolution during the Canadian rebellion sparked conservative fears of rebellion at home. The *Loco Foco* recalled a long list of state officials and their corruption scandals, charging that “The true reason why the *Loco Foco* scares these citizens is, they are guilty of many things which they wish concealed:--they cannot bear to have a light shine upon their hearts in such a way as to expose them to the freemen.” A virtuous republican revolution, like that attempted mainly by American filibusters in Canada, could destroy the web of corporate legislation binding the class hierarchy in American life.<sup>118</sup>

At the other end of the country, the locofoco movement assumed a very different practical, local form and function. One Perez Colman, a Montgomery, Alabama lawyer, member of the local Democratic Club, and editor-publisher of *The Loco-Foco*, promoted a proslavery, nationalist version of locofocoism, believing Martin Van Buren best represented his bloc of political opinion. Colman’s paper presented a southern locofocoism, borrowing the key elements of equal rights and anti-privilege, mixing them with a host of proslavery preconceptions. *The Loco-Foco* was a short-run campaign paper designed to expose William Henry Harrison and his Whig managers as crypto-abolitionists and to elevate Van Buren as the natural choice for southern voters. Montgomery and the surrounding area of Alabama was a hotbed of southern Whiggery, and Colman published a Democratic paper in the Whig section of a Democratic state. Two issues of the paper remain to historians, much of which were devoted to campaign songs lampooning Harrison and boosting Van Buren, and lauding his ‘principles of ‘98.’ Colman believed strongly enough in the ideology and activism in New York that he named paper after the matches that lit Tammany Hall in October 1835. For Colman’s *The Loco-Foco*, Van Buren’s major credential was his *laissez-faire* policy record, including opposition to internal

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*

improvements projects by the general government, a national bank, protective tariffs, and an attitude of non-interference in southern slavery. Most importantly, however, Colman called Harrison a would-be aristocrat with contempt for common people. One article reported on the “Harrison Law,” sponsored by the General in the Indiana legislature in 1807, which enabled punishment “by whipping after the rate of twenty lashes for every eight dollars” whenever an offender was liable to pay a fine to the state. “Here, therefore,” Colman wrote, “we have DOLLARS as the currency for the *rich* man, and LASHES as the currency for the *poor* man...Be it known, therefore, that in the tables of Harrison currency...*Forty cents* of the RICH MAN’S MONEY is equal to *one lash* on the POOR MAN’S BACK.”<sup>119</sup>

The Montgomery *The Loco-Foco* offered poor whites an opportunity to explain slavery as a legal right recognized by the people’s government. Attacks on the institution, therefore, attacked the integrity of democratic, republican government in the South broadly. Colman warned readers of another danger posed by the Whiggery, the threat of politically-inspired slave rebellions. “We clearly see that the slaves of this State are strongly impressed with the belief that the success of General Harrison will secure their immediate emancipation,” Colman reported, “They cannot repress their feelings, and...look forward to the election of General Harrison, in whom they recognize a liberator.” *The Loco-Foco* even remarked on a gathering in Baltimore County, Maryland on 12 October, at which “a considerable number of negroes assembled with BANNERS, and marched up and down the public road, singing Tippecanoe songs, and using the most offensive language towards the members of the families and friends of Mr. Van Buren!” The black activists bore arms as well as banners, though whites confiscated the

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<sup>119</sup> “Facts for the People,” “Modern Whiggery and Federalism,” “The Present Campaign,” “Leading Whigs,” “Whig Policy,” “Van Buren Opposed to Internal Improvement,” “They Have Eyes to See, and See Not,” “Martin Van Buren,” “Democracy’s Flag,” “Whig Lament,” “The Democrat’s Answer,” “Rallying Song,” “Kiteing—A Tippecanoe Song,” and “Harrison Law,” Montgomery, Alabama *The Loco-Foco*, 29 September 1840, 1-4.

weapons “after a hard scuffle!” “We are no alarmists,” Colman assured readers, and he had never been one to scaremonger on the possibilities of slave revolt. Abolitionists and corporatist Whigs, however, were joining forces in national politics, a veritable “demon-like spirit” coursing through American life, uprooting societies and ignoring the traditional rights of citizens. Identifying the Whigs with examples of African American politicking enabled proslavery locofocos to advance a radical economic and decentralist agenda while protecting the core element of working class white support for slavery: racism.<sup>120</sup>

For *The Loco-Foco*, the campaign was another battle in the war between aristocracy and the republican citizen’s “Equal Rights,” and for Democrats gathering for dinner and politicking at the Talladega Battlefield on 14 October, 1840, the key phrase remained: “*Equal Rights to all, Exclusive Privileges to none.*” Democrats in Alabama invited women to sit in the audience of political events and condemned the Whigs’ increasingly clever uses of democratic campaign methods, messaging, and propagandizing to voters. “The great bankers,” one editorial exhorted readers, “the wealthy merchants, the lordly Aristocrats of the land, “appear before you with a log cabin, the emblem of poverty, as if they were poor, as if they ever lived in a log cabin.” Colman warned Democrats to avoid falling into the Whig trap—that they were actually Federalists adopting democratic political tactics. “*The same party, and some of the very same men, who in ’98 insulted and abused the...advocate of ‘Equal Rights,’ Thomas Jefferson,*” now attacked Loco-Foco Democrats in similar ways. Jeffersonians were called “*Jacobins, Democrats, Infidels,*” but forthright and virtuous republicans, North and South, should recall that “The Democratic party, professing the principles of ’98, and avowing the doctrines of ‘EQUAL

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<sup>120</sup> “The Storm is Approaching,” “The Black Flag,” “Why No Democrat Can Vote for William Henry Harrison,” “Line Creek Democratic Club,” and “The Abolition Society of Richmond, VA,” Montgomery Alabama *The Loco-Foco*, 3 November 1840, 1-4.

RIGHTS' to all...opposed to all MONOPOLIES, all 'EXCLUSIVE PRIVILEGES,'" consistently defended popular government. If the people would only do their duties, "The year 1840, like the year 1800, will be a remarkable epoch in the history of this Republic." If the Whigs won, corporations and wealthy would-be monopolists could use the levers of power to influence the public to exploit the people and usurp the rights and powers of freemen.<sup>121</sup>

The Democrats lost the presidential election of 1840 and the Whigs swept into control of the national government. Locofoco Democrats like Perez Colman or the filibuster-friendly border locos in Vermont once again did not abandon their ideas, their social lives, political alliances, all because of a series of poor election results. Colman himself was elected mayor of Montgomery from 1842 to 1846, and his cohort throughout the North likewise continued their activism, intellectual development, and cultural production. Yet, historians have generally ended their stories of locofocoism with the Equal Rights Party.<sup>122</sup> In fact, locofocoism only grew in importance and spread geographically over the decade after the Equal Rights Party's death. Democrats of all proclivities found angles and aspects of locofocoism intellectually appealing, politically powerful, or culturally impressive. The movement transcended politics and section, uniting locofocos through their perceived membership in the oppressed class of freemen republicans battling the forces of neo-feudal aristocracy, whatever the particular form that struggle took moment-to-moment. Loco-Young Americans explicitly sought to rid the world of British institutions, which they saw as fundamentally different than American institutions. While Britain represented the forces of Power—aristocracy, monarchy, corporations—the United States should represent the forces of Liberty—republicanism, democracy, and equality. At all times,

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, "Our Prospects," "Democrats of Alabama! To Your Posts!!"

<sup>122</sup> Mark Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

the Loco-Foco movement was a broad and diverse coalition, most of whom accepted the core principles discussed above, but many of whom picked and chose *a la carte* as their individual strategies and tactics demanded. In their interactions with non-locofocos in related movements (Young America, the Dorr War, Free Soil), a growing, nation-wide faction of radical democratic-republicans exercised tremendous influence on American life. As historian Edward Widmer states, “I am not arguing that every important new intellect of the 1830s and 1840s was an adolescent Locofoco hailing from New York. But to a degree I think unappreciated, a creative movement occurred that partook strongly of these elements.” John Stafford’s classic study *The Literary Criticism of Young America* states the connections quite clearly and confidently: “Politically the Young Americans were Locofocos.”<sup>123</sup>

Locofocoism characterized radically anti-corporate, anti-privilege, pro-republican activists from Vermont to Alabama, from the park meetings of New York City to the Brother Hunters’ torch-lit elections in the Ohio wilds throughout the late 1830s and well into the 1840s. The loco political coalition joined the effort to elect Polk after the Dorr War and Van Buren’s defeat at the 1844 nominating convention. With the rise of Polk, a generation of expansionist, racist, yet *bona fide* locofoco partisan Democrats like Samuel Tilden, Fernando Wood, and Franklin Pierce utilized locofoco activism and ideology in a new, modernist packaging to refashion the Democratic Party. The philosophy of locofocoism pervaded the Manifest Destinies imagined in minds as different from one another as Fourierite Albert Brisbane and hard-nosed realist James K. Polk. During the Mexican War, the militant, Polkite expansionists usurped the Young America moniker and the once-youthful Whitmans and O’Sullivans were increasingly relegated to ‘old-fogydom’ throughout the following decades. A new wing of a new, pragmatic

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<sup>123</sup> Widmer, *Young America*, 12; John Stafford, *The Literary Criticism of ‘Young America:’ A Study in the Relationship of Politics and Literature, 1837-1850*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 2.



and power-friendly Democracy steered the party through the Free Soil secession and into the murky politics of the 1850s. Locofocoism smoothed this transition by linking networks of activists and intellectuals throughout the 1840s and providing the political support necessary to empower the Douglasses (Young America II Democrats not at all connected to locofocoism) and Buchanans (only loosely connected with loco-associated events like the Dorr War) in the Democracy. Historian Yonatan Eyal's study of Young America focuses on the movement within the ranks of conservative Democrats and political figures in the 1850s empowered initially by locofoco activism during the mid-1840s. "Moving away from the agrarian roots of Andrew Jackson's original coalition," Eyal states, "Young America Democrats accepted the market revolution, loosened their interpretations of the Constitution, and adopted various reform causes." The aggressive Young American expansionists that propelled Stephen Douglas into stardom were radically different than the Young American Leggettians Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, but the content and course of locofocoism throughout the 1840s established both Young Americas. Rather than Widmer's sharply divided Young Americas, I suggest that the locofoco ideologues populating Young America I provided many of the radical ideas from which Young America II politicians picked and chose in exchange for moments of political support from a unified Democracy. Locofocos found, throughout the history of their movement, that they could successfully lead coalitions with Whigs over single issues (like battling Tammany in 1835-7 and advancing Free Soil from 1848 to 1852) and with Democrats when single issues were of less importance.<sup>124</sup>

Young America was born in the turmoil within the Democracy of 1830s New York City and the Loco-Foco movement constantly shaped it, from filibustering operations in Canada and

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<sup>124</sup> Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Movement and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-1861* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Widmer, *Young America*.

Rhode Island, to protestations against British imperialism from Ireland to Afghanistan. The historical vision of the Loco-Focos permeated the works of Young America and the concept of Manifest Destiny. The quote from Levi Slamm's *Daily Plebeian* which opens this chapter illustrates the radicalism of loco-Young American anti-British sentiment. Slamm's correspondent and, no doubt, the bulk of his readership unequivocally took the side of the Afghans against British imperialism. Another correspondent informed the *Daily Plebeian* readership of British activity in the Opium Wars and the spirit of Chinese resistance. The correspondent and Slamm both considered the Opium War a single battle in the global, historical war of Liberty vs. Power and considered the Chinese their brothers-in-arms against the British Leviathan. In the words of an anonymous correspondent:

The Chinese people and the Chinese government, alike, are most deadly hostile to everything *English*. They feel their power, and bend to the necessity, hence they will sign any sort of a treaty—willing on any terms to get their great ships of war and steamers out of their waters. The force of might only prevails, and whatever you may think we know not—but have made up our minds upon one point, which is, that *England has only begun the game in this Empire*, and before long all the rascals and gamblers in the world, who have no business in smuggling, or the slave trade, or piracy, will be coming this way to assist her in conquering one of the greatest, and we believe, the happiest nation on earth, this same China...

Besides the inalienable right of soil, what is to be considered safe so long as a flag of the despoiler flies on the Chinese island of Hong Kong?—Why may not the same some day be seen on Nantucket, or upon the top of our own Hempstead Hall? And then Nantucket or Long Island is British ground. But to return to from the heroics.—John Bull has an awful day of retribution to look to *when the world wakes up*.<sup>125</sup>

Refusing to limit their critique to the more obvious examples of imperial duplicity in Afghanistan, Slamm's locofocos attacked the extension of British power in China, the Sandwich Islands, Ireland, Oregon and Texas, and they continued to agitate for American annexation of the

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<sup>125</sup> "Correspondence of the Plebeian," *Daily Plebeian*, 26 May 1843, 2.

Canadas. Even the Suffragist struggle of the Rhode Island Dorrites was cast as a battle against the remnants of British tyranny.<sup>126</sup>

### Mobilizing the Democracy: Locofocoism in the Rhode Island “Dorr War”

“They *feel* that they are sleeping on the top of a volcano. They hope to chain it down. They have just doubled their patrol, and are daily brushing their arms. Call that safety? They can have none by oppression. *A spirit now slumbering, but just ready to be awakened*, will take *sweet* vengeance on the enormities it has suffered...It will arise in giant strength, and hurl back its fetters, and wind aristocracy in the grave-clothes prepared for itself. Remember Haman’s gallows...I can assure them it is coming...They have taken, by force, the guns of the people, but they cannot take the armor of right. Those who fight in a right cause are not unaided. *Some helping France, with a becoming fellow-feeling*, will lend her aid to justice and human right. Let usurpers tremble.”

--“From A Rhode Islander,” New York *Daily Plebeian*, 3 August, 1842 (emphasis added)

The Rhode Island of 1842, the height of the “Dorr War,” had not been quite so roguish since the days of Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams. Thomas W. Dorr (styled “The People’s Governor”) threatened to instigate civil war throughout New England, targeting the famous Charter issued by King Charles II in 1663 and widely recognized as of world historical significance. Rhode Islanders exalted the charter as a political relic, venerated much like the Declaration of Independence or Constitution. The Charter and State of Rhode Island protected the liberal foundations of American life so well that George Bancroft declared, “Nowhere in the

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<sup>126</sup> “British Honor at Cabul,” *Daily Plebeian* 25 February, 1843; [Untitled Correspondence] *Daily Plebeian*, 26 May, 1843; “British Usurpation of the Sandwich Islands” and “Justice! Justice to Ireland,” *Daily Plebeian*, 8 June, 1843; “The Sandwich Island” and “Ireland and her Wrongs” *Daily Plebeian*, 12 June 1843; “Oregon Territory,” *Daily Plebeian*, 9 June 1843; “Maintaining the Great Principle,” report of Maine legislature’s “Report on Rhode Island Affairs, State of Maine,” 3 March 1843. *Daily Plebeian* Widmer does not explore the extent to which locofocoism impacted the Dorr War, nor does he much explore the number of Dorrite activists who should be included in the ranks of Young America. While he notes the close personal and professional ties between Thomas W. Dorr and John L. O’Sullivan, he does not mention, for instance, the important Young American historians, Dorrites, and locofocos Catharine Read Williams and Frances Greene (see below). Historians’ failure to write histories of *locofocoism* as something far beyond the Equal Rights Party has prevented them from explaining the long-term causes underlying a long series of better-known movements and moments.

world have life, LIBERTY, and property been safer than in Rhode Island.” Yet by 1841, the state hardly qualified as *republican form of government* at all and Bancroft, (himself a locofoco Democrat and Young American) became an active *opponent* of the Charter.<sup>127</sup>

The Rhode Island historian Patrick Conley described the state as a clear example of “democracy in decline.” The state’s founding principles, embodied in the historical visage of Roger Williams, and laws, based on the hallowed Charter, were among the most liberal the world had seen in the colonial period. In 1655, as much as 90% of the white males in Warwick were eligible to vote. By 1725-1776 the white males qualified for Freeman status (including voting rights) declined to about 75%. Conley states that “the internal political and constitutional alterations produced by the Revolution were minimal,” and little long-term social change occurred before the growth of industry. Most importantly, Rhode Island freemen maintained the royal Charter of Charles II. This large corps of freemen, who enjoyed what was likely the freest government on the planet, resoundingly rejected the national Constitution in the initial referendum (237 for, 2,708 against) and their state was the sole holdout ex-colony. Rhode Islanders refused to ratify the Constitution until Providence threatened secession from the state in 1791. Throughout the 1790s, entrepreneurs and capitalists introduced industrialization to North America (in Rhode Island), and a large, landless urban population developed, notably of recent Irish immigrants, many of whom were no doubt familiar with anti-British ideas and sentiments. Conley’s data demonstrate that “expanding” towns overwhelmingly supported constitutional

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<sup>127</sup> Quoted in “The Rhode Island Clam-Bake.” *The Daily Atlas* (Boston, Massachusetts), Aug. 9 1842. Far and away, the most important works dealing with the Dorr War are Patrick T. Conley, *Democracy in Decline: Rhode Island’s Constitutional Development, 1776-1841*, (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1977); Marvin Gettleman, *The Dorr Rebellion: A Study in American Radicalism, 1833-1849*, (New York: Random House, 1973); George Dennison, *The Dorr War: Republicanism on Trial, 1831-1861*, (Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1976). See also David Grimstead, “Chapter Seven: The Mobs of the Second Party System,” in *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). See also: Peter J. Coleman, *The Transformation of Rhode Island, 1790-1860*, (Providence: Brown University Press), 1963;

reform as early as 1824, with “static” and “declining” towns opposed. By 1829 there were roughly 8,400 Freemen and 12,365 non-Freeman white males in Rhode Island. “Remnants of urban Federalist aristocracy and the old Jeffersonian yeomanry,” Conley argues, “joined in an incongruous alliance to prevent the enfranchisement of the new breed of men which the changing economy of early nineteenth-century Rhode Island had spawned.”<sup>128</sup>

The decline of democracy quickened as industrialism advanced and by 1841, radical locofocos and Young Americans like George Bancroft, Levi Slamm, John L. O’Sullivan, and his childhood friend Thomas W. Dorr moved against the British charter of Rhode Island. Like his fellow Young American locos, Dorr was an early and vigorous advocate of global republicanism. He “exulted over the July Revolution of 1830, deplored Russia’s suppression of the Poles, and urged parliamentary reform and suffrage extension in England.” Like Abram D. Smith, Dorr was an early convert to locofocoism, though this point is little-known and less emphasized in histories of the Dorr Rebellion. As early as 1833, his radical vision included anti-corporate banking reform, prison and education reforms, constitutional reform in Rhode Island, and—several years later—abolition and equal rights for African Americans. Throughout the 1830s, Dorr was an anti-Jackson Whig, though as Conley claims, a critical factor “in Dorr’s conversion to the Democracy appears to have been the image that party projected as a result of the development within the New York Democratic organization of the Locofoco or Equal Rights faction...which Dorr strongly supported.” The mails controversy of 1835 prompted Dorr’s full conversion to abolitionism. Like Leggett, he saw the Slave Power and Money Power as not

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<sup>128</sup> Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, “Chapter 8: The First Convention” and “Chapter 9: Free Suffrage,” 184-235. See especially Table 6, 211. The example of Rhode Island is easily contrasted with the examples of other state constitutional conventions and new constitutions that proliferated throughout the era. It was the sole example of constitutional change accompanied by a high probability of violence. For broad coverage of the constitutional conventions of the period, see Merrill Peterson, ed. *Democracy, Liberty, and Property: The State Constitutional Conventions of the 1820s*, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2010 (First printed: 1966).

unconnected. Both utilized artificial rights, granted purely by the State and unrecognized by the laws of nature. In September 1839, Levi Slamm's New York *Democratic Republican New Era* advocated a new state constitution in Rhode Island. Slamm argued that the Constitution guaranteed republican forms of government in the states, and Rhode Island no longer qualified as a republic. The "corporate charter" of King Charles II, therefore, should be removed. Dorr, notes historian Erik Chaput, "was an ardent believer in the paper's radical agenda."<sup>129</sup>

The New York Loco-Foco movement prompted Dorr's conversion to the Democracy and his activist career took flight. In September 1840, Dorr was chosen as leader of the Rhode Island Democratic Party and he took the opportunity to refocus on "his fear of the Money Power." Dorr used his influence to support Van Buren and oppose Harrison and Clay's "American System" during the 1840 campaign. As part of his ongoing internal Rhode Island political war against the freeholder's bloc of both Democrats and Whigs, Dorr and "a conglomeration of urban Whigs, reform-minded Democrats, and radical labor leaders" founded the Rhode Island Suffrage Association on 27 March 1840. By late Summer 1841, the Suffragist Association was strong enough to call for the selection of delegates to a People's Convention to draft a new state constitution. Voters chose delegates "on the basis of universal male suffrage at meetings in every town in the state," on 28 August 1841, and the Association encouraged all 21-year old residents of the state to attend the convention. The People's Convention met in October 1841 and crafted a new constitution for Rhode Island on the basis of universal white male suffrage. Race remained the sharpest dividing line at the People's Convention, with delegates like Dorr

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<sup>129</sup> Erik Chaput, *The People's Martyr: Thomas Wilson Dorr and His 1842 Rhode Island Rebellion*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2013), 5, 47, 51-2. For information on Bancroft in particular, see: Lilian Handlin, *George Bancroft, The Intellectual as Democrat*, (New York: Harper & Row), 1984 and Anonymous, "The Merits of Thomas W. Dorr and George Bancroft, as They are Politically Connected," Second Edition, (Boston: John H. Eastburn), 1844; Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 269-289.

opposed to inserting the word “white,” and the majority of suffragists in favor (46 to 18). The People’s Constitution officially affirmed the authority of the People to change their constitution at will, reapportioned the state to properly represent Providence, provided for the annual election of judges, a more simplified process of amendment, ensured secret balloting, provided for state education, a bill of rights, and the authorities of juries in fact and law. In accordance with mainstream locofoco opinions on corporations, the People’s Constitution affirmed the legislature’s right to create, maintain, alter, renew, or abolish any chartered corporations upon a two-thirds vote. Any bills relating to banking corporations, however, must be submitted to the electorate for a majority vote.<sup>130</sup>

The conservative landholders in the Rhode Island Assembly offered their own draft constitution to the state legislature in November 1841 and throughout the Winter the rival factions promoted their respective documents in the popular press. The Landholder’s Constitution retained landholding requirements, introduced “new restrictions on naturalized citizens, which would require them to live in the state for three years in addition to the freehold requirement,” and did provide for significant reapportionment. Through the *New Age and Constitutional Advocate*, the Suffrage Association and antislavery activists organized a vote on the constitution throughout the state for 27-29 December 1841. Voters overwhelmingly approved the People’s Constitution, 13,944 in favor and a meager 52 opposed. Most of the support come from the industrialized north of the state and the vote even included a majority of freeholders (4,960 of about 8,000 landholders). Dorr attended the next Landholders Convention

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<sup>130</sup> Chaput, *The People’s Martyr*, 47, 51-2, 58-61; “Proposed Constitution of the State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, as Finally Adopted by the People’s Convention, Assembled in Providence, on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of November, 1841,” Article IX “General Provisions,” Sections 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, State of Rhode Island Secretary of State Digital Archives, <http://sos.ri.gov/archon/?p=digitallibrary/digitalcontent&id=12>, Accessed: 23 December 2015.

as a delegate in February 1842, where he “attempted to convince the delegates to disband and recognize the People’s Constitution,” to no avail. The Convention decided instead to craft a new document designed to win moderate suffragist support. The Landholders new Constitution universalized suffrage for native-born white males, while retaining the landholding requirement (and a new three-year residency requirement) for naturalized citizens. The General Assembly also permitted voters qualified by the proposed constitution to vote for its adoption. At the 21-23 March 1842 elections, however, the Landholder’s Constitution lost by a vote of 8,689 to 8,013, a “slim margin...made possible only by the two-thirds majority in Providence and the surrounding mill villages--the strongest voting blocks for the Suffragist Association.” Over 8,000 Dorrites either abstained from the vote or were excluded by the voting qualifications.<sup>131</sup>

The People’s Constitution called for elections in April 1842, and as the date quickly approached, “Rhode Island was dividing into armed camps.” On 18 April, Dorr received 6,604 votes for governor--a significant plunge of support from the December 1841 vote for the People’s Constitution. Dorr claimed a majority of voters supported the People’s Charter and their newly-elected governor. Samuel Ward King, elected governor under the Charter, refused to bow to the pretenders, and a quasi-military standoff resulted. The Dorrites attempted an assault on a state arsenal in Providence on 19 May 1842, repulsed by state troops. After a series of retreats and setbacks, Dorr fled Rhode Island and his rebellion evaporated. In September 1842, Dorr was safely in exile with a \$5,000 bounty for his capture. The King government decided the time for negotiations from a position of strength had arrived and called yet another constitutional convention. The resultant constitution rejected the Dorrite revolutionary principle but allowed for suffrage reform liberal enough to incur wide support. The Dorr War acted as a catalyst,

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-78, 85.



spreading locofocoism throughout the radical wings of the Democratic and, to a lesser extent, Whig parties. Dorr self-identified as “numbered among those...of the school of States Rights and Equal Rights, including universal suffrage to be exercised by all American citizens.” Anti-bank, anti-corporation, generally anti-state, and sharing the loco class and historical theories, the Dorrists were locofocos from the Whig direction while the New Yorkers were locos from the Democratic direction. The New York locos pledged military support for the Dorr War and harbored Dorr while in exile. In support of Dorr, radicals throughout the region, but clustered in the major cities, formed tight-knit activist networks that coordinated activities and worked toward common revolutionary goals. United by their radicalism and the language and worldview of the loco class theory, these locofoco activist-organizers perceived the looming war as a timeless, boundless class war, to be decided by political means first, and revolutionary means as a last resort. Philadelphia, New York, Providence, and Boston activists linked together in a radical network across which flowed monetary support, intellectual exchange, thousands of militiamen ready to fire upon federal armies for the loco cause, and all the fresh fish, mussels, and clams you could eat.<sup>132</sup>

While Leggett and the Loco-Foco Party shook New York politics, the Rhode Island Whig Party to which Dorr belonged stubbornly resisted constitutional reform. “The Whigs are not true to their friends,” Charles Randell vented to Dorr. “Our folks say, that it is of no use for them to come out & that they do not receive that treatment from their own party that they think they deserve, that they are defeated, when any project is proposed for their benefit, and that too by their own party.” The suffragists held partisan politics in disgust and regularly identified with

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<sup>132</sup> Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 281, 305; Chaput, *The People’s Martyr*, 86, 94; Dennison, *The Dorr War*; Gettleman, *The Dorr Rebellion*; David Grimstead, “Chapter Seven: The Mobs of the Second Party System,” in *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1998, 199-217.

the antinomian heritage of Roger Williams and the locofoco radicalism of the New York Democracy. “What we want now,” Randell exclaimed to Dorr, “is, men who will act, and are not afraid to grow their Constitutional sentiments...The people want stirring up.” John L. O’Sullivan, a regular correspondent and boyhood friend who, along with the Sedgwick clan, spent childhood summers with Dorr in western Massachusetts, shared his friends’ frustrations with the public. O’Sullivan asked after Dorr’s health in his letters and solicited writing from him for the *Democratic Review*, saying “how valuable would be any contributions...from such a pen as I know yours to be.” He then complained heartily about his early colleagues, long before Young America gelled in the pages of the *Review* and before the magazine moved publication from Washington to New York City: “they are such a stupid people here that we never get a line...from them, but have to furnish everything from our own pen—rather a severe drain upon such shallow fountains.” Charles Peckham, another Rhode Island Dorr-ite, complained about the partisan smear tactic of demagogically branding the Dorr-ites as black suffragists, a curse upon the entire house for many racist northern voters. “I feel indignant at the knavery of one part, and the stupidity of the other,” Peckham lamented. From the earliest days of his movement, however, Dorr and his closest allies had hazy dreams of converting the mainstream to their cause through successful electoral politicking.<sup>133</sup>

Dorr-ites use the parties as mere vehicles for the exploitation of state power to affect political change. Even when the fairly locofoco Martin Van Buren was elected president, the Dorr-ites could find no solace with the Democrats. Charles Randall lamented of the electorate,

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.; Metcalf Marsh to Dorr, 24 April 1835, Dorr Correspondence; Charles Randell to Dorr, 18 August 1835, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to George Bancroft, November 25 1835, Dorr Correspondence; Charles Randell to Dorr, 18 August 1835, Dorr Correspondence; Charles Randell to Dorr, 11 November 1835, Dorr Correspondence; Bill from Miller & Paine’s printer shop to Dorr, 12 August 1835, Dorr Correspondence; John L. O’Sullivan to Dorr, 13 January 1836, 16 July 1837, Dorr Correspondence; Charles B. Peckham to Dorr, 11 March 1836, Dorr Correspondence; Metcalf Marsh to Dorr, 14 March 1836, Dorr Correspondence.

“They all are so much attached to the Whig or Van Buren parties that it is next to impossible to hold them in these exciting times.” Randall concluded that “The V.B. party alias Custom House party, are not in very good humor; many of those who voted for V.B. will now go for the Whig ticket.” He indicated that both a sizable contingent of disaffected Democrats and many Whig Dorrites supported the locofoco Van Buren but remained fluid within the system of partisan identification. Suffragist Charles Tilly suggested that the “Constitutionalists” of Rhode Island remain stridently anti-Democratic and proposed a method contemporaneously being tested by the New York Equal Rights Party. He suggested overlapping nominations with the Dorrites and Whigs to defeat Democratic candidates while advancing suffragist ideology and politicians.<sup>134</sup>

Antislavery Dorrites like Charles Peckham, however, refused to even run for office lest they serve as political punching bags for both parties and hurt the larger movement. Peckham expressed his “utter abhorrence of Negro slavery,” and declared himself firmly “in favor of the Free Discussion of the whole matter however much the despot’s peace may be disturbed. I have discovered nothing in Historic or Philosophic Truth unfavorable to immediate emancipation, and in so far as it can be brought about by moral means, my whole heart and soul are devoted.” In an 1837 response to a series of questions from the Rhode Island State Antislavery Society, Dorr presented an antislavery platform, including opposition to the Gag Rule, advocating abolition in the District of Columbia, and declaring that “both philanthropy + patriotism demand of every free citizen the interposition of a decided + prompt negative” on the annexation of Texas, which would assuredly be a slave state. Dorr advocated immediatism and declared, “I believe that a candid investigation of American Slavery in all its nature and bearings will satisfy most men that it ought to come to an end; and, further, that there is no more danger in bringing it to an end

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<sup>134</sup> Charles Randall to Dorr, 12 July 1837, Dorr Correspondence; Charles Tilly to Dorr, 17 January & 15 August 1837, Dorr Correspondence.

immediately, than there is in terminating any other act or system of injustice.” The slave trade in Washington “exhibits nearly the same horrors as the foreign trade, which has been made piracy at law, as it has always been in fact.” He wrote to James G. Birney in 1836 that abolition “rests upon the eternal principles of Truth, justice + humanity.” In ideology, if not in politicking, Dorr approached the Leggettian purists.<sup>135</sup>

From the earliest, however, Dorr considered these most radical elements of his movement political impediments. He thought that antislavery politics was best left to the transcendentalists and poetic dreamers of literary Young America. With Leggett’s martyrdom assuredly at the back of his mind, Dorr feared that the larger cause would be ground under the wheel of racism. Declining a position with the American Anti-Slavery Society, Dorr assured Birney that abolitionism was his creed and “From the support of that cause I shall not be deterred by a fear of personal consequences; but I believe I can serve it best where I am, and that by acceptance of the Trust which is now tendered to me I should not strengthen myself against the opposition with which we have here to contend.” Many supporters among the populace were far from Dorr’s level of anti-racist egalitarianism. “And why should we undertake to settle the question of slavery?” asked suffragist and Dorrite C. W. Needham, who then rather flatly answered himself: “We have nothing to do with it.”<sup>136</sup>

Dorr and most of his supporters originally fell into the Whig coalition of anti-Jackson men. Asahel Johnson, a supporter and contributor of five dollars, warned Dorr in June of 1837 that “If there be anything that looks like Jacksonism in your nomination, every man who voted last April for the Constitutional ticket will no [sic] support it...[and] for God’s sake, set me

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<sup>135</sup> Charles Peckham to Dorr, 11 April 1836, Dorr Correspondence; RI State Antislavery Society Corresponding Sec. M. Chace to Dorr, 18 July 1837, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to RI State Antislavery Society Corresponding Sec. M. Chace, 25 July 1837, Dorr Correspondence.

<sup>136</sup> Dorr to James G. Birney, Corresp. Sec. of American Anti-Slavery Society, 26 Dec. 1837, Dorr Correspondence; C. W. Needham to Dorr, 21 March 1836, Dorr Correspondence.

ashore from a Jackson man.” Gradually gravitating toward the Democrats, the suffragists combined a whiggish distaste for executive power, partisanship, and demagoguery with locofoco platform. Charles Greene forecast the official suffragist schism from the Rhode Island Whiggery in 1839, and Dorr wrote to Boston’s resident locofoco intellectual, Orestes Brownson, that “The thought of a ‘locofoco’ speaker surrounded by a ‘whig’ audience, who listen to facts + reason...is not easily endured by our opponents.” By 1840 Dorr clearly considered the Whiggery the primary enemies of reform in Rhode Island. He explained his reasoning to political lynchpin and Postmaster General Amos Kendall: the Whigs had promised to roll back “all the mischief of the locofocos, and disable them from doing any more for a long period.” Van Buren’s presidency signaled the ascendancy of locofocoism in the Democracy, and the Whigs began to identify the whole party with the radicals who steered it from the wings. Whigs adopted “Locofoco” as a blanket insult to all Democrats, indicting the party for tolerating fanatics. Finishing Dorr’s list of complaints against Whiggery was a firm distaste for Clay’s American System and its interventionism. He finally decided that the Democratic Party must serve as his electoral vehicle for adopting a People’s Constitution, and the locofoco wing must be his base. The impending rebellion whipped the spirit of “Locofoco Romanticism” into the winds, and Young America found itself in the cultural and intellectual climate that followed.<sup>137</sup>

By the spring of 1842, Samuel Ward King was sworn in as governor of Rhode Island and the Dorrites were outraged. Intent on maintaining the integrity of the royal charter, King’s government threatened the Dorrites with treason charges and militancy escalated. The so-called “Algerine Acts,” which declared any support of and participation in the People’s Government treasonous, were “meant...merely to frighten the common sort of folks!” Resident of nearby

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<sup>137</sup>Asahel Johnson to Dorr, 28 April 1837, Dorr Correspondence; Charles Green to Dorr, 27 November 1839, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to O.A. Brownson, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Amos Kendall, 18 September 1840, Dorr Correspondence; J.L. O’Sullivan to Dorr, 9 August 1841, Dorr Correspondence.

Fall River, Massachusetts, Louis Lapham, assured Dorr that “If the ‘Old Charter’ party should be so insane as to attempt to carry the ‘Algerine Law’ into operation, put me down as a volunteer hunter in favor of the People’s Constitution, ready at 30 minutes warning to emigrate to my native state *with 300 recruits!*” “Come what may,” Lapham continued, “my life is at the service of my brethren in Rhode Island.” He stated he would not have supported the People’s Constitution before because “it did not secure to colored people the same rights that it does to others,” but it was a dramatic advance over the “Old Charter.” He implored Dorr, “If a physical contest should unhappily take place, you will feel no delicacy in advising one of such assistance as may be in the power of many here to give; and which will be readily and voluntarily rendered.” Lapham’s proposed regiment was the first trickle in a coming flood of locofoco filibusters targeting the Algerine state.<sup>138</sup>

It was soon rumored that President John Tyler, recently ejected from the Whig Party and widely despised by Democrats, planned to dispatch federal troops to support Governor King if necessary. Accordingly, Thomas Dorr began vigorous correspondence with top members of the national Democracy, especially those inclined toward the locos. His goal was to amass support in Washington to force changes in the executive’s hand, perhaps through legislation recognizing the Dorr government. He received support from: Levi Woodbury, New Hampshire Senator and former Secretary of the Navy under Jackson and Secretary of the Treasury under Van Buren; William Allen, Democratic Senator from Ohio, soon to become a leading Young American expansionist; Silas Wright, Senator from New York and locofoco fellow-traveler who may have become president in 1848 if not for his untimely death; and Thomas Hart Benton, called “Old Bullion” for his staunch support of locofoco-oriented hard money policy. Wright provided Dorr

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<sup>138</sup> Dorr to Aaron White, 4 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Louis Lapham to Dorr, 16 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence.

with weak moral support, stating that “You are raising a question in Rhode Island of the most delicate character and deepest importance to the institutions of our country.” Benton assured Dorr that when the critical moment came, Tyler would blink and there would be no civil war. He wryly intimated opposition to violence from either side, however: “This is not the age, nor the country, in which to settle political questions by the sword.” News of Tyler’s supposed intent to use the army to enforce what many considered a non-republican (and therefore unconstitutional) state charter sparked the beginnings of a grassroots locofoco networking revolution. Under threat of federal force, the locofoco ranks coalesced and swelled.<sup>139</sup>

The support received from New York City and the locofoco holdouts in Tammany was beyond anything Dorr imagined. Gotham proved the “helping France with a becoming fellow-feeling” Rhode Islanders so desperately sought. While attempting to keep all plans, pledges, and communications between the New York radicals and Dorr strictly *secret* from the Democratic Party, New York and Providence activists established a regular exchange of information. New York locofoco William Balch pledged military support from among the city’s workingmen as early as 19 April, 1842. “Think you,” asked Allen Sniffen rhetorically, “that we can stand idly by and see our friends and colabourers in the cause of Justice and Equal Rights struck down and tramped upon by the vile aristocracy that so long have lorded it over their fellow Men. Never—NO—Never[!]” Sniffen, who once conspired in the Military and Civic Hotel to shatter Tammany’s hold on the Democracy, informed Dorr that he, too, would provide regiments of locofoco workingmen from New York and would set about raising them to arms immediately.

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<sup>139</sup> Dorr to Levi Woodbury, 13 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Levi Woodbury to Dorr, 15 & 17 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to William Allen, 14 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence; William Allen to Dorr, 15 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Silas Wright to Dorr, 16 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence; T. H. Benton to Dorr, 16 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Eyal, *Young America*, 84-86.

Perhaps more importantly, he vowed to champion the cause openly before Tammany Hall.<sup>140</sup>

Events in Rhode Island, however, quickly outpaced raising the militarized Loco-Foco standard.

Faced with a sizable resistance, Governor King declared martial law in late April 1842 and the Dorrites prepared to assault various state buildings. The legislature officially requested federal support on 4 May and President Tyler, while reserving the use of soldiers, sent military advisors to Rhode Island. The weak display of commitment encouraged Dorr's supporters, though he decided to flee what seemed like imminent capture by far superior Charter forces. He touched down in New York City the morning of 8 May. He was greeted and "saluted by two police-officers, who had found me out through someone on board, and who came forward to pay their respects to me as a friend of the People's Cause, in a model salutation very much out of their usual course." "In the name of god," John Harris asked Dorr on 9 May, "will Congress allow the President to send troops to instigate a civil war? Are there no voices in either house that can...stay the hand of the destroyer?" New York City may have to ensure the suffragist cause in Rhode Island: "I hope you arranged matters in New York so that we can depend upon something substantial from there in case of difficulty."<sup>141</sup>

New York inspired Dorr that his cause would triumph after all. While in the heart of locodom, Dorr stayed with its foremost public representative, Levi Slamm. On 12 May, he wrote Aaron White that "The movement of the democracy here and in other places, and the general [explosion] of public sentiment in our favor have alarmed the administration with the fear of an American War of the People against the Government, and they begin to pause."

Rhode Island may be tiny and its people weak on their own, but a struggle built around class

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<sup>140</sup> William Balch to Dorr, 19 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Allen Sniffen to Dorr, 20 April 1842, Dorr Correspondence.

<sup>141</sup> Dorr to Bradford Allen, 8 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; John Harris to Dorr, 9 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence.



divisions could provide the force necessary to put him in the governor's mansion: "Our hopes must rely on the aid + strength of the People of [New York City]...I hope before I leave this city to obtain assurances of 1000 volunteers, to act in case a government soldier shall put his foot on our soil, to put down the People." He continued, in "Loco-Romantic" fashion, "I have been received everywhere with a truly cordial spirit. *There is a real heart and soul in democracy*; and never [were] they more truly manifested than now."<sup>142</sup>

The freshly-optimistic Dorr even expected some aid from Washington. Tyler was "a very good natured and weak man, unequal to his situation," subject to advisors. Dorr predicted to Aaron White that "We have the moral + intellectual weight of Congress on our side, and perhaps the numerical weight, after a full + fair discussion." Still pessimistic about partisan machinations, he concluded, "but this I will not positively expect." A national coalition of locos seemed impossible when so many universalist-abolitionists represented the movement. Slavery cleanly divided southern and Dorrite interests. Dorr wrote to Walter Burges that "The democrats in Congress and some of the Whigs are with us; and after a full discussion...we should stand a tolerable chance in both Houses. Some of the Southern members (for instance Cuthbert [(D), GA] of the Senate) are with the People of Rhode Island, but not with all People in asserting a principle, which might be construed to take in the Southern blacks, and to aid the abolitionists." Philosophically and practically, southern politicians could not be counted upon to support the suffragists. The Democracy of New York and the Dorr warriors could make no progress in Washington, but they continued to inspire budding Young Americans and New York Loco-Focos. The Locofocos, among them Alexander Ming Jr., now sporting himself a Colonel of the

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<sup>142</sup> Chaput, *The People's Martyr*, 151; Dorr to Aaron White, 12 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence. Emphasis added.

New York State Artillery, urged Dorr to action. Ming and Levi Slamm promised Dorr “Several military companies of this city” to return with him to Providence.<sup>143</sup>

Dorr’s heady eagerness to pursue the people’s cause quickly outpaced his ability to manage it effectively. He received no support from within the Tyler administration, which considered suffragism “a tremendous Abolition Plot.” Despite this resistance from the national government, New York locofocos and Young Americans wanted their city to “Come up—come up—come up...[and] take her noble stand in this mighty crisis. It may give a new direction to the history of the world.” In New York City, a park meeting of locofocos elected emissaries to Rhode Island that would travel with Dorr, choosing “Mr. Slamm, with several others.” After arriving in Providence, “Some accounts say they went to Woonsocket. They are naturally looked upon with suspicion, and their presence is exceedingly offensive.” Dorr charged ahead with his own small band, before receiving any significant military aid from New York and despite the potential of federal interference. The People’s Governor ordered the seizure of the state arsenal on 19 May. The assault failed and Dorr’s men fled to Woonsocket. On 21 May, 1842, “Mr. *Slamm* was at Woonsocket,” and Thomas W. Dorr addressed his soldiers and supporters, noting especially that a righteous cause cannot be beaten by arms. “I have kept steadily in view the great principle of American Democracy,” Dorr stated, “the right of the majority of the whole people to change their form of government, without the permission or consent of existing authorities.” The conservative Providence *Chronicle* feared “that large bodies of men from New

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<sup>143</sup> Dorr to Aaron White, 21 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Walter Burges, Esq., 12 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; For the fullest discussion of the Southern reaction to the Dorr War yet published, see Chaput, “3. The Abolitionists and the People’s Constitution,” “4. Peacefully If We Can, Forcibly If We Must,” and “6. An Abolitionist Plot,” in *The People’s Martyr*; Dorr to Walter Burges, Esq., 12 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Alexander Ming, Jr. Col. New York State Artillery to Dorr, 13 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence.

York and Connecticut will associate themselves with these forces at Woonsocket, and render all the aid they can bring to carry out the purposes of Mr. Dorr, whatever they may be.”<sup>144</sup>

The Dorr War fueled an outpouring of locofocos and fellow travelers at meeting places throughout the northern states even as events in Rhode Island escalated in favor of the Charter. Philadelphia locofocos representing “the Republican Citizens of the City + County of Philadelphia,” assured Dorr of their support. The Philadelphians argued that Dorrites fought “for the diffusion of liberty, and the maintenance of their own rights,” and that “the stout hearts and strong arms of the true hearted Yeomanry of the country, are with them...*in a contest opposed to a hired soldiery and pampered aristocracy.*” Town hall meetings swept across Connecticut in response to potential federal military action in Rhode Island. Colonel William Mitchell of Boston advised Dorr, “Fear not the U.S. troops. One gun fired from them, would be worth a thousand men to you.” “I have just returned home from one of the most enthusiastic meetings I ever attended,” Daniel Jackson reported from New York City on 14 May 1842, “more than 8000 were present and attentive listeners to the proceedings, and a more respectable class of men never met in front of the City Hall.” Dorr later reported to Aaron White that “A death in every family would not produce the gloom which is felt by every democrat here. They are wounded to the heart by the affairs in Rhode Island.” Support in New York was so formidable, that though “King has sent his requisitions to several states for my arrest,” Dorr stated, and “Seward [Governor of New York] has issued his order for my capture, it cannot be enacted but by stratagem, such is the indignation of the democracy here.” The strength and fervor of the loco-

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<sup>144</sup> “[Untitled],” *Berkshire County Whig*, 26 May 1842; “[Untitled],” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 May 1842; Aaron White to Dorr, 5 June 1842, Dorr Correspondence; “An Address from ‘Ex-Gov.’ Dorr,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, 31 May, 1842; “Rhode Island,” [sic] *Barre Gazette*, 3 June 1842.

Dorrites was impressive and intimidating: “My friends say that they will not permit the Algerines to remove me. It can only be done by stealth.”<sup>145</sup>

Like the networks of radical revolutionaries generations before and the New Yorkers of 1835, the locofoco Dorrites plotted their revolution in secret. The extremely hostile and conservative Boston *Daily Atlas* reported from Providence on 4 June 1842: “Dorr...is concealed in New York, where several meetings have been recently held, and whence he holds constant communication with his fellow traitors in this State.” J. S. Harris of Providence reported to Dorr on 12 June that “Our friends” in Boston were holding regular Dorrite meetings in secret, most often in breweries and Christian meeting-houses. Scrawled in the folded corner of his letter to Dorr, in the tiniest of print, Harris states that “There is a secret meeting held today at Clayville in Situate. Many of our friends have gone out...Indeed, these secret meetings are being held all over the land of the state in order to have a thorough understanding for whatever may take place hereafter.” Harris said “there are now three or four volunteer suffrage companies organizing in the City—silently but thoroughly. In the first ward they began last night + in one house between 30 + 40 signed to become soldiers.” “In Woonsocket [RI] yesterday,” he continued, “there was, as I learn, quite a military parade—some six to ten companies met there—there or from from[sic] Massachusetts.” Harris sought social revolution of class against class—republicans radicals claiming a natural right to revolution and self-government battling an aristocracy protecting the predatory state. “Will the People of these free United States,” Harris asked, “sit quietly and see + hear of such proceedings as these, *without one great struggle* to reestablish personal rights?”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Samuel Hart, et. al. to Dorr, 14 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Samuel Wales to Dorr, 18 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Col. William Mitchell to Dorr, 21 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Aaron White, 27 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Aaron White, 1 June 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Daniel Jackson to Dorr, 14 May 1842; “Requisition of the Governor,” Boston *Daily Atlas*, 31 May 1842.

<sup>146</sup> “Rhode Island,” Boston *Daily Atlas*, 6 June 1842; J.S. Harris to Dorr, 12 June 1842, Dorr Correspondence; J.S. Harris to Dorr, 2 June 1842, Dorr Correspondence. Emphasis added.

On 27 June, 1842, the Philadelphia *North American* reported that Rhode Islanders were decidedly “*Still for War!*” Proof positive were the five hundred men and six cannons supposedly assembled at Chepachet, Rhode Island. “It is stated that Dorr left Norwich late on Thursday night, in a private carriage, it was supposed for Chepachet, and that the insurgents were entrenching themselves at Chepachet.” The Franklin Bank of that town moved its stock across the Connecticut border for safe-keeping. Major Auguste Davezac, “who was an aid to Gen. Jackson at New Orleans, and is now a representative from New York in the State Legislature, passed through Providence on Wednesday, to join the Insurgents at Chepachet, to take command of them.” The atmosphere was extremely tense and “In anticipation of the effort to be made by the Dorr party to effect a forcible revolution, all the uniformed companies of Providence were under arms.” The militia was acting under the knowledge that “recruits are actually raising in New York for the service of Dorr in his work of treason.” However, when actually and finally confronted with state militia at Acote’s Hill, Chepachet, Dorr’s army crumbled and fled. “The controversy,” editorialized the New Hampshire *Sentinel*, “is now, evidently, not between the people of Rhode Island, but between the State and Levi D. Slamm and other desperate *radical* and *destructive* LOCO FOCOS *out* of the State!”<sup>147</sup>

The Whig Boston *Daily Atlas* felt quite comfortable in declaring Rhode Island in an open state of rebellion, targeting revolutionary locofocoism as the prime mover. “That same spirit of Locofocoism, which exists in a greater or less degree, all over the Union—which took its rise in the elevation of General Jackson...and was continued down through the reign of Martin Van Buren—which disregards all the obligations of Law and Order, and set up in their place the

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<sup>147</sup> “Rhode Island ‘Still for War!’” Philadelphia *North American and Daily Advertiser*, 27 June 1842; “Rhode Island Insurrection,” Keene, *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 29 June 1842. Davezac served in the New York Assembly alongside Mike Walsh and was Jackson’s Minister Plenipotentiary to Holland in 1831. He was later appointed by President Polk to Charge d’affaires to Holland and served in that office from 1 May, 1844-31 Dec. 1847. Davezac was an important figure that fused the political and military imagery of the Jackson movement into a single man.

fanatical ravings of a mob...has exhibited itself in its true and prominent colors, in the recent Rhode Island Rebellion.” After the “Locofoco” Boston *Morning Post* expressed a hope that “We may see a New England San Jacinto,” the *Atlas* attacked its rival editor as an “ink and paper supporter of rebellion and treason...who would not have soiled his white gloves, or have incurred the risk of a wrinkle in his dress coat, to have saved the whole State of Rhode Island from perdition.” The *Atlas* declared Dorr a “contemptible tool of the Locofocos.” With such a large number of suffragists still at arms in the countryside, however, Whigs remained thoroughly worried about the prospects of violent revolution.<sup>148</sup>

Thomas Dorr, John Harris, the New York radicals, and the more agitated of the Whig presses were hardly alone in their conviction that revolution was possible throughout the North. Richard Anderson of Aberdeen, Massachusetts, opposed the use of force for its potential to ignite a civil war that could spread nation-wide, a series of state-by-state contests to cleanse the anti-republican elements of constitutional regimes in spontaneous, revolutionary conventions submitted to popular suffrage. Rhode Island supporter Joseph Pollard invoked the language of feudalism, identifying the Dorr War as the struggle which would birth true republicanism. He wrote Dorr that they were “on the Eve of a Revolution, just about to burst on our own New England...I cannot but hope that this war of extermination of charter rights, or rather wrongs, will be carried through all our estates that we in reality may be what we affect to state ourselves—The bravest, wisest people on this Earthly ball.” Pollard actively sought revolution along class lines, cutting racial barriers in particular. He denounced corporate rights, which he considered antithetical to natural rights, artificial abominations unnaturally extending the power of a privileged few over the liberties of the exploited many. Importantly, he extended his analysis to include the slave as a member of the common struggle against the remnants of

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<sup>148</sup> “Rebellion in Rhode Island,” Boston *Daily Atlas*, 29 June 1842.

feudalism and aristocratic government. Pollard's revolution of the productive classes required *all* true democrats, regardless of color, "in order to destroy the remnants of tyranny yet remaining." Pollard implored Dorr,

How is it that we overlooked the liberties of three million of our subjects and how is it that we proffer to them no milder conditions, than servitude or death[?] Republicanism is made of sterner stuff—Our patriotism is bleeding, our honor is tarnished, is fast crumbling to the dust, and shall we fold our hands in sleep, shall we ask what has the North to do with slavery, are we not its abettors...? Sir who does not know that the South would tremble beneath the weight of its own wrongs if there [sic] arms were not held up and strengthened by the north.

Let us therefore speak out, let us say to them we are from henceforth, clear of the Blood of your Slain; we can no longer partake of the guilt of your high handed oppression—your piracies in the slave trade is [sic] no longer ours, your untimely deaths by the lash—your crossings, your Brandings, your shootings, your taring [sic] with dogs, we repudiate, we sanction it not we disclaim all participation with it, wither direct or indirectly, we say to you forebear, can the judgments of God overtake you, and meat [sic] out a due reward.-----

Dorrites, many said, should embrace their natural radicalism and use the fire of their ideas to fuel their movement, properly construed as a war against arbitrary Power—whatever its form.<sup>149</sup>

The People's coalition of locos constructed itself along the lines of oppression—the oppressed masses, awakened to their common struggles, against the oppressing few, the moneyed aristocracy and their corporate agents. Writing William Simons from Westmoreland, New Hampshire, Dorr made the nature of his growing coalition clear: "But all depends upon union at this juncture. *Common rights, trials & dangers ought to form and cement it.* The result of it will be...auspicious and decisive." The inclusive nature of the locofoco and Young American theories of history and revolution brought together radicals from throughout the North, and New York was not the only place where Dorr was granted safe haven, whether by the people

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<sup>149</sup>Joseph Pollard to Dorr, 9 July 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Anonymous to Dorr. Enemies of Dorr's unconventional methods and ideas often expressed their anger in unconventional ways. On 13 August 1842, a death threat was issued against Dorr and mailed directly to him. The would-be assassin remained anonymous, signing himself "one who formerly respected you.--" Dorr identified the threat as "A specimen of the Algerine spirit prevailing in R.I. This is not the only letter of this purport received by me. But the rascals who threaten in this way have always kept at a respectful distance." 13 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Elias Smith to Dorr, 22 Aug. 1842, Dorr Correspondence.

or the state. Governors Marcus Morton (Massachusetts), Chauncey Cleveland (Connecticut), and Henry Hubbard (New Hampshire) all denied Governor King's request for Dorr's extradition to Rhode Island. The alliterative Democratic trio of governors likely privately considered King an anti-republican usurper--the *actual* revolutionary regime in Rhode Island--and the governors' support briefly inspired Dorr with hopes of completing "the line of enclosure around the Algerines of R. Island." Lewis Joselyn, editor of the *Bay State Democrat* of Boston, even stated to Dorr that "Should Morton be [re]elected, you can come immediately to Massachusetts; and might, I think, issue a Proclamation for convening the Legislature under the People's Constitution, at Pawtucket." William Smith reported that suffrage men from Rhode Island were actively networking with Massachusetts Democrats at Morton campaign speeches and events. From further west, Dorr was assured that "The whole democracy of Connecticut are our friends with Gov Cleveland at their head." Governor Henry Hubbard of New Hampshire was so fervently supportive of Dorr that he wrote him personally and rather tenderly claimed, "I wish you were in my own family." For his part, Dorr was visibly frustrated by the delays and setbacks. He languished in exile while his supporters absorbed the philosophy of locofocoism and spread the militant, romantic vision of Young America. The enemy remained the idea that political authority derived from a source outside the rights of individuals. In a letter to Governor Cleveland, Dorr wrote "The doctrine of the Cabinet at Washington is that our governments are corporations; that the 'authorities' are the ultimate source of political power in this country, and that no changes of government can take place without the consent of these 'authorities.'"<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid; J. S Harris to Dorr, 2 June 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Aaron White, 12 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Daniel Parmenter to Dorr, 30 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Aaron White to Dorr, 18 June 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to William Simons, 23 Aug. 1842, Dorr Correspondence. Emphasis added.; Samuel Whipple to Dorr, 6 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Aaron White, 27 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; William Simons to Dorr, 7 Sept 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to His Excellency Gov. Cleveland of Connecticut, 13 May 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Larkin Ammidown, et. al., 30 Sept 1842, Dorr



## The Ladies Kick Up a Revolution

*A Woman of Spunk*—The Providence Chronicle gives the following as a report of a speech made at the late suffrage clam bake at Somerset, by Mrs. Parlin of Providence:--

I propose that if there is a sufficient number of Suffrage ladies present, to lead them to the prison, and liberate William Dean, but I don't want you to deal by me as some of the Suffrage men did by Gov. Dorr, run off into the woods, and leaving me to fight the battle alone. I am willing to be the first to be shot down, and if I do fall, don't stop to pick up my dead body, but press on until you succeed. Neither am I particular about the manner of my burial, place my body in Rhode Island soil, and I shall be happy in having fallen a martyr in the cause of human rights. [She was greeted with immense cheers.]

--Middletown, Connecticut *Constitution*, 21 Sept. 1842

In the Summer of 1842, Thomas Wilson Dorr experienced the “great soul” of the New York Democracy while key locofoco activists petitioned Fitzwilliam Byrdsall to produce and publish a history of the Loco-Foco or Equal Rights Party. Byrdsall was the former Recording Secretary and probably no one else was better positioned to write such a work. After being so petitioned “for some years past,” he decided to take on the mission and write the history of his cherished movement. The point of argument which convinced him to do so was historical, ideological, and romantic—if he did not preserve the locofoco legacy, it might be lost forever. Events progressed incredibly quickly and Locofoco Young Americans like Byrdsall viewed it as their duty to history itself to preserve for later generations the wisdom and follies of the past. “Thus urged,” Byrdsall wrote, “and being, withal, of the opinion that if [I] did not write it no other Loco-Foco would, and that such a work was necessary to our political literature,” he began compiling the book in the summer of 1842. Byrdsall wrote throughout the most heated and heady days of the Dorr Rebellion, including Dorr's exile in New York City, his repeated visits to Loco-Foco luminaries like Levi Slamm and Alexander Ming, Jr., the fevered attempted seizures of the Providence and Chepachet arsenals, and the greatest loco-Dorrite events, the clam bakes.

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Correspondence; Lewis Parlin to Dorr, 2 October 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Gilbert Eddy to Dorr, 23 Oct 1842, Dorr Correspondence; William Smith to Dorr, 25 Oct 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Gov. Hubbard to Dorr, 28 Oct 1842, Dorr Correspondence.

“Through many interruptions,” Byrdsall cryptically noted, his book was completed in October, 1842, one month after the Charter government capitulated to the call for regular constitutional reform and expanded suffrage. In the preface, he prepared the reader for an encounter with the principled fringes of American politics and softened the blow of his radicalism by appealing to the rising spirit of youthful reform and republican reinvigoration. Byrdsall wrote directly to Young America and hoped his relatively brief political history of the Equal Rights Party would serve as continued inspiration for the rising generation of radical republican activists. He wrote for those rising to the challenges of republican life in an increasingly corporatist United States. The Loco-Focos, he hoped, would provide inspiration and instruction to those who carried on their battle against aristocracy. Young America and the Manifest Destiny movement grew out of this intellectual and political coalition of Loco-Focos, Dorrite radical republicans, political activists like the clam bakers discussed below, and the growing clique of public intellectuals and expansionists associated with the New Yorkers. The Loco-Young Americans’ ideology and the Dorr movement’s popular mobilization prepared many Democrats to surge in support of James K. Polk in 1844. The next chapter will explore the early articulations of Manifest Destiny in the Dorr movement, especially the sense of republican mission surrounding the Rhode Island clam bakes.<sup>151</sup>

When Dorr’s army evaporated at Chepachet, the militant movement wound to a close and the grassroots took charge. Women’s organizations formed the strongest leadership within the growing loco coalition. First collecting money to relieve families affected by the Algerine Act, Ladies’ associations quickly began directing clam bakes and the distribution of political materials. Dorr himself returned a \$100 donation from the Suffrage Ladies of Providence, sent

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<sup>151</sup> Byrdsall, *The History of the Loco-Foco Party*, vi.

to him for the purpose of “establishing on a permanent basis the rights of the workingmen and mechanics of your native state... You may depend on finding among the Wives and Daughters of those men in [sic] whose behalf you have so nobly contended a band who will to the extent of their feeble abilities defend you... as the benefactor of the honest and industrious Mechanic.” Sitting in relative comfort in his Keene, New Hampshire safe house, Dorr responded, “The uncommon People have had a long day in Rhode Island. Let us hope that that of the common People is approaching.” In his postscript, Dorr concluded “I hope you will not permit any of our suffrage men to vote for getting up another Old Charter Constitution for the State.” Abby Lord provided the sort of response Dorr was hoping for: “I [consider] a man that [votes] for [the Algerine compromise constitution] after he had voted for the people’s constitution as much of a traitor as Benedict Arnold.” Women now actively participated in Dorr’s politics in the public space opened by the failure of the militant movement. Franklin Goodey of Providence surely understated the matter when he commented to Dorr on 20 August, 1842 that “The Suffrage Ladies are very active and are [achieving] much good.”<sup>152</sup>

Dorr was very much admired by a large and well-connected constituency of women activists. Despite the occasional anonymous death threat, Dorr received several letters from women supporters which took decidedly romantic and wistful tones. One such love letter, marked by Dorr as from an E. Taylor, compared him to Washington and stated that “you have

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<sup>152</sup>Dorr to Suffrage Ladies of Providence, 24 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Mrs. Almira E. Howard to Dorr, 16 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Suffrage Ladies of Providence to Dorr, 20 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Abby Lord to Dorr, 2 Oct 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Franklin Goodey, 20 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence. On the subject of women’s activism in the early republic, especially early political activism for suffrage extension, see: Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2006; Sally McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women’s Rights Movement*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2008; Rosemarie Zagarrri, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 2007; Ronald & Mary Zboray, *Voices Without Votes: Women and Politics in Antebellum New England*, (Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press), 2010.

had a place, day by day, in my thoughts and feelings; feelings that any Daughter of America would not blush to own; feelings that our mothers felt, and have been handed down to us for the noble Washington and others who struggled for liberty.” Mary and Sarah Anthony noted that “Mrs. Kinyou that you saw at our house has a son which she has named Thomas W. Dorr and a better little suffrage man you never saw.” “Someone in Woonsocket,” reported the Berkshire County *Whig*, “has christened his son after Thomas W. Dorr. This is unnatural and cruel—to imprint that burning plague spot upon the innocent brow of infancy.” Catharine Williams claimed that her local suffrage ladies association was one hundred twenty members strong and met regularly, and Calvin Whitney of Eastford, Connecticut wrote that “The females are unanimously suffrage, to a man, and are desirous to see, and witness ‘Gov. Dorr’ among us.”<sup>153</sup>

Excitement reached a fever pitch in August of 1842 and women’s organizations took advantage of the leadership vacuum created by the Algerine Act. William Simons reported on 4 September that “More than a dozen meetings of ladies have been held, for the purpose of hearing [a recent political letter of Dorr’s] read...I can assure you, my dear sir, that there never was a moment when you stood as high in the esteem and affection of the people, as at this moment. It amounts to *absolute enthusiasm* (emphasis added).” Ann Parlin and Abby Lord wrote to Dorr that, “Our husbands have been prisoners of War + now we are ready to be so.” Parlin and Lord were determined that suffragist women persistently undermine the regime: “The Algerines conclude we are rather treasonable characters; we intend to remain so, we bear our suffrage badges at all times in open daylight, we are doing all that women can do...we are determined to

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<sup>153</sup> Regarding death threats, one in particular stands out in the Dorr Correspondence. Anonymously sent “From one who formerly respected you—”, Dorr scribbled on the letter that this was “A specimen of the Algerine spirit prevailing in R.I. This is not the only letter of this purport received by me. But the rascals who threaten this way have always kept at a respectful distance.” Anonymous to Dorr, 13 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; “[Untitled],” Berkshire County *Whig*, 4 August 1842; Mary & Sarah Anthony to Dorr, 21 August 1842; Catharine Williams to Dorr, 9 October 1842; Calvin Whitney to Dorr, 7 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence.

not sleep or slumber, but keep doing.” Ann Parlin connected members of the locofoco movement together while the male leadership were unable to do so. “Mr. Slam [sic] + many others all wish to hear from you, + wish to see you in Providence + occupying the office which rightfully belongs to you,” she told Dorr, writing from New York, where she was regularly visiting with old Equal Rights Party activists. Not willing to let their movement hinge on political successes alone, Parlin declared to Dorr that “I would [if Morton were elected in Massachusetts] wish our people to commence another action, + fight it out, if they would—or if they do, *I will pledge myself to lead the army to death or victory.*” She would see to it that if men would not act, women would: “In case we are not heard in Congress this next Session, *there will be a movement on the part of the women*—which will necessarily move the men to actions, for the present state of affairs cannot much longer be tolerated, and...I may yet have the honour or disgrace of striking the first blow, I shall not be a silent spectator, on behalf of our valiant men, in peace[, who become] cowards in war.”<sup>154</sup>

According to many observers, including persistent reporting in the *Providence Chronicle*, the suffragist women were a critical source of militancy from the very beginning of the Dorr War. Slamm introduced his New York audience to several accounts of the motivations behind Dorrite militarism “as an instance of the patriotism of the ladies of that State,” contrasting the apparent cowardice of the men and the heroism of the women. Samuel Green stated that he “Went into the cause because some ladies were going; thought there was no danger where the ladies were; heard many of them were ready to fight for Dorr.” One William F. Mason, a man of

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<sup>154</sup> William Simons to Dorr, 4 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Ann Parlin to Dorr, 4 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Mary & Sarah Anthony to Dorr, 21 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; “A firm and true Suffrage woman” to Dorr, 5 September 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Mary & Sarah Anthony to Dorr, 31 Oct 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Mrs. C. R. Williams to Dorr, 2 November 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Ann Parlin to Dorr, 6 November 1842, Dorr Correspondence. Empases added.

only eighteen years, confessed to reporters that he “Should not have gone to Chepachet had not the women persuaded me to do so.” Romantic fury drove not merely a great deal of loco-Dorrite political thought, but accounted for non-intellectuals like the young Mason. “There was one in particular I did not dare refuse,” he recounted. “She was my sweetheart; threatened to give me the mitten if I did not go.” Clark Smith from Albion Village in Lincoln stated that “Most of the women in our village are in favor of Dorr...Some talked of putting on pantaloons and going to his aid.” Women were prime networkers, gluing Dorrite men of all levels of commitment to one another. According to Smith, “They had a good deal of influence with the men; kept up a continual talking; should pity the man who remained at home among them. Should rather remain in prison than to contend with them myself.” Perhaps accounting for many of the desertions in the face of battle at Chepachet, Clark Smith “Went to the camp to make a show—made a poor show; in case of actual battle meant to sneak off myself.” Almond Smith, Clark’s 18-year old son, also joined the Dorrite ranks for romance rather than a desire to create lasting political change in his state. Almond worked in a local mill and “went to Chepachet; was advised to go by Sarah and the rest of the girls; hated to hang back for fear they would laugh at me; mother knew I was out; she let me go because I wanted to.” Almond set out for Chepachet, “expect[ing] to be made a hero of,” but like the revolutionary Patriot Hunters before him, was severely disappointed. He was instead “made a prisoner of; searched for glory—couldn’t find any.” He concluded, no doubt tremendously deflated, that “[I] don’t think I should have plucked up and gone to the camp, had it not been for the gals; they made me feel gritty.”<sup>155</sup>

Though the Dorrite ‘army’ was dissolved at Chepachet, the combination of foreign locofocos and Rhode Island suffragist women proved a persistent problem for the Charter

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<sup>155</sup> “Rhode Island,” *Daily Plebeian*, 11 July 1842.

regime. While Dorrism numbers continued to leak back into the accommodationist columns, New York locofocos and women's organizations provided courage and brashness to match, reviving the intellectual movement in the wake of political defeat. During one of his flights to safe haven, Dorr lost his correspondence bag, containing evidence of his secret networking activities, most significantly those letters exchanged between him and the New York Locofocos detailing massive military preparations and clear talk of war. William Balch, the loco that had promised thousands of recruits, intimated that "My name is in [Tammany's] 'Black book' as the instigator and getter up of the Tammany meeting [to raise support for Dorr, an event that greatly embarrassed the state Democratic Party]. Their proof is the letter I sent you which they found in your carpet bag." Balch, naturally enough for a Locofoco, took this to be a badge of honor: "I rejoice in all this. I have been used to such treatment, in religion, in my governmental heresy, and also in my radical political views." William Burges noted that "The ungodly outrage upon your Carpet bag + contents is still continued," as of 30 October 1842.<sup>156</sup>

Inspired by their new-found leadership roles, Abby Lord and Matilda Knowls marched directly to former (and recently-reelected) Governor James Fenner's doorstep, knocked on his door, and confronted him face-to-face, accusing him of stealing Dorr's letters. Fenner had been elected governor as a Democratic-Republican and at the tail end of a distinguished career, he ran as the Law and Order Party candidate with the mission of transitioning Rhode Island into new, yet regularly-constructed constitutional regime (see Appendix Table 9). "I asked him what right government had to seize a man's private property and convert it to its use," Abby Lord recalled. She demanded Fenner submit the letters to her so she could return them to Dorr, but it was Fenner's position that "the papers did not belong to Tom Dorr," but rather were the property of

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<sup>156</sup> William Balch to Dorr, 13 Oct 1842, Dorr Correspondence; William Burges to Dorr, 30 Oct 1842, Dorr Correspondence.

the public. Lord remarked that she was a member of the public and had the best claim to retrieve the letters. Fenner then retreated to the position that in fact “they belong to the Government.” “You have one Government,” Lord retorted, “and we have another[;] the question is which is the right one.” Fenner, undoubtedly somewhat exasperated, said he knew nothing of Dorr’s government. But Abby Lord persisted: “I said we mean to let you know something about it[,] he says what will you do with us[,] I said what had we a right to do with you in consideration of what you have done to us.” Fenner burst into laughter at the thinly veiled threat from the two women encamped on his doorstep. “He said we must be good citizens and support the Government,” Lord reported to Dorr, but Malinda Knowls spoke the last words. She “told him she thought we were both old enough to understand the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence and they told us which was the rightful Government.” Fenner dismissed them with a hearty laugh. New England Whigs and conservative Democrats confronted this ideological and political bloc with a similar mix of disgust, trepidation, and amused bewilderment throughout the clam baking Fall of 1842. The Dorrite ladies took control of the movement and changed direction entirely. What was necessary, they determined, was a moral and intellectual revolution. “The ladies are not inactive,” Slamm reported in late July 1842, “and seem from all accounts resolutely determined to express their unmitigated disgust for the cold-blooded conduct of the Royalist party. They are to meet at Cherry Grove, on the Massachusetts side, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August.” Levi Slamm himself was invited to attend.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Abby H. Lord to Dorr, 8 November 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Abby Lord to Dorr, 25 November 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Chaput, *The People’s Martyr*, 170; “Rhode Island” and “[Untitled],” *Daily Plebeian*, 29 July 1842.



## Chapter 4

### “No Monopoly of Mackerill:” Radical Locofocoism, the Dorrite Clam Bakes, & Young America

The Boston Transcript has an amusing account of a great clam bake at Hull.” “We’ve done the deed, did’st thou not hear the noise.” The “scaly tenants of the mighty deep” were appalled, and “mud-creek actually ran up hill.” The speech of Kallender, who did the honors, was superb. “Gentlemen (said he) of the free-suffrage-cockle-shell-and-horn-spoon association, this is a great day for Hull—Gentlemen, clams are a calumniated race—but times have changed, and clams are out in all their glory. Shell-fish are no longer to be thrown into the shade by the sharks of aristocracy—no monopoly of mackerill—let the traiters among tom cod tremble! Squires have our sympathies,” &c. &c. The clambakarians left off eating when they had finished, and went home when they were tired of staying, and no lives were lost.

--Keene, *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 31 August 1842

#### “The Clambakarians:” New York Locofocoism Served New England Style

##### THE RHODE ISLAND CATASTROPHE

Laud first Rhode Island  
Charterists,  
They have been quite  
humane;  
Laud next the mild free  
suffragers,  
For no one have they  
slain...  
Both parties cried aloud for  
aid,  
They were in such affright,  
And both were willing to  
look on,  
While others fought their  
fight...  
Oh, never yet were such  
she men,

Not since the world began;  
Rhode Island has no true  
free men,  
‘Tis feared she never  
can...  
The cause of freedom oft  
has met  
With daring, manly foes,  
Unlike the braggart  
soulless set  
The Charterites compose...  
The great commander  
yeleped King.  
He took Chepachet camp  
without  
Gunpowder, sword or  
ball...

With sheroes great and  
small  
A cow was shot, the best  
blood shed,  
A woman fainted quick;  
An officer by chance shot  
dead.  
And by a lunatic...  
And thus the Revolution  
ceased;  
‘Twas all a sounding brass,  
It opened with sublimity,  
But ended like a farce.

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<sup>158</sup> “THE RHODE ISLAND CATASTROPHE,” *Daily Plebeian*, 2 July, 1842.

In the wake of Dorr's rebellion, effectively dissolved by July of 1842, supporters of the suffragist cause turned from arming themselves to spreading their message and networking to coordinate political activism. The main vehicle for popular networking and activism was, by far, the clam bake, and the most important activists were, by far, the various Ladies Societies and regional locofocos. Throughout New England, women activists hosted clam bakes as fundraisers for the victims of Algerine oppression and political fairs spreading locofocoism. They constitute an important, though largely forgotten, impetus to the electoral victory of James K. Polk, the electorate's embrace of an expansionist, Loco-Romantic foreign policy. They were the high-water mark of the Dorr movement, they spread locofocoism throughout New England, and were in many ways great victories where the Dorr War proper was a disappointing and farcical failure. Yet, when locofoco filibusters from throughout the region attempted to take advantage of the popular suffrage movement to 'get up a revolution' in the famed Land of Roger Williams, their theory met practice in unexpected, often unpleasant ways. The peaceful revolutionaries that drove clam baking activism, by mixing revolutionary republicanism with support for the expansion of the American state, violated their most sacred theories and moral precepts. The results—Polk's election and the Mexican War—shattered the locofoco coalition, splintering loco factions across the electorate and dividing the major parties along antislavery and proslavery lines.

Historians' treatments of the Dorr War generally do not include discussions of the clam bakes, and those that do use them to illustrate the political rather than intellectual history of the movement. Patrick Conley's exhaustive treatment of Rhode Island constitutional reform entirely neglects to mention the clam bakes. Marvin Gettleman and George Dennison produced the most piercing histories of Dorrite radicalism and the principles of republicanism which animated their

movement. Both historians, however, failed to systematically examine these events which drew tens of thousands of locofoco northerners from surrounding states and galvanized the radical wings of both major parties. Erik Chaput, the most recent and comprehensive scholar of the Dorr War, presents the clam bakes as “grist for the political mill,” stepping stones to Marcus Morton’s 1843 victory over John Davis, yet even he presents the clam bakes as relatively small and insignificant moments in the rebellion, at least compared to the quasi-military clashes of Summer 1842 and the arguments before the Supreme Court. The story of the clam bakes proper, therefore, remains to be told, especially the intellectual history of those events, their connections to the wider Locofoco movement, Manifest Destiny, and the political origins of the Civil War.<sup>159</sup>

As the poem that opened this section illustrates, a great amount of disaffection and disillusion disrupted the Dorr movement after the military collapse. Locofocos from throughout the region deplored what appeared to be another abortive Patriot War—well-meaning American republican revolutionaries invade foreign soil hoping to incite a full rebellion, but they are betrayed by the weak wills and compromising spirits of the native population. Levi Slamm surmised, “Men should never attempt revolution who lack to moral energy and the indomitable determination necessary for a crisis.” But female activists in particular kept hope throughout the dark days of Summer 1842, when most suffragist leaders were either imprisoned or exiled. In a letter marked “From a Rhode Islander,” actually Frances Whipple attempted to reassure Slamm that Rhode Island was still worth New York’s time and attentions despite recent failures.

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<sup>159</sup> Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 309-375; Dennison, *The Dorr War*; Gettleman, *The Dorr Rebellion*; Chaput, *The People’s Martyr*, 170-1; Chaput, “The ‘Rhode Island Question’ on Trial: The 1844 Treason Trial of Thomas Dorr,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 11, No. 2 (June 2010): 205-232; Chaput, “‘Let the People Remember!’: Rhode Island’s Dorr Rebellion and Bay State Politics, 1842-1843,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 39, Nos. 1 & 2 (Summer 2011): 108-141; John Rae, “Democrats and the Dorr Rebellion,” *The New England Quarterly* 9, No. 3 (Sep. 1936): 476-483. For an overview of Massachusetts politics throughout the period, see Ronald Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790-1840s*, (New York: Oxford University Press), 1983.

Precisely because liberal institutions so long protected in Rhode Island were now directly under assault by the Charterites, their crimes were worse than the French Jacobins. “In no period of the French Revolution did Marat or Robespierre more directly violate the most sacred rights of man and the institutions of France, than have the Chartists in Rhode Island those of American Republicanism.” Most importantly, Whipple alluded to the grandiosity of the struggle before them, both politically and intellectually. The very vitals of republicanism were at stake—the right to revolution and the People’s collective ownership of the body politic. Even Levi Slamm, who played such an important role in Dorr’s own suffragist argumentation, did not emphasize this point strongly enough for Frances Whipple. “I rather wonder you do not say more,” she wrote, “for a vital principle is involved in that question, which lies at the foundation of our Government, and of Republicanism itself. I wonder that every *free press* does not speak out in thunder-tones against such an open violation of human rights by an armed aristocracy.” Whigs and sleepy Democrats alike, who hoped to avoid the necessary and inevitable conflicts of history by bowing to the wishes of the political class, sacrificed Liberty to the interests of Power. The Algerine and “Sheroe” Democrats that hoped to avoid conflict inspired it through their furtive, counterrevolutionary militarism: “A thousand men driven from the State will not always keep away...and Suffrage men are beginning to feel the freedom they once felt, and to deem it worth some blood.” The Algerine regime, terrified at the prospect of an actual rising of the people, was “preparing to make their peace with the great ruling power, the ‘*will of the People*,’ and if not, perhaps “Some helping France, with a becoming fellow-feeling, will lend her aid to justice and human right. Let usurpers tremble.”<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.; “Rhode Island” and “[Untitled],” *Daily Plebeian*, 29 July 1842; “From a Rhode Islander,” *Daily Plebeian*, 3 August 1842.

Fortunately for the cause of peace, the day following Slamm's publication of the above correspondence, the ladies of Rhode Island began their own reformist movement. Instead of drenching Rhode Island in blood (and perhaps much of New England, if not the rest of the Union), they grafted a grand tradition, the community clam bake, onto contemporary political causes, prison relief and suffrage. Concerned about the trajectory of the reformers and apprehensive of violence, the Boston *Daily Atlas* and Providence *Evening Chronicle* regarded every movement of Dorrites with suspicion. The *Evening Chronicle* of August 4 1842 reported that "We have reason to believe that serious mischief is contemplated... We have all along thought violence would be attempted by certain people out of this State." The *Chronicle* referred to "a Loco Foco gathering which was to take place, in that vicinity, under the name of a clam-bake." "Let us be watchful," it implored as clam bakers streamed through the streets of Providence and boarded steamers and ferries bound toward the Pomham Rocks lighthouse across the Massachusetts border. "There ought to be a strong patrol on duty this evening, while the whole military of the city, should be under arms, ready to move at a moment's warning." "The charter papers could see nothing in all their movements but treason," stated the Dorr-friendly New Hampshire *Patriot*.<sup>161</sup>

As the clam bake quietly raged, editors prepared their dispatches for the following morning and printed their early issues. Excitement with the phenomena spread quickly that week and participants took news of the event back with them to the countryside and city streets. The affair was composed almost entirely of Rhode Islanders and attendance was estimated at 3-4,000, two-thirds of whom were reportedly women and children. "It is a pity that the editor of

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<sup>161</sup> "Rhode Island," Boston *Daily Atlas*, 5 August 1842; "Meeting of the Constitutionalists of Rhode Island in Massachusetts," New Hampshire *Patriot and State Gazette*, 11 August 1842. For a full treatment of data pertinent to the clam bakes, see Appendix Table 7.

the Chronicle couldn't have had his head baked with the clams, for it must be softer than that of any shell fish, to sound the above alarm," chortled the editor of the New Hampshire *Patriot*.

Describing the event, the *Patriot* stated that, "Speeches were made by men from Boston, and clams and patriotism were served up in great profusion." "The Clam Bake set the Charter party in Rhode-Island in a great *stew*," commented the Pittsfield, Massachusetts *Sun*, which then copied a description of the clam bake from the *Bay State Democrat* (whose very own editor Lewis Joselyn made a speech at Pomham Rocks):

The gentle breeze from the bay, and healthy exercise, naturally created a pretty good appetite, and the ladies, under whose patronage the whole affair was conducted, had anticipated these wants, and provided an abundant supply of all the necessaries and luxuries that the most nice in these matters could desire. But the great clam and chowder entertainment deserve particular attention. It was a grand affair, got up on a grand scale, and consisted of no less than *eighty bushels* of clams and *four barrels* of chowder, the latter being made in a cauldron of that size, which was fully filled, and of the finest quality.

The process of baking the clams is simple and unique...A hole was dug in the sand, which was lined with clean stones from the bottom to the top. This reservoir or cauldron, was then filled with dry fuel, which was set on fire and burned till the stones became well charged with caloric. The coals were then swept out clean, and the hole nearly filled with clams—over these seaweed, washed clean, was thrown, to prevent the heat from escaping. The steam from the water of the clams being prevented from escaping, together with the heat of the stones, cooked the clams in the most excellent manner. *Eighty bushels*, as before stated, of clams of the finest sort were cooked in this way, and served up to the multitude, who were assembled in groups, under the shade of trees, according to their tastes and wants.

"This is the terrible affair," the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* wryly noted, "which frightened the Providence Chronicle so much that the authorities were recommended to... 'have the whole military force of the State under arms' ...to demolish the clam gormandizers, should they not eat them in the utmost quiet, according to law and order."<sup>162</sup>

Whigs, meanwhile, clearly linked New York Loco-Focos with the Dorrites and their continuing movement in Rhode Island, identifying the clam bakes as thoroughly loco affairs.

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<sup>162</sup> "[Untitled]," Pittsfield *Sun*, 11 August 1842. See also "[Untitled]," New Hampshire *Patriot and State Gazette*, 11 August, 1842; "The Great Clam Bake," *Daily Plebeian*, 9 August 1842; "[Untitled]," Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, 8 August 1842; "'The Grand Army,'" New Hampshire *Patriot and State Gazette*, 11 August 1842.

“The project for overthrowing the government of Rhode Island, originated in the New York custom house; the orators who have urged it on came from Massachusetts, and the money and some of the men were sent from New York. *But nothing has exceeded in impudence the resolutions passed at the clam-bake at Pomham.*” Yet even the *Daily Atlas* conceded that the brash resolutions were “pretty fair for a parcel of spunky women to resolve, while their hen-pecked husbands were sitting and looking on. A nice little petticoat Revolution, truly.” Clam bake resolutions were often so radical and unaccommodating that they aroused Dorr’s ire from exile and caused him much exasperation. Supporters, nonetheless, were sure to send him dozens of pounds of fresh seafood so he could share in the camaraderie from exile. Ann Parlin sent Dorr “a specimen of our Clams, which I hope you will get before they spoil.” J. Holbrook of Boston contributed “one prime codfish weighing 15lbs., 1 mackerell, 1 pack of clams and a few fine oysters.” “I have been particular with the selection,” he noted. Holbrook explained, “We intend to see you well supplied with clams & fish, and that you shall have a Clam Bake of your own, as often as the ladys [sic] of your Native State.” Nevertheless, Dorr longed for political battles which, for him, meant a far greater deal than to his average supporter. Winning and losing the political game was the difference between exile and a governorship for Dorr. For his loco supporters, politics was a means to an end. Despite Dorr’s insistence that the resolutions were far too radical and unaccommodating, the clam bakers continued to speak their truths.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Boston *Daily Atlas*, “The Rhode Island Clam-Bake,” 9 August 1842, 2; The Young Ladies Suffrage Association mailed Dorr a Bible, Young Ladies Suffrage Association to Dorr, 5 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Ann Parlin to Dorr, 18 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; J. Holbrook to Dorr, 23 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; William Mitchill, 23 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; John Harris, 29 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; J. A. Brown to Dorr, 2 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Samuel Whipple to Dorr, 6 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Williams Simons, 7 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; John Harris to Dorr, 29 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Aaron White to Dorr, 12 Oct. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Mary & Sarah Anthony to Dorr, 21 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Nehemiah to Dorr, 31 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence. Emphasis added.

The “Resolutions” began by noting the irony that peaceful people had been forced into exile from the Land of Roger Williams in order to peacefully assemble and discuss politics. The “Rhode Island Amazons,” thanked God “that there still exists a spot where we may enjoy that freedom of thought and of speech which is denied to us in our own State.” They then declared the Charter null, void, and inoperative. In its place, they confirmed the legitimacy of the People’s Constitution and Dorr’s governorship. Therefore, any usurper state government requests for his extradition were also null and void (a clear shot at Governors Seward in New York and Davis in Massachusetts). Most importantly, the first of the Dorrite clam bake resolutions expressed deep intellectual commitments to Paineite republicanism and radical locofocoism. “Resolved,” read the keystone resolution,

That the people have an unalterable and inalienable right to change, abolish, and institute government, and that the Suffrage Party, in abolishing the charter of King Charles and adopting the new constitution, have pursued a course of action which is sanctioned by Washington, Jefferson, and Roger Williams—and by the Declaration of American Independence, the Constitution...and by the Bill of Rights of the oldest and largest States of the American Union.

They proclaimed the Charterites “profligate and soulless usurpers,” and his interference earned John Tyler, “the indignant reprobation of every patriot and friend of popular sovereignty.”

Finally, the woman (likely Ann Parlin or Catharine Williams), who read the resolutions offered an additional candidate of her own making, expressing “our heart-felt thanks” to Dorrite sympathizers in Boston. More than any other, this resolution raised the ire of the *Daily Atlas*, which assailed the woman: “Immortal Lady of the Clam-Bake! Witch of the Enchanted Grove of Medbury! Fairy of the Free Suffrage Grotto! All hail to thee! Fair one, thou hast let us into another secret. Was it sympathy *for thee, and thy rebel sisterhood*, that sent those gallant spirits, overflowing with patriotism, and bursting with liberty, down into State street...on the memorable night of the 18<sup>th</sup> May?” Perhaps, the *Atlas* suggested, the “Amazon,” would “find it necessary to



wait upon these Patriots in person,” and would find her time well-served to strike up “some sort of Platonic arrangement, which shall secure them the sympathies of each other, hereafter.”<sup>164</sup>

Respectable Whig tongues were rarely so firmly in-cheek.

The clam bake speech by George Barstow, introduced by *Bay State Democrat* editor Lewis Joselyn, is especially note-worthy for its deeply romantic expressions of locofocoism and a sense of historical mission. The key principle involved in the Dorr War, he contended, was that “*sovereignty resides in the people and not in the forms of government*. If the patriots of the revolution have not left us this principle, they have bequeathed us nothing but the shadow of freedom—the outward forms of liberty.” Barstow thought it a long hallowed American tradition, hailing from Jefferson’s own words, that “*a majority of a community hath an indubitable, inalienable and indefeasible right to reform alter or abolish government*.” New England states reaffirmed the principle in their own constitutions, and they were now willing to withstand the might of the corporate aristocracy that had taken control of Rhode Island. “Shall I be told that although the people have a right to *change* government, yet they must ask permission to do it? Are they to bow at the footstool of any pretended or accidental authority, and sue for change? Are they to ask a favor or a boon? How long would it take to get leave of a tyrant to abolish tyranny?” Barstow found it essential that the people themselves express ownership claims to the State. Anything less was a quite literal step backward in intellectual history. “Your masters,” he declared, “are behind the age of Pitt, for they claim the right to govern you and to *tax* you, without giving a representation.”<sup>165</sup>

Barstow wondered what else one could call an armed aristocratic government which forcibly overturned and imprisoned the People’s elected governors—it could *only* be a tyranny,

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<sup>164</sup> “Clam Fake,” *Barre Gazette*, 12 August 1842; “The Rhode Island Clam-Bake,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, 9 August 1842.

<sup>165</sup> “Mr. Barstow’s Speech, at the Free Suffrage Clam Bake,” *New Hampshire Patriot*, 18 August 1842.

an attempt at feudal, European counterrevolution in the formerly free republics of America. “The new government *has* taken effect,” Barstow proclaimed, “True, it has been thwarted for a season by usurpation. An armed force has trampled it down, and struck at it with bayonets. A usurper has seized the reins, and holds them by brute force. But it is no less the government of the people, because they have not dethroned the usurper.” King’s declaration of martial law perverted and polluted the democratic process, inevitably resulting in a tyrannical and illegitimate State. “Any government formed after that crowning act of oppression... would be like commanding a man to sign a contract with a dagger at his heart, and then making a show of free agency by withdrawing the dagger during the ceremony of writing his name.” Naturally, “Such a contract would be void, and a constitution thus formed is equally void.” The point was met with raucous cheers, but the orator continued his attack. Foreshadowing much of the 1850s anti-Fugitive Slave Law rhetoric, Barstow wondered how the Charter authorities intended to seize Dorr. The Algerines intended to forcibly seize the outlaw, one way or another, “By force? Beware! Will you *steal a man*?” While noting that Ohio’s Senator William Allen was a firm and radical loco-Dorrite, Barstow remarked that “The laws of Ohio,” punish *kidnapping*. Will you break the peace? We have a law to punish you for a *riot*. Are you armed? Beware how you invade the soil of Ohio. If you make an invasion, we shall repel it. Your pretended charges of *treason* will not gain you impunity *here*.” Such sentiments were easily transferred to the subject of delivering fugitive slaves a decade later.<sup>166</sup>

The historical precedents set in Rhode Island over the constitutional struggle were particularly important to Barstow. Addressing the Algerines, he stated that “You are affording to the crowned heads of Europe a rare treat—yea, *rare*, for it is not often that the savage hatred of

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<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

European despots to freedom, is gratified by such a degradation of liberty.” The “tremendous cheers,” that accompanied this remark testify to the crowd’s own sense of their position in history. Counterrevolutions tolerated in the midst of the world’s only true haven for liberty were dangerous threats to *all* human freedom. They were solving a grand question of historical development, namely “*whether all power is embodied primarily in the people, or in the forms of existing power and authority?* Is it in the legislature, or in the people?” The struggle in Rhode Island was a struggle for all Americans, and the people of every state therefore had a stake in its conclusions. “The present contest,” Barstow declared, “is a collision of principles, and in that light is not confined to Rhode Island. It pervades the Union. It becomes important to the whole American people.” In fact, “The right assumed by the President to interfere with an armed force, to prevent the people of a sovereign State from establishing government, may justly alarm the friends of a republican government every where.” Barstow took great pains to assure his clamoring friends gathered that night at Pomham Rocks, that Democrats throughout the Union were with them in their fight and history *destined* victory. Despite the long train of errors and follies thus far, Americans everywhere were “waking up to the importance of your contest.” He concluded his speech with the hopeful notes of radical liberal Manifest Destiny, a version of the doctrine which had little to do with the destiny of the Anglo-Saxon *race* and much more to do with transformative impact of free institutions on human societies. Barstow concluded to the gathered suffragists, “if you are true to yourselves the star of Rhode Island, now struck from its orbit for a season, will recover its place in the heavens.” Stripped of the burdens of Charles II’s corporate aristocracy, Rhode Island “will move up the sky again with a brilliancy which will only be enhanced by the darkness from which it emerges. It is not a little meteor, *destined* to shoot along the sky with a pale and feeble glare. It shall be a fixed star of the firmament.

Thousands shall hail its reappearing.” Power would be beaten back and the cycle of history, revolution and counterrevolution, would be broken by the triumph of righteous arms. With the People’s government and the important precedents of its founding maintained, “Peace shall return with it—truth shall triumph—rights shall be established—Industry shall sound her busy hum again, and one general jubilee shall unite all hearts but the hearts of despots.” History itself would be vanquished as powerful aristocrats and their supplicants give way to *common* people now free to live their peaceful, prosperous, *common* lives. Rhode Island would thus inaugurate an age in which “tyranny is dead and tyrants are remembered only to be execrated.”<sup>167</sup>

Activists hosted the next clam bake on 24 August at Somerset, Massachusetts, also on Narraganset Bay. The main attraction was former Massachusetts Governor Marcus Morton, who delivered a speech to the crowd. The *Pittsfield Sun* reported that “The day was rainy and unpropitious, but this did not prevent a large and spirited gathering of the democracy of the vicinity.” Roughly 1,500 people attended despite the poor weather, and “100 bushels of clams and 500 lbs. of fish, besides other eatables, were served up on the occasion.” Morton’s speech “strongly condemned the doings of the Algerines, and of ‘Capt. Tyler’ and Gov. Davis in aiding them.” Morton, a well-known sympathizer with the abolition movement and future Free Soil defector, contended that the People’s Constitution was the just and legal one in Rhode Island, though it was not perfect. “He preferred a constitution as liberal as that of Massachusetts,” the *New Bedford Register* reported, “He would do away with the property qualification, and strike out the word ‘white.’ He believed that every man...should have the right to vote; or at any rate, if he had paid taxes, which was the qualification in Massachusetts.” Morton, like his fellow Young American firebrands in the Democracy, attacked the legacy of Great Britain and its long

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<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

history of usurpations against Liberty. Since Magna Carta, “extorted from King John, by his Barons,” the English government has been violating the liberties of the people, prosecuting a long counter-revolution, until the Americans reinvented the constitution according to republican principles. As his *coup de grace*, Morton brandished Governor King’s requisition letter for Dorr’s arrest before the clam bake crowd, condemning his former fellow for demanding a man be arrested without trial and thrown in a Bastille. American politicians, Morton concluded, were emphatically *not* the same as French aristocrats and their actions should reflect as much.<sup>168</sup>

The Charter regime remained unable to actively counter the new, radical, and yet decidedly *peaceful* forms taken by the Dorr movement. The clam bakes continued uninterrupted, Ann Parlin, Catharine Williams, and Levi Slamm contended, because the Algerines dared not charge hundreds of women with treason. Slamm continued in his role as the primary New York organizer of Dorrites, notifying his readership of upcoming clam bakes like that planned for 30 August at Medbury Grove, Pomham Rocks. Sarah Anthony wrote Thomas Dorr, exiled in New Hampshire, that “All of the family are going to the sufferage [sic] clambake...even our steady Miss Babcock who never went to such a place before will attend. I heard a man say in one of the bookstores he has sold 9000 tickets and he said it would [be] *the largest Clambake that ever was known.*” News of the event gradually filtered through the Union, and by 3 September, the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* reported that “Another great ‘clam bake’ was held on Tuesday, somewhere in Massachusetts, just beyond the border of Rhode Island. The Providence Journal says, that *from five to ten thousand persons were present.* Speeches were made by several suffrage men, and several ‘Algerines’ were driven from the ground.” Ann Parlin, “made a speech, and offered to go at the head of an *army of women* and release Mr. Dean from prison.

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<sup>168</sup> “Democratic Clam Bake,” *Pittsfield Sun*, 25 August 1842; “Gov. Morton’s Speech at the Clam Bake,” *Barre Gazette*, 26 August 1842; “Somerset Clam Bake,” *Barre Gazette*, 2 September 1842.

Governor Dorr had better resign that sword to the lady.” The pro-Dorr Pittsfield *Sun* reported that “Not less than TEN or FIFTEEN THOUSAND PEOPLE were present, and every thing passed off in the happiest manner.” Samuel Whipple reported to Dorr, neither “the hellish system of fiendish oppression nor the fifty prison cells can quench the fire of liberty that burn[s] in every heart[,] that glows in every eye...The great Mass Clambake and the Documents from the Trio of Democratick Govs is producing a great sensation.”<sup>169</sup>

The “Great Clam Bake” boasted letters-of-address from Lewis Joselyn, editor of the *Bay State Democrat*, former President Martin Van Buren, former Massachusetts governor Marcus Morton, Pennsylvania Senator James Buchanan, and General James McNeil of New Hampshire. Buchanan regretted that he could not attend, and expressed his deepest sympathies. Though Rhode Islanders were currently suffering, he was hopeful that their trials would not last long. “Public opinion, in this country, is more powerful than the sword—more terrible than an army with banners. Millions of brave and free hearts throughout the Union beat responsive with your own—in the cause of your political emancipation.” With a thoroughly locofoco faith in democracy, Buchanan noted the grandiosity of the recent wave of democratic state constitutions that broke down old systems of monopolistic privilege. “Your gallant little State is now the only spot in our favored country where freeholders and their eldest sons constitute a privileged class, and where the natives of other lands, who have fled from oppression at home and become American citizens, are denied the privilege of voters. This will not—cannot long continue.” Fusing past and present through moral example, Buchanan concluded, “The march of free principles is onward, and their progress cannot be much longer arrested...Universal suffrage, and

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<sup>169</sup> “[Untitled],” *Daily Plebeian*, 19 August 1842; “Mass Clam Bake,” *Daily Plebeian*, 26 August 1842; “Rhode Island Affairs,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 3 September, 1842. Emphases added; “[Untitled],” *Pittsfield Sun*, 8 September 1842; Samuel Whipple to Dorr, 6 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence. Emphasis added.

representation according to numbers, are the pillars upon which American freedom must repose...and by a firm and energetic, but peaceful contest, conquer from your oppressors the rights and liberties of freemen. Your victory is certain.”<sup>170</sup>

General McNeil’s letter was markedly more militant, recalling the influence of British aristocracy on the Rhode Island struggle. McNeil demanded revolution to restore the People’s government: “If men can be found in America who will take their stand upon a British Charter and attempt to enforce by martial law, the arbitrary doctrines of the English Monarchy, *may millions of freemen arise* and bring the contest to a speedy termination.” McNeil’s devotion to “liberty and equal rights,” watch-words for locofocoism, intellectually linked his vision of the past with his struggle in the present. “I regard the struggle in which you are engaged, as involving the same principles contended for in the Revolution—the right of the people to establish government.” The People should never relinquish their right of self-government to an entrenched aristocracy—“*Come what may, that great principle must not be yielded up.*”<sup>171</sup>

Former President Van Buren’s letter, as the *Daily Atlas* was quick to note, amounted to sound and fury, actually saying very little. Spending more than half the letter thanking the correspondence committee for inviting his words and stating his sympathy for the Dorrite cause, Van Buren spent the rest of the letter merely stating his hope that popular opinion and political will in Rhode Island now supported regular constitutional reform. “I am happy to believe,” he claimed, “that they will yet be made to yield to the persevering demands of the masses, and that the principles of equal rights and democratic liberty must ultimately prevail in Rhode Island, as elsewhere.” The *Daily Atlas* delighted in comparing (side-by-side, no less) this letter to Van

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<sup>170</sup> “[Untitled],” New Hampshire *Sentinel*, 14 September 1842.

<sup>171</sup> “[Untitled],” New Hampshire *Patriot*, 22 September 1842.

Buren's well-known objections to the New York constitution of 1821. As a younger man, Van Buren fully recognized "*the many evils which would flow from a wholly unrestricted suffrage,*" not the least of which was a Dorr War-like scenario. The Martin Van Buren of 1821 should have expected and sympathized with the martial law of the Algerine regime. The *Atlas* quoted him, "The just equilibrium between the rights of those who have no interest in the government, could, when once thus surrendered, *never be regained, except by the sword.*"<sup>172</sup>

Marcus Morton produced an exhaustive exposition of the principles at stake and his support for the Dorrite cause. In his view, the key questions were: "I. THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO GOVERN THEMSELVES, AND TO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN FORM OF GOVERNMENT. II. FREE SUFFRAGE. III. EQUALITY OF REPRESENTATION." Morton maintained that Rhode Islanders legally adopted the People's Constitution and advanced a Paineite republican case for self-government and the right to revolution. He wondered, do the Algerines "maintain that there is a favored class who possess greater political rights and power than their fellow men, and that they cannot be deprived of them without their own consent?" This "*is the rankest doctrine of ARISTOCRACY.*" Invoking the Loco-Romantic fear and hatred of Britain, Morton considered the Algerine counterrevolution "retrograding some six hundred years into the dark ages—dark indeed for political liberty and the rights of the people—when British Kings undertook to *grant* to their subjects *charters* of their rights and liberties. One man GRANT RIGHTS to millions! LIBERTIES depending on the *Charter* of a King!" Leading his audience, Morton implored the clam bakers, "Do we derive our rights immediately from our Creator? Or do we depend on *rulers*, pretending to be ordained of God, to dole them out to us at their discretion, and according to their good pleasure?" Once again, the cause of Rhode Island

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<sup>172</sup> "Van Buren in 1842, Van Buren in 1821," Boston *Daily Atlas*, 11 October 1842; "[Untitled]," *Daily Plebeian*, 7 September 1842.



suffrage was the cause of all America and, indeed, all mankind: “Will the American people, or the friends of free government any where, acknowledge the principle that the people can *only* make or amend their constitutions by the permission of their rulers?”<sup>173</sup>

In a reply to Morton’s clam bake letter, the *Daily Atlas* implored him, how could he “descend from these high stations to the level of *Slammism*.” Partisan politics and the lust for office, the *Atlas* declared, accounted for Morton’s actions. The objects of the Democratic Party, “and yours, I fear,” the *Atlas* addressed Morton, are “the same—power, power. The lust of office and of power has ever proved the greatest enemy of human rights. Such is the lesson of history, and what is passing before us shows that we are not free from the evils which have caused the downfall of so many republics.” The *Atlas*, like other Whigs skeptical of the loco-Dorrite combination of democracy and revolution, recognized that the locofoco drive to class war and revolution necessitated the very tyranny the radicals so feared. Furthermore, Morton’s anti-British tirades were tantamount to outright falsehoods, political ‘red meat.’ “This may do very well, Sir, for a clam bake, but it comes with a very bad grace from a late Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts!” Morton was merely stirring up the vote with Loco-Romantic jingoism. The *Daily Plebeian*, by contrast, delighted in Morton’s forceful remarks. His support for “the right of the people in their sovereign capacity to change or modify their form of government, regardless of existing governmental authority...has afforded us great satisfaction.”<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> “Governor Morton’s Letter to the Suffrage Clam Bake Committee,” *Daily Plebeian*, 6 September 1842.

<sup>174</sup> “A Reply to the Letter of the Hon Marcus Morton, Late Governor of Massachusetts, on the Rhode Island Question,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, 20 October 1842; “Gov. Morton on the Rhode Island Question,” *Daily Plebeian*, 6 September 1842.

The Rhode Island question quickly dominated Morton's campaign, and the events of the Dorr War firmly fixed the associations between Boston and New York locofocos. The *Daily Atlas* reported on a 7 September 1842 "Loco Foco Convention" in Faneuil Hall, "pursuant to the notice of the wire pullers." In the famous hall, "A motley assemblage of Loco Foco politicians, Rhode Island sympathizers, State street orators, together with the garbage of the party...nominated for the office of Governor, that old party hack, Marcus Morton."<sup>175</sup>

Meanwhile, the Barre *Gazette* reported on 9 September that "'Clam bakes' are getting to be quite frequent and famous as political meetings in these days, and are coming up even into Worcester County...a 'free suffrage meeting and clam bake will be held at Millville, in Mendon, next Saturday afternoon, which all the friends of the suffrage cause, gentlemen and ladies, are invited to attend.'" There were 2,500-3,000 people at the Millville clam bake, where "Several spirited speeches were made—one by a young lady whose brother is now pursued by the Rhode Island despots." The clam bake at Smith's Mills, Dartmouth, Massachusetts amplified the implications for the Rhode Island question in Massachusetts politics. After a series of anti-Clay, anti-Davis resolutions, the crowd declared for Dorrism and Morton:

Resolved, That the known identity and feeling existing between his Excellency John Davis and the land-holders of Rhode Island, renders it nearly certain that he would, had he the power, disfranchise every adult male inhabitant of our ancient Commonwealth, who had not the good luck to be born first, or could not show a legal claim to one hundred and thirty-four dollars worth of sand and gravel.

Resolved, That the recently avowed opinions of Marcus Morton, in relation to the right of suffrage, proves him still true to his Democratic faith, and imposes on the friends of equal rights in this State a new obligation to secure his election.

Resolved, THAT WE CAN AND WE WILL ELECT MARCUS MORTON TO THE OFFICE OF CHIEF MAGISTRATE IN NOVEMBER NEXT.

The *Atlas* charged "The Loco loco presses and declaimers, with Marcus Morton at their head," with "attempting to raise an excitement...against our excellent Governor, on account of his

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<sup>175</sup> "Loco Foco Convention," Boston *Daily Atlas*, 8 September 1842.

course in relation to the recent Locofoco Rebellion, in a neighboring State.” In the words of the Worcester *Aegis*, Boston Locofocos, led by Bancroft, Hallett, Tarbell, and Morton, “are leagued in this effort to foist a locofoco chief magistrate upon the Bay State, and to advance themselves to the office of an Albany Regency, by falsehood, libel, and delusion.” Massachusetts Democrats identified with the locofoco, Dorrite suffragist cause while Whigs who enjoyed universal suffrage regimes in their own states saw only nefarious conspiracy and demagoguery.<sup>176</sup>

On 19 September, Levi Slamm’s *Daily Plebeian* reported that “The Ladies of Chepachet have appointed a Committee to make arrangements for a Clam Bake on Acot’s Hill...on Wednesday, September 28<sup>th</sup>.” John Harris reported to Dorr that “There were between 5+8 thousand people on the spot, in spite of Algerine threats to send a military force.” The Chepachet clam bake passed resolutions similar to those at previous engagements and featured a letter from New Hampshire’s General John McNeil, the fiery anti-British speaker from the second Pomham Rocks clam bake. McNeil’s letter reiterated previous Anglophobic reasoning. Another clam bake at Southbridge, Massachusetts, on 5 October attracted a crowd of 2,000 (at least 300 of which were women). Speakers included Welcome B. Sayles, Speaker of the Rhode Island House under the People’s Constitution.<sup>177</sup>

New Hampshire Dorrites planned a clam bake in Nashua, “where it is expected Govs. Dorr and Hubbard will be present to address the multitude, and invitations are extended to the whole Suffrage party of Rhode Island and all the friends of Morton and Reform in

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<sup>176</sup> “The Bay State Awake,” *Daily Plebeian*, 8 October 1842; “Another Clam Bake,” *Barre Gazette*, 9 September 1842; “Clam Bake at Millville,” *Barre Gazette*, 16 September 1842; “[Untitled],” *Boston Daily Atlas*, 23 September 1842; “Clam Bake at Millville,” *Daily Plebeian*, 16 September 1842; “Governor Davis and the Rhode Island Rebellion,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, 9 September 1842.

<sup>177</sup> “Clam Bake,” *Daily Plebeian*, 19 September 1842; “Interesting Items,” *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 28 September 1842; “Rhode Island,” *Philadelphia Public Ledger*, 5 October 1842; “[Untitled],” *Pittsfield Sun*, 6 October 1842; “[Untitled],” *Pittsfield Sun*, 13 October 1842.

Massachusetts.” The Nashua clam bake, which was tentatively scheduled for 1 November, 1842, was “about to let the people of New Hampshire into the mysteries of ‘clambakes,’” reported the *Manchester Memorial*, “Gov. Hubbard and other distinguished clams will be present.” The *Nashua Telegraph* joked, “The faithful in New Hampshire are wofuly in the dark about the clam bake which the Massachusetts and Rhode Island loco focus are going to bring off in this town on Monday. This is wrong. Will the getters-up of this affair forward something ‘definite’ to the editors of the N.H. Patriot without delay? A clam-shell will do.” Sure enough, as Whigs suspected, the radical reformist impulse of the New York and Boston locofocos penetrated certain quarters of Rhode Island, but was somewhat alien to New Hampshire, which housed little native, revolutionary support for the Dorr movement. The Nashua bake “did not ‘come off,’ as was notified and expected,” reported the Amherst, New Hampshire *Farmer’s Cabinet*, “it is indefinitely postponed. And perhaps that is the best thing that could be done with it.”<sup>178</sup>

Aaron White, Dorrite and Providence attorney, wrote to Thomas Dorr on 12 October 1842 that “Tomorrow a Clam Bake will be held in Woonsocket [RI].” The next day, the women of Woonsocket convened yet another clam bake. The *Daily Plebeian* reported that “this festival, which was got up by the suffrage ladies of that village, and seconded heartily by the patriotic men of that place, who have most warmly promoted the cause of equal rights, yesterday drew together between three and four thousand guests, of both sexes.” The Woonsocket resolutions heavily borrowed the language and concepts of locofocoism. “Resolved,” declared the first of many, “That we the Suffrage Party of Rhode Island, as the party of equal rights, have been trodden under foot by the aristocratic minority. We rejoice that the time has come when tyranny

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<sup>178</sup> “New Hampshire Clam Bake,” *Daily Plebeian*, 29 September 1842; “New Hampshire Clam Bake,” *New Hampshire Patriot*, 13 October 1842; “Clam Bake at Nashua,” *New Hampshire Patriot*, 27 October 1842; “[Untitled],” *New Hampshire Sentinel*, 2 November 1842; “[Untitled],” *Amherst Farmer’s Cabinet*, 4 November 1842.

and wealth can no longer triumph over virtue and liberty, nor shake the foundations of a free government, and may the Royal Charter of Rhode Island be wiped from the records of our republic.” They reaffirmed the legitimacy of the People’s Constitution, the governorship of Dorr, thanked the ladies of Woonsocket for their energy and action, and concluded the affair by reading letters from prominent politicians, including Marcus Morton. Morton’s letter topped the event with a heady vision of republican destiny, stating that the Dorrite cause was “righteous and holy...By the smiles of Divine Providence, it will be prospered.” Morton’s commitments to democracy convinced him that liberal, republican reforms could do none other than promote the cause of freedom and prosperity. “Those who obtained power by usurpation and maintained it by military force,” he believed, “begin to quail before that strong and growing public sentiment which is pressing upon them from every side, with a moral weight, and pungent stringency which the human conscience cannot long resist.”<sup>179</sup>

As Winter set in throughout New England in November, 1842, the clam baking ground to a halt, but activism and organization continued relatively unabated. Levi Slamm’s *Daily Plebeian* reported about a rare meeting in New York City’s Shakespeare Hotel, at which Ann Parlin delivered the first speech by a woman ever witnessed at that venue. The *Plebeian* described the scene as eminently respectable and affable. The prior announcement that “Mrs. Dr. Parlin would address the citizens of New York, had attracted a large number of the fair sex, who testified by their enthusiasm their deep interest in [the Rhode Island question].” “She was aware,” wrote the *Plebeian* reporter, “that in appearing before them, she might be accused of

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<sup>179</sup> J. A. Brown to Dorr, 2 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Dorr to Williams Simons, 7 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; John Harris to Dorr, 29 Sept. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Aaron White to Dorr, 12 Oct. 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Mary & Sarah Anthony to Dorr, 21 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Nehemiah to Dorr, 31 August 1842, Dorr Correspondence; “Woonsocket Festival,” *Daily Plebeian*, 14 October 1842; “Woonsocket Clam Bake,” *Daily Plebeian*, 17 October 1842; “[Untitled],” *Daily Plebeian*, 21 October 1842; “[Untitled],” *Boston Daily Atlas*, 22 October 1842.

departing the social forms and usages which, from earliest time, have restricted the action of [women] within the narrow circle of domestic occupations.” She was well aware of the socio-political handicaps placed on her, but “deemed it unnecessary, in a country where a virile education was given to so many women, to apologise for having acted a manly part during their civil discords—for presenting herself then, before them, on behalf of the unfortunate victims of aristocratic tyranny.” Though Parlin was not as well-read in history as some of her male counterparts, she admitted, “she had read in elementary books of history,” enough to know that women have often been able to exercise tremendous amounts of power. Women were able, when willing, to change the course of history and even make revolutions happen. From ancient Rome to Joan of Arc, the agency of women often turned events; in ancient Greece, “when she awakened from the deathlike sleep of centuries of bondage, fierce Amazons led her fleet to glorious battles; In Spain, young...retiring and timid maids were seen standing undaunted on the gory beach, inspiring the enthusiasm of their own heroic valor in the warriors of Arragon and Castile.” Parlin encouraged her audience to make the present another such moment in history.<sup>180</sup>

Ann Parlin interwove past and present throughout her speech, constantly calling on the lessons and models of the past for guidance in the present crisis. Parlin recounted the series of events from the origins of the People’s government to the clam baking autumn of 1842. “After untoward events had destroyed their hopes of immediate emancipation from aristocratic thralldom,” the suffragists were imprisoned and oppressed through Algerine martial law. “A band of ruthless aristocrats strode over their State, spreading terror throughout the land. Informers, spies, denunciators crowded the cities, the hamlets, and the isolated abodes of husbandmen, violating everywhere the sanctities of private life,” not unlike fugitive slave-

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<sup>180</sup> “Great Meeting in Relation to Rhode Island,” *Daily Plebeian*, 5 November 1842.

catchers so familiar to later Free Soilers and antislavery Republicans. “No one dared to act, but few ventured to speak,” and “In that period of gloom she looked round her for a leader to step forward to the rescue of American freedom! None appeared.” Deciding that she must take charge of organizing the movement, she began planning the events with a circle of female friends and activists. They called for the great clam bakes in every public forum open to them and bore the great burdens of a hostile press. Nevertheless, the clam bakes were fantastic successes, “in which the spirit of resistance to oppression suddenly revived in every breast.” “These meetings,” Parlin continued, “had reanimated the desponding, infused life and daring into hearts before infirm of purpose.” Tapping into the Loco-Romantic, Young American proclivity for Anglophobia, she testified that “The horrors of the British prison-ships, of which she heard, in the history of their first war, could bear no comparison with what she witnessed in the jails of Rhode Island, aggravated, too, as they were by the reflection that the executors of cruelties which no nation save England was supposed capable of inflicting on prisoners of war, were *Americans*. [Applause.]” The anger fostered in her during these visits drove her activism, though she did not think women could accomplish effective reform alone. “She believed, when she began this pilgrimage in behalf of human rights...that the cause which enlisted the sympathies of woman, would triumph at last by the action of men.”<sup>181</sup>

Parlin hoped her stab at revolution would not suffer from unnecessary and outdated sexism, and she trusted that Young Americans would not let such frivolous considerations impede progress. “Let such as might be tempted to censure her for appearing before the people in her own state, and presenting herself to that auspicious gathering of democracy—let them, she said, remember the patriotism of American women during the revolutionary war—their urging

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

their husbands, brothers and sons, like Spartan matrons, to enlist under the banners of freedom.” Women during the Revolution used their social, political, and economic roles *as women* to fight British Power and defend American Liberty. “Their memorable resolution to forego, as long as the war continued, the use of all those luxuries imported in British ships or manufactured in England, which she lavishly spread over the land, to enervate men and corrupt women,” should stand as a model to activists in the present. True democrats should guard themselves against the corrupting influence of the aristocracy, purify themselves spiritually and morally. Women were, naturally enough to Parlin and her audience, of fundamental importance to the future of republicanism. “So far it might truly be asserted, that the future of a nation was always prepared and moulded by women,” she stated. Though the Rhode Island of the present “belonged to the oligarchy,” the present itself was always fleeting and changing, opening new possibilities for the warriors of Liberty. The present, “was like the leaves of this protracted autumn still, hanging on the trees, but sere, withered and ready to fall before the first blast, never again to resume life and verdure. The aristocracy had lived one season; but they had no harvest to expect from coming years.” Young America belonged to the radical liberals, the locofocos, the Dorrites—not the oppressive, neo-feudal, corporatist Whigs. True political change was not likely to be won through open contest with the aristocracy, or even through immediate democratic politics—the government clearly did not respond in the interest of the majority. No, rather lasting change came with new hearts and minds born into the world that rejected a socio-economic and political order based on privilege. “Every spring,” she continued, “together with the renovated life it breathes into matter, sends forth on the stage of political action, thousands of Suffrage youths. It was out of their hands they should receive, from the grave where it now rested, embalmed in a Nation’s tears, the true, the real, the only constitution Rhode Island ever had or ever would



accept. [Cheering.]” Upon making her first, final, and brief plea for contributions to relieve the families of imprisoned suffragists, “Mrs. P. sat down amid tremendous and enthusiastic cheering.” The meeting of New Yorkers then passed a series of pro-Dorr resolutions condemning “the royal charter of a profligate king,” denounced the Algerines, and recognized the importance of the Rhode Island question. The fifth resolution thanked Ann Parlin for her service in the cause and her speech that evening. Finally, the sixth resolution notified the crowd of the opening of a subscription list now maintained by Levi Slamm’s *Daily Plebeian* for anyone interested in donating to the suffragist cause.<sup>182</sup>

The Parlins paid a dear price for their political radicalism. Upon their return to Rhode Island shortly after Ann’s speech in New York, the Algerine press prosecuted a slew of “vile attacks” and drove the Parlins from the state. Like Anne Hutchinson before her, Anne Parlin moved to New York City, where she found refuge from the reaction at home. “The Doctor was confined in their Bastille for his advocacy of the cause of popular rights,” reported the *Daily Plebeian*, “and, when liberated, was made the object of unrelenting persecution. His business was in effect broken up, and every attempt was made to destroy the peace of his family.” Lewis Parlin soon established a homeopathy clinic in the Tenth Ward, which was regularly advertised in the pages of the *Plebeian* and offered free treatment for the poor. Ann Parlin was remembered as a heroine and inspiration. The *Providence Express* foreshadowed the lingering, important influence of Parlin, her clam bakes, and the power of her perseverance:

As respects Mrs. Parlin, she was a noble, whole souled woman, perfectly unsuspecting that any of her actions could be misconstrued, or that any one could believe any evil of a person whose heart was good. Her exertions in the suffrage cause, will long be remembered by the people of Rhode Island, and many prayers are offered that peace and prosperity may be her portion in the place where she has taken up her residence. But let not the editor of the Chronicle suppose the cause of free suffrage with the ladies of Rhode Island dies with any one individual of their

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

number; they may succeed in killing twenty-three thousand women in this State, who are engaged heart and hand in this holy cause, and the Algerines will find them like dragons teeth, for every one trampled in the dust there will come up a thousand.<sup>183</sup>

Histories of the Dorr War which investigate its radicalism have almost entirely neglected the clam baking phenomenon aside from its impact on New England elections in 1842-1843 (see Appendix Table 9). In these presentations, political events take preeminence over intellectual and cultural change. More recent studies have focused on Dorrism and the question of slavery or early instances of female political activism, while older studies focus narrowly on the Dorr War as a constitutional crisis. This history of the clam bakes both confirms and broadens earlier claims about the radical causes and reactionary outcomes of the Dorr War by uniting events in Rhode Island with a host of other movements throughout the antebellum period—each inspired by the philosophy of locofocoism and teeming with loco activists. The clam bakes complicate our understanding of democracy and demonstrate the most important problem in locofoco thought—democracy and republicanism may in fact be incompatible and antagonistic. At once, the clam bakers were triumphant reformers and also Leggett’s “Dupes of Hope Forever.” As Marvin Gettleman perceptively argued, Loco-Dorrism theory and practice were often inconsistent. “The Rebellion,” Gettleman wrote, “reveals the limited nature of that radicalism—its unwillingness to delve deeply into social and economic issues, racism, its commitment to the sanctity of private property, its respect for constitutional forms, and its historical nostalgia.” The Loco-Young American, filibustering proclivities of the Dorr Warriors violated locofoco social and historical theory. The developing concept of Manifest Destiny rendered loco theory useless, flatly answering Leggett with republican bluster and a rather naïve faith in democracy. George Dennison argued that after the Dorr War, and “the traditional American ideology based on the

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<sup>183</sup> “The Cruelty of the Rhode Island Algerines,” *Daily Plebeian*, 12 December 1842; “[Untitled],” *Daily Plebeian*, 24 December 1842.

concepts of popular sovereignty and peaceable revolution had fallen into disrepute.” Patrick Conley further explains, “What has died is Dorr’s doctrine of popular constituent sovereignty, that even in 1842 was an archaic and potentially dangerous relic of our Revolutionary era.” What seemed more abundantly clear to Whigs and conservative Democrats than any other point of principle was that “the People,” would destroy peaceful society if necessary to achieve their ends. To southern Democrats, the Dorrites seemed poised to become rabid antislavery militants who could just as easily turn their filibustering energies away from the Landholders to focus on the Slaveholders. To a growing majority of Americans, radical locofocoism seemed less the stuff of the Revolution, and more a pathway to destroying the freest societies the world had yet seen. They were Shays rebels in Jacksonian garb.<sup>184</sup>

Perhaps most significantly, the Dorr War tried and discredited the very idea of the right to revolution, destroying the key element of political thought which excepted America from most of world history. In *Luther v. Borden* (1849), the court recognized the right to revolution as “natural and physical,” but not “constitutional and legal.” Any attempts at constitutional reform that could not be defended politically (or militarily) were necessarily illegitimate. Might now effectively made right. According to George Dennison, “Civil liberty took second place to an institutional concern for stability and order,” and after the Dorr War’s near-farcical outcome, “No one much bothered with a constitutionalism based on the legal right of the people to alter their governments at will.” “Something vital,” he wistfully writes, “had gone out of American ideology...Somewhere in the years between 1815 and 1862 ‘a great American body lies buried.’ Unappreciated and unmourned, the old republic died giving birth to the republican empire.”

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<sup>184</sup> Dennison, *The Dorr War*; Gettleman, *The Dorr Rebellion*; Chaput, *The People’s Martyr*; Conley, *Democracy in Decline*, 375. Conley continues, as we shall see, erroneously: “Dead also is the anti-bank and anti-corporate economic dimension of Equal Rights, the passing passion of an atomistic pre-industrial age.” In fact, locofocos continued to adapt their ideas about banking and corporations to the rapidly developing world of industrial capitalism.

From the Dorr War on, “*Might* settled all questions about social ideals...Americans finally agreed that governments based on force were as necessary in the United States as they had always been elsewhere.” True republicanism, self-government in the radical locofoco mold, was truly dead. Americans were no longer “new and different entities subject to novel principles of development and behavior. Instead America rejoined the world, and Americans became mere men.”<sup>185</sup> These bleak developments, however, are visible only to the historian, and seemed anything but foreordained to the hopeful locofoco radicals eager to push on and always fight the next fight. The clam bakes continued, though as the Dorrite men steadily regained the leadership of the movement, they increasingly used the events as vehicles to elect Democratic Party politicians. Moderates regained their foothold over the radical wing, prepared, like the Algerines, to adopt much of the locofoco style, retaining little of the spirit.

#### In Theory: Loco-Young Americans & History

But when, where, and how, has experience demonstrated our theory to be impracticable? Our theory is, that men have equal rights; that government, which is the guardian of their equal rights, should confine itself within the narrowest circle of necessary duties, the mere protection of that equality, by preventing the encroachment of one man upon the rights of another; and that all beyond this should be left to the influence of publick opinion, and those natural principles of commercial intercourse which are called the laws of trade. This is our theory. This is the theory of a popular government. This is the theory of democracy. We ask again, when, where, and how, has it been demonstrated to be impracticable?

--William Leggett, “Theory and Practice,” *Plaindealer*, 29 July, 1837

In one of his most important editorials, William Leggett set forth a united vision of locofoco theory and practice. He bound a utilitarian theory of human action with the classical liberal theories of class formation and historical progression to analyze the efficacy of

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<sup>185</sup> Dennison, *The Dorr War*.

democracy and the historical position of the United States. His philosophical children in the history of locofocoism built upon Leggett's foundational romanticism and developed the concept of Manifest Destiny during the decade after his death. Ignoring Leggett's warnings to the "Dupes of Hope Forever," the second generation of Loco-Focos was almost eschatological in the conviction that a democratic citizenry could perfect human government and cleanse the planet of evil. Leggett's powerful editorials convinced a younger, more energetic generation of radical activists and artists that proper theory could be none other than effective in practice. The heady atmosphere of hopeful expansion and reform permeating the Jacksonian period was thickest at the edges of political respectability and locofocos everywhere sought to transform society. The "Loco-Romantic" political activists, revolutionary filibusters, intellectuals, and artists believed that Americans had rediscovered a secret from the ancient world which allowed Man to transcend his wickedness, escape the clutches of soul-crushing tyranny in Europe and enjoy liberty on the frontier. With unparalleled liberty came unbelievable prosperity and a series of republics powerful enough to defend liberty from the world's preeminent aristocratic power. In the United States, Man was allowed the liberty to transcend the previous limits of his existence, conquer time and space, transform the surface of the Earth, and even eliminate violence and poverty.

From the days of the Workingmen's Party to the filibusters in Canada and Rhode Island, locofocos united through a shared vision of historical and social development. They positioned themselves in the forefront of battles which moved the wheels of history—fighting the British in Canada, the monopoly bankers at home, the remnants of British monopoly corporatism in Rhode Island; they in turn developed a cogent approach to foreign policy advancing this particular vision of America's place in time and space. Throughout the Tyler administration and

conventions leading into the election of 1844, a series of distinct loco camps emerged. Most remained loyal to Van Buren, their most prominent intellectual ally on the national stage, right through his barnburning Free Soil candidacy. Some stayed true to the Democratic Party after Van Buren's defeat in the 1844 nominating convention. These partisan die-hards followed Levi Slamm in support of "Texas and Oregon; Polk and Dallas." Others allied with Calhoun, hoping to protect the loco platform through a vigorous support of states' rights. A precious few refused to support the major parties and either abstained from political involvement or partook in the radical movements of the day, notably the causes of labor reform and abolition. This political cladogenesis contributed significantly to the intellectual and political climates surrounding Manifest Destiny, the expansion of the American republic, and the collapse of the Second Party System. The works and worldview of Dorrite locofoco historians and activists, especially Catharine Williams and Frances Greene, offer particularly clear insight into the connections between locofoco movements in New York City, Canada, Rhode Island, Texas, and the political contests discussed in later chapters.<sup>186</sup>

Catharine Williams was a Rhode Island historian, sixth-generation descendent of Roger Williams, and budding representative of the Young America movement. She was born in Providence in 1790 and as a young woman moved to New York, then on to western New York, and finally back to Rhode Island after divorcing her husband. Fleeing with her child, she supported herself on a modest writer's income. She wrote a great deal of biography, especially of American revolutionary heroes, morality-infused narratives, and screeds against the historical role played by aristocracy. In 1841 Williams wrote and self-published *The Neutral French; or,*

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<sup>186</sup> Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery*; Eyal, *Young America*; After the Baltimore Democratic Convention (27-29 May, 1844), Levi Slamm's New York *Daily Plebeian* changed their electoral masthead from support of Van Buren to support of Polk. It would remain until the final issue of the paper.

*the Exiles of Nova Scotia*. She considered it her best work. The book repeatedly attacked the British for the atrocity of exiling the French Canadians from Nova Scotia during the Seven Years War. Williams wrote to tell the story of “the remnant of those who survived,” and noted the impact of aristocracy and government power on their lives and culture. Anticipating Lord Acton’s famous dictum that power tends to corrupt, Williams observed that “The throne is constantly surrounded by a set of cormorants, whom nothing can satisfy, and Grant after Grant is obliged to be dispensed until there is nothing more to give, except the privilege of plundering one another; that is, the privilege of the strong to plunder the weak.” Such themes defined her career and her political activism. “There are two things to which she had the most decided antipathy,” writes historian Sidney Rider, “viz.: Kingcraft and Priestcraft.” Williams sent Thomas Dorr a copy of *The Neutral French*, characterizing it as a history of tyranny and revolution producing dramatic historical development.<sup>187</sup>

Critically, in *The Neutral French*, she blamed the “curse” of American slavery on this very phenomenon in the history of the British imperial system and class legislation that artificially protected slave owners and fattened imperial coffers. Rather than indict the morality and integrity of her fellow American warriors for liberty in the Democratic South, Williams focused her historical judgment on the imperial power which aided and abetted the crime of New World slavery. “We are not advocates for the principle of slavery,” she claimed. “On the contrary, we think the first man that ever brought slaves here, yea, the second and the third, ought to be condemned.” She continued to harass the British aristocracy, connected in her mind to a wide and ever-growing array of social and political tensions from Canada and Rhode Island

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<sup>187</sup> Sidney Rider, *Bibliographical Memoirs of Three Rhode Island Authors: Joseph K. Angell, Frances A (Whipple) McDougall, Catharine R. Williams*, Providence: Sidney S. Rider, 1880; Catharine Williams, *The Neutral French; or, The Exiles of Nova Scotia*, Providence: Self-published, 1841.

across the oceans and around the globe. “But we cry the mercy of our English neighbors, who have so much to say on the subject [of slavery], and entreat them not to compare our southern slaveholders to theirs of the West Indies, from whose ruthless and blood-stained hands (by their own account) they have just taken the lash.” She laid bare the source of moral difference between the British Caribbean planter and his plainer American counterpart: “The one, proud, aristocratic, and domineering by nature, and from precept and example. The other, highminded and gentlemanly indeed, but altogether different, from *cherishing the principles of liberty, and feeling that every other gentleman is his equal.*” The southern planter was no aristocratic taskmaster, but “the head of a great family.” Williams argued that try as the British moralists might, they could not escape the judgments of history: that New World slavery was largely the result of British imperial activity. Nor could they escape the moral taint of destroying lives and culture in Nova Scotia. “It was the design of the British Colonial Government at least, that all memory of this nefarious and dark transaction should be forgotten,” Williams held.<sup>188</sup>

Like other Classical Liberals of her day, she envisioned history as the continuous struggle for liberty, and, therefore, all people of all ages were brothers and sisters in a common labor against criminality, violence, and ignorance. In a footnote to *The Neutral French*, Williams applied her classical liberal theories of history to the French Revolution and revolutions generally. At the heart of historical development, revolution and counterrevolution, was *conspiracy*. The motivations, interests, and actions of individuals moved events. When individuals used their power to advance themselves at the expense of their fellow men, social conflict resulted. The more power these would-be aristocrats could marshal, the more liberties

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<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* 13.



they impacted and the more inequality and conflict they generated. Williams fluidly tied together the histories of Britain, the Continent, and America through political class conflict:

When the *secrets* of all men shall be disclosed at the great day, it is presumable that the expose of court diplomacy will reveal *the greatest mystery of iniquity the whole assembled universe can produce*. We shall then know how certain nations have *contrived* to make themselves so *powerful*, and of *England* among the rest, whose boasted system is essentially systematic intrigue. There is not a court in Europe—to say nothing of America, where her facilities are boundless, speaking the same language, &c.—where there is not a set of hired traitors employed to sow the seeds of jealousy, discord, and discontent, against the existing government. If the *real origin* of many of the disturbances that have deluged Europe in blood, divided the counsels and destroyed the resources of nations, could be known, in nineteen cases out of twenty the *intriguers* of foreign courts would be found at the bottom of them, and in nine cases out of ten, during the last five hundred years, *England has been the intriguer*.<sup>189</sup>

Democracy was the only antidote to Aristocracy, the total removal of Power's ability to corrupt political leaders by restoring the People's proper role as absolute sovereigns-in-themselves. The best hopes for democracy, Williams thought, rested with locofocoism and Dorrism. She sought a revolution in morals and believed the politics would follow. Justice and righteousness flowed from religion, and her morality tales couched as oral history illustrated this aspect of her worldview. Williams was always a Democrat and an early supporter of Dorr's Suffrage Association. She identified with the New York Loco-Focos and even represented Dorr's government before the Tyler administration. Through her tireless advocacy for Dorrism throughout the constitutional struggle and clam baking phenomenon as well as her volumes of historical writing, "Williams' outspoken Jacksonianism challenged the backlash against women in politics and encouraged others to do the same." Her realistic treatments of individuals, common peoples and aristocrats alike, as agents of history reflect "the reality of social and

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid. 84. Emphasis added.

political interplay as it affected average Americans.” In Williams’ history and her activism, average men and women possessed power as individual moral agents.<sup>190</sup>

The loco vision of history extended beyond all geographical and temporal bounds, to the jubilant, romantic reaches imagined by Catharine Williams at the Dorrite clam bakes or by Abram D. Smith as he gazed drunkenly at the night sky one July 3<sup>rd</sup>, long before he was ever President of the Republic of Canada. Catharine Williams as activist *and* historian wrote to Dorr, “We see that tyrants of *all ages* are the same, from the Monarch...to the mushroom Aristocracy of Providence.” The course of world history itself depended upon the outcome of the Dorr War. In the words of our next Dorrite historian and Young America-affiliated intellectual, Frances Greene, “The decision which is now making and the course of action which leads to it, will not, alone, affect us and our posterity. The neighboring States will feel and be affected by it. The North will feel it. The Republics of Central and South America will feel it; until, finally, *throughout the whole earth*, the chain will be forged, or the fetter broken, according as we prove ourselves bond or free. It is in this wide relationship to all Humanity that I consider the question; and so all wise and thinking men among us regard it.”<sup>191</sup>

Frances Whipple, later Frances Harriet Whipple Green McDougall, was born into the quintessential American aristocratic family. On her father’s side, the Whipple line included Rhode Island heroes like Abraham Whipple (1733-1809), who led the burning of the *Gaspee* in 1772 and some of the earliest settlers of the colony. On Frances’ mother’s side of the family, the Scotts included some of Roger Williams’ earliest and closest associates in the foundation of the

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<sup>190</sup> Catharine Read Williams, *Religion at Home; A Story, Founded on Facts*, (Providence: B. Cranston & Co., 1837); Catharine Read Williams to Dorr, 6 September 1842, Dorr Correspondence; Graham, “A Warm Politition and Devotedly Attached to the Democratic Party,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 30 (Summer 2010): 254-278.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* Emphasis added; Frances Greene, *Might and Right; by a Rhode Islander*, (Providence: A. H. Stilwell, 1844). Emphasis added.

Rhode Island colony. Both families were living examples of American history, sporting innumerable military and political figures, prominent businessmen and professionals, and influential property-owners and socialites. By 1816, George Whipple, Frances' father, faced an enormous debt and land completely incapable of producing enough to pay. Nature was particularly cruel to the Whipples, and the 22 September, 1815 "Great Gale" storm ravaged Providence, flooding wharves and destroying crops within a forty mile radius of the city. 1815 also happened to be the "year without a Summer," in which the Indonesian Tambora volcano erupted so violently that the ash clouds actually repelled solar radiation from the earth, cooling the planet. With a future of nothing but drought, sooty clouds and gloom, George sold the family farm in 1816 and Whipple was destitute. Frances managed to support herself through odd jobs, educate herself by reading widely in literature and philosophy, and build a place for herself within an entirely new sort of United States. From her birth in 1805 to her death in 1878, the United States became in many ways a completely different place, just as Frances had become a completely different kind of Whipple.<sup>192</sup>

As many historians have noted, the nineteenth century was the first great era of reform movements, and though most major reform efforts have been treated extensively by scholars, *locofocoism* remains a significant movement not yet integrated into histories of the period. Frances Whipple (or Green), and her *locofocoism* illustrate the importance of the New York movement to a wide variety of fellow *isms* of the day, huge swathes of American life from Spiritualism and Dorrism to Abolitionism and Republicanism. Frances Harriet Whipple Green McDougall championed each of these causes and more throughout her long life of teaching, writing, speaking, and even spirit mediumship. Like Abram D. Smith, who carried his

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<sup>192</sup> Sarah O'Dowd, *A Rhode Island Original: Frances Harriet Whipple Green McDougall*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 2004, 1-17.

locofocoism into the forests of Ohio to plot revolution in Canada; like Ann and Lewis Parlin, who fled Providence to practice Dorrism and homeopathy in peace; like the Young American filibusters who trotted the globe adding new stars to the flag; Frances carried her radical ideas with her wherever she went, New York to California, and her body of work pushed American life in radical directions as Americans like Frances discovered who they were and where they fit into the ever-transforming world around them.<sup>193</sup>

Frances Whipple's most significant early contributions to what she saw as a "New Age of Reform," were in the fields of feminism, Dorrism, and abolitionism. After attaining some stature as a local writer of short pieces for the literary magazine *Original*, a Rhode Island women's benevolent society charged her with writing a fundraiser book for the relief of Eleanor Eldridge. Eleanor was a free black resident of Providence recently embroiled in a legal battle for her home and property, virtually bankrupted by the legal fees incurred. To offset these costs, Whipple authored *The Memoirs of Eleanor Eldridge* and *Eleanor's Second Book*, both of which sold tens of thousands of copies and which publishers reprinted sixteen times into the 1970s. The books were astonishing successes and helped make Eleanor Eldridge a folk hero of African-American feminism. Frances Whipple became a Rhode Island literary legend and positioned her well to agitate the related issues of suffrage and slavery. In 1844, Whipple published *Might and Right*, her history of the Dorr Rebellion. At the point of publication, Dorr languished in a prison cell charged with treason against his state while his followers were busy clambaking Van Buren (then Polk) into the White House. For Whipple, recently married to Charles Green, Dorrism was merely reflective of a larger universalist philosophy of equal rights. Her lasting point of contention with the Dorr movement, in fact, was the Rhode Islanders' resistance to equal

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

suffrage for African Americans and, ultimately, the abolition of slavery. She was an important radical, locofoco link in the Young American community and her history of the Dorr War, *Might and Right*, was sought by collectors long after her death at such a high price that it “would astonish the author.”<sup>194</sup>

Green’s *Might and Right* is a classical liberal interpretation of the Dorr War published in 1844. The book is more professional and well-documented than any of Catherine Williams’ works while it possesses every bit of Williams’ zeal for locofoco philosophy. Greene dedicated *Might and Right* to Dorr, “The TRUE and TRIED PATRIOT, the fearless DEFENDER OF HUMAN RIGHTS.” Echoing this universalist language throughout the text, she says Rhode Island’s Dorrites occupied the moral high ground: “Believing in the unity of Human Rights—the unity of Freedom—we can see that the injury of any member, is the injury of the whole body, and wrong towards any part is wrong towards the whole.” She was plainly and expressly reacting to the failure of the Dorr Warriors to mobilize the populace to effective resistance; the weak wills and cheap manhoods that apparently occupied the land. Greene’s historical vision and universalism suggest that the Dorr War was the domain of all mankind. Her first task, then, was to rally the firm republicans of sister states to come to the aid of liberty-loving Rhode Islanders. Green adopts the definitive language and sense of certainty in historical development common to Young American discussions of Manifest Destiny. The loco-Dorrite revolution would literally spread like wildfire in the winds if the people voiced support for the core principles of

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid. 18-31, 32-61; See Joycelyn Moody, ed. Frances Harriet Whipple, *Memoirs of Eleanor Eldridge*, Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2014; Frances Whipple, *Eleanor’s Second Book*, Providence: B. T. Albro, 1842; *The Mechanic*, Providence: Burnett & King, 1842; *The Housekeeper’s Book*, Philadelphia: William Marshall & Co., 1837; “Bibliographical Memoir of Frances H. McDougall, Born Whipple,” in Sidney Rider, *Bibliographical Memoirs of Three Rhode Island Authors: Joseph K. Angell, Frances A. (Whipple) McDougall, Catharine R. Williams*, (Providence: Sidney S. Rider, 1880), 26-47; Sarah O’Dowd, *A Rhode Island Original: Frances Harriet Whipple Green McDougall*, (Hanover: The University Press of New England), 2004.

representative government, winds that closely followed later Free Soil and Republican routes to electoral success:

Speak old Massachusetts, our elder-brother-land! Send us a God-speed, that shall echo from your northern battlements to the hallowed Rock of Plymouth! Give us one word of good cheer, Connecticut, our comely and right-minded sister! Show us that a Heart is throbbing beneath that sober girdle—ay, and a Soul, too, ready to kindle at the tale of wrong! The granite cliffs of New Hampshire never refused an echo when the oppressed cried for help! They will speak for us. And even Greenmantled Vermont will blush in shame, that she beheld our sufferings unmoved. Her mountain-heart will beat again, true to herself, and the Free Thought that surrounds her like a native element; and she will more than make amends for her former coldness. Maine will send us a cheer on the free billows that chafe her coasts...New York will send our call abroad, with the high authority of the Empire State, and whisper it to the gentle sister she embraces; and even the Land of Penn, will be ‘moved in the spirit,’ to hear, and to help us. Ohio will catch our Appeal from the banks of her own beautiful River, and bear it westward, until, from the children of the distant prairies, shall come a widely-echoing response; and no free Wind shall return to us with our call unanswered.<sup>195</sup>

In 1845, Frances Whipple (now Frances Green) edited *Liberty Chimes*, a collection of antislavery writings, and she continued publishing shorter pieces in abolitionist periodicals like *The Liberator*. *Liberty Chimes* was Green’s attempt to reunify the Rhode Island abolitionist movement, recently ruptured into factions by the Dorr War. Dorr was one of the state’s most prominent abolitionists and defenders of free speech, but his reluctant assent to the “white’s only” clause in the People’s Constitution alienated much of the abolition movement from the Dorr movement. Frances Green maintained membership in both and offered *Liberty Chimes* as “a way to foster unity among various Rhode Island antislavery factions, focusing again on the effects of slavery on families and appealing to all virtuous women to work to end these evils.” As Sarah O’ Dowd, psychologist and biographer of France Whipple, writes, “Many female abolitionists conceptualized their role as appealing for interracial sisterhood, an approach that Whipple used to a large extent in her editing of gift books” like those for Eleanor Eldridge. Green’s own contribution to *Liberty Chimes* was titled “The Slave-Wife,” and she shockingly

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<sup>195</sup> Greene, *Might and Right*, x-xii.

portrayed master-slave sexual violence six years before Harriet Beecher Stowe's mammoth, though considerably more timid image of slavery. "Whipple violated the norms of female propriety by dealing openly with sexuality," O'dowd explains, a stylistic choice which isolated her from much of her audience. In the opening issue of her worker's periodical *The Wampanoag and Operatives Journal*, Green declared for women's liberation and abolition as twin goals. Green's other *Liberty Chimes* story, "Ahmed's Letters," (followed in 1858 by the novel *Shahmah in Pursuit of Freedom, or 'The Branded Hand'*) told the story of a Barbary traveler to the United States shocked and disgusted by the annexation of Texas and the expansion of slavery within a supposedly free country. Throughout the story, "Writing in Ahmed's voice, Whipple angrily denounces those who favor annexation. She asserts that President James K. Polk broke his oath of office in aggressively sending the American army into Texas." History, she believed, was not supposed to go this way. As with Catharine Sedgwick, Bryant, Whitman, and so many others, the issues of war and the expansion of slavery drove single-issue wedges between the diverse factions of the locofoco movement. Frances Whipple married and divorced Charles Green within two years, likely the victim of domestic abuse and spousal neglect. At the highest point of tensions between radical political factions, her own life took dramatic, radical, and unexpected turns.<sup>196</sup>

France Whipple Green McDougall's life loosely paralleled and intersected with the development of the leftmost fringes of Young America politics, the labor and land reform movements. Historian Mark Lause's treatment of George Henry Evans, the National Reform Association, and the agrarian land reform movement which adopted the label "Young America" in the mid-1840s virtually separates the reformers from the Loco-Focos. To Lause, like Walter

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<sup>196</sup>O'Dowd, *A Rhode Island Original*, 50-61, "Chapter 6: Shahmah," 105-118; Rider, *Bibliographical Memoirs of Three Rhode Island Authors: Joseph K. Angell, Frances A. (Whipple) McDougall, Catherine R. Williams*, Providence: Sidney S. Rider, 1880, 33-34.

Hugins, the Equal Rights Party “collapsed” in 1837, and their “insurgency” “folded about them.” In fact, their locofocoism prompted reformers like the original Loco-Focos John Commerford, John Windt, Simon Clannon, Thomas Estebrook, Robert Hogbin, Ellis Smalley, Robert Beatty, and none other than Fitzwilliam Byrdsall to join the National Reform Association. Loco-Foco Democrats and Evansite “Young Americans” shared the same physical spaces in New York City, including meeting halls and park meeting grounds, they shared much of the same audience, and very similar worldviews. These labor reformers and early trades unionists (including Whipple herself), rejected the Aristotelian, aristocratic contempt for manual labor and the notion that labor was a lingering curse from God as punishment for the crimes of Adam and Eve. Theodore Dwight Weld’s “Manual Labor School Movement,” and the land reformers attempted to minimize repetitive, existentially unfulfilling labor and elevate manual labor to a social and moral ideal. For the most part, the Evansite labor movement operated distinctly from the Loco-Foco Movement, the politico-literary Young America, and the Dorr War, but a slew of important individuals, shared ideas, and political tactics linked them all through the 1840s.<sup>197</sup>

George Henry Evans, John Windt, and the ex-Chartist Thomas Ainge Devyr founded the National Reform Association in John Windt’s print shop on 8 March, 1844 with the goals of driving and coordinating a variety of socio-economic and political reforms. The NRA allied itself with the Dorr movement and the Anti-Renters in New York, attracting Loco-Foco allies like Fitzwilliam Byrdsall, whose Calhounite Free Trade Association advocated free trade as a way of protecting working class consumers from price inflation. The Anti-Rent crusade in the

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<sup>197</sup> Lause, *Young America*, 9-20, 24; Jonathan Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991, 23-25, “Chapter 3: Division of Labor and Mechanization in Factories: Pressures to Redefine Intelligent Manual Labor,” “Chapter 4: Drudge Work: Menial Services, Dirty Work, the Death Trades, and the Case of the British Climbing Boys,” and “Chapter 5: The Technological and Fourierist Solutions to Drudge Work.”



great manor counties to nullify landlord titles and renegotiate leaseholds often crossed paths with locofocos and many involved counted themselves ideological allies with the radicals in New York City. The Anti-Rent rebellion began at Rensselaerwyck in 1839 and reached its peak in 1845, when “10,000 tenant families in eleven counties with a total of 1.8 million acres under lease for lives or forever,” successfully resisted paying “feudal” rents on their upstate New York farms. In response to early Anti-Rent violence against officials attempting to collect rents, Bryant’s *Evening Post* condemned the “Indians” and mask-wearers sullyng the cause of reform with the letting of blood. Despite their disagreements in tactics, locofocos and Anti-Renters generally shared similar anti-monopoly philosophies and penchants for affecting structural reform to address social problems. The depression-era atmosphere of the early 1840s exacerbated left-wing reformist coalitions and New York’s radical democrats of all affiliations “looked to the reform of state constitutions in order to curtail the Whig penchant for borrowing money, chartering privileged corporations, and otherwise impairing the principle of equal rights.” One Anti-Renter meeting advertised itself as “A Meeting of the friends of Equal Rights,” John Evans named his anti-rent Columbia County newspaper the *Equal Rights Advocate*, the 1844 Anti-Renter state convention styled itself the “Equal Rights Convention,” and both factions of New York radicals pursued anti-privilege, anti-monopoly courses. Many Evansite land reformers supported Texas annexation as a means of obtaining land for white settlers and shared Young America I hopes in the expansion of the American republic. Others, like Barnabas Bates, an original member of the Equal Rights Party, remained actively opposed to the slave trade and domestic slavery often accompanied by mob violence directed against him. Bates committed himself to antislavery so profoundly that he pioneered a movement in postal

reform, founding Cheap Postage Associations aiming to reduce the costs of flooding the mails with political materiel.<sup>198</sup>

The most significant outcome of the combined forces of the Workingmen's movement, locofocoism, the Anti-Rent War, and Young America in New York was the 1846 constitution. While they existed with independent lives as independent movements, the Locofoco and Anti-Rent movements intersected in the effort to reform the state constitution, long a pet project of locos like William Cullen Bryant and Fitzwilliam Byrdsall. Byrdsall, in fact, communicated with one of the leading figures for constitutional reform, Democratic Assemblyman and former Congressman, Michael Hoffman, in establishing exactly what the new constitution should do for its citizens. According to their plan, the new constitution should establish firm controls over the legislature's ability to spend and contract debts, guarantee public education, abolish the practice of bank suspensions of specie payments, limit the powers of municipal governments, abolish all partial legislations, limit the number of government offices, limit executive and legislative appointing powers, more fully protect the separation of powers, and establish a regular constitutional convention in twenty-year intervals to refresh the fundamental laws of the state as conditions changed. The *Evening Post* called for the formation of county-level organizations and a State Association for Constitutional Reform in 1843, including state meetings in New York City and Albany in August and November 1843, respectively, and county-level meetings throughout the year. Theodore Sedgwick, speaking in support of the plan, urged his fellow New

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<sup>198</sup> Lause, *Young America*, 94, 125; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 81-111; Reeve Huston, *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 109, 111, 164; Edward P. Cheney, *The Anti-Rent Agitation in the State of New York, 1839-1846*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1887, 42; McCurdy, *The Anti-Rent Era*, xiii, 20-21, 106, 124-125, 126.

Yorkers to avoid the disastrous example of the Dorr War, a farce which should not be “reenact[ed] on the theater of New York.”<sup>199</sup>

“Essentially a Democratic instrument,” the constitution “revealed the influence of the Workingmen and their permanent contribution to the New York Democracy,” Hugins wrote. The new document minimized “sectarian influence,” guaranteed “liberty of conscience,” made virtually all judges and state offices elected “including the canal commissioners and state prison inspectors,” and rejected common law as “repugnant to this constitution.” By far the most significant contribution of the Loco-Focos to the 1846 constitution was the treatment of the relationship between corporations and the state. The constitution abolished government weights and measures offices while retaining the authority of setting standards and repealed “the traditional special chartering system for all but municipal corporations,” which gave constitutional support to the New York Free Banking Act, another loco-inspired legislation. Finally, the constitution forbade the legislature from sanctioning bank suspensions of specie payments to noteholders, who were now constitutionally guaranteed “preference over all other creditors in case of insolvency, and stockholders were made individually liable to the extent of their holdings for all corporation debts and liabilities.” As Hugins argued about the Workingmen-Loconfoco coalition, it depended upon much greater, widespread support than New York City alone: “It is inconceivable that this small band of political dissidents could have effected such a revolution unaided.” Their accomplishments “could not have been enacted into law but for the acquiescence--indeed, the active cooperation--of a significant segment of the population upstate.” Attracting support primarily from dissident, radical Democrats, the Workingmen, Locofocos, Anti-Renters, National Reformers, and Young Americans all drew

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<sup>199</sup> McCurdy, *The Anti-Rent Era*, xiii, 20-21, 106, 124-125, 126, 162-181, 222, 266-269.

from Whigs and non-partisans as well. Governor Silas Wright failed to maintain party unity in the face of increasing tensions between Barnburners and Hunkers at the state level, practically conceding the politics of Anti-Rent to the Whigs, who left the matter to the courts and a generation of legal battles over the rights of manorial landlords. By 1848, the Free Soil movement virtually absorbed the National Reformers and land reformer Young Americans. Though locofocoism has seldom been indicated as a movement worthy of its own study, linking many of the otherwise disparate stories of reform throughout the period discussed here, the locofoco Free Soil movement clearly became the senior partner among reformists. Reformism, “came very near to being entirely swallowed by the Free Soil Party,” By the time of the Civil War, those associated with the old NRA favored the conflict as a “War for Free Labor,” as much as antislavery locofocos considered it a cleansing of America’s moral slate.<sup>200</sup>

Perhaps the most significant delineating factor allowing historians to disentangle the complexly intertwined histories of the Workingmen-National Reformers and the Loco-Focos remains the distinction between William Leggett’s extremist *laissez-faire* individualism and George Henry Evans’ support for government power wielded in the interest of “the whole people.” Representing the working class, both groups fought “against law-created privilege, rather than attacking the business community of which they considered themselves actual or potential members.” Neither the Workingmen nor the Loco-Focos advocated the transformation of American society, but rather “a campaign to transform government into an impartial arbiter among free individuals, each pursuing his own economic self-interest.” In raw numbers, more Americans inclined toward the Leggettian, *laissez-faire* side of the divide, which, as Hugins suggests, was evidenced in the 1846 constitutional convention’s strict limitations on the

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 216-218.

economic role of state government. Activists, members of the press, and politicians did their best to appeal to both factions of politically fluid Young Americans. Attempts to balance these closely related, though nuanced, traditions on the Jacksonian left-wing with efforts at mainstream constitutional reform could, as the case of Governor Silas Wright demonstrates, be both wildly successful and potentially fatal. Victories at the state level for reformist locofocos and Workingmen both prompted the radicals to once again reconsider their position within the national party during the Polk administration.<sup>201</sup>

Levi Slamm, editor of the New York *Daily Plebeian*, original member of the Loco-Foco Party, Young American, and thoroughgoing Dorrite, served as an important bridge between the various Young American and Loco-Foco factions largely by demagogically thundering about the British and American places in world history. His *Daily Plebeian* hunted the British Empire around the globe, attacking every extension of British power. He linked anti-monopoly theory derived from Leggett with Anglophobic anti-imperialism. Slamm harbored deep antipathy to British culture and so sought to bolster the budding Young America movement. He often used his pages to attack the merits of British writers like Charles Dickens for his supposed “foreign aristocratic manners and fashions.” Upon naming his paper *The Daily Plebeian*, Slamm identified himself and his cause with those struggling for liberty in all ages, against all iterations of unjust power. “The political aristocrats of the day are but the inheritors of the principles of the patricians of elder ages,” Slamm editorialized in his second edition. So deep did his scorn for British power plunge, he anticipated Spencer in sympathizing with murderous non-whites like the Afghans from the quote which opened this chapter. Slamm’s editorial placed him firmly on the side of the resistance. His antipathy extended from Afghanistan, east to China. Denouncing

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<sup>201</sup> Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 222.

British interventions in the Sandwich Islands, pushing for the 54°40' boundary in the Oregon Territory, and vigorously fighting the "British Charter" in Rhode Island, Slamm was a Young American fighting the new British Empire, not an Anglo-Saxonist warhawk. His paper advertised directly to Irish immigrants, attempted to convince them that the Democrats were unequivocally their natural allies in American politics, and trumpeted Irish home rule and repeal of the Corn Laws. Perhaps most importantly, Slamm shifted from the Van Buren camp and began calling for the annexation of Texas, largely to prevent British influence over the Lonestar Republic, and the election of James K. Polk in 1844. Slamm's support may well have driven the slim margins that elected Polk and many of the more conciliatory locofocos no doubt felt triumphant and hopeful.<sup>202</sup>

Levi Slamm's New York *Daily Plebeian* was perhaps the most important locofoco enterprise since Leggett's editorship of the *Evening Post*, and it was a key source for locofoco news, opinion, and social networking. The *Daily Plebeian* courted the Workingmen faction of the Jacksonian left in the old locofoco tradition, hoping to mobilize locofoco supporters to vote for Democratic politicians. Slamm's paper represents one of the most complete and significant compendiums of locofoco thought and activity, covering the Dorr War in particular detail. Slamm established the *Plebeian* in May 1842, during the heady days of the Dorr War military standoffs and Dorr's own visits to Slamm while in exile. Through the clam baking Fall of 1842 and into the election cycle of 1844, the *Daily Plebeian* served as a crucial link in the locofoco networks of the antebellum North and the political, social, and historical ideas expressed in those pages offer significant expositions of locofoco thought. From the first, the *Daily Plebeian* was committed to Leggett's locofocoism, though Slamm remained loyal to the new Tammany Hall

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<sup>202</sup> "A Bare-Faced English Monopoly," *Daily Plebeian*, 14 September 1842, 1; "Charles Dickens," *Daily Plebeian*, 19 August 1842, 2; "Our Name," *Daily Plebeian*, 28 June 1842, 2.

and the national Democratic Party after the Equal Rights Party conflict. The first issue contained a bombastic defense of locofoco principles and frank expressions of America's role in history as the world's last hope. Slamm embraced his Loco-Foco past, declaring that "we are willing that our past course shall be considered an earnest—at least in part—of our future career, and that under more favorable circumstances than it has hitherto been our fortune to enjoy, we promise ourselves a more extended sphere of usefulness."<sup>203</sup>

To the Loco-Focos, lifestyle was as important as public policy. Their historical vision and social theory told them that real reality—actual lived experience—happened in rather mundane circumstances and that the private, personal behaviors of individuals were ultimately what drove events. Personal habits, individual traits, and the particular moral perspectives of *particular* moral agents joined together through purposeful human action to produce political and social structures and historical change. Public intellectuals like Slamm attempted to revolutionize people's heads and hearts as much as their ballots. Slamm's *Plebeian* attempted to court readers based on their radical politics, and reshape their moral proclivities according to their political first principles, and finally reshape society through organic, peaceful, *intellectual* and *cultural* means. Explaining the name of his paper, Slamm identified his cause with that of "the interests of the mass—the people at large, the tillers of the earth, the 'huge paws' of the land, the men of honest industry, whose every drop of hard-wrung sweat adds to a nation's gold, in a word the producers of every thing that gives us national wealth and industry." He did not base membership in the productive classes on labor or wealth alone, however, as access to political power was the crucial necessity to break from the humble classes and become an aristocrat. The class of exploited, productive laborers was comprised of the great bulk of humankind according to virtually every metric. The class of exploiters, the proud and powerful

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<sup>203</sup> "Introductory," *Daily Plebeian*, 27 June 1842, 2.

aristocracy, was comprised of relatively few people with relatively little *actual* power not foolishly delegated to them by a well-herded public, “the hereditary drones, whose sole business it was to live on the labor of others.”<sup>204</sup>

Slamm dismissed any historically-specific definition of the classes, emphasizing a belief that regardless of time and context, the most important social conflicts are caused by disparities in political power which incentivized some to exploit others. The plebeian class, he argued, “comprises every interest out of the pale of the privileged classes, whether such privileges be those of a titled hereditary aristocracy part and parcel of the government, or those of hereditary monopolies, neither part nor parcel of the government, but the excrescences of its rank luxuriance, the parasites that twine themselves around, and feed on its life-blood.” And while he recognized that the United States had largely escaped the historical yoke of feudalism and class divisions were perhaps less apparent than in the Old World, he added that the battles of history were fought everywhere the clash of Liberty and Power caused social conflict. “To the term aristocratical,” Slamm wrote, “the time honored name of Democrat has always been opposed.” The mushroom aristocracy of the emerging corporatist-capitalist hybridized American political economy may have sprung into existence shrouded in paper mysteries, but their social role was far from novel. “The political aristocrats of the day are but the inheritors of the principles of the patricians of elder ages,” Slamm surmised; and they were functionally and necessarily opposed to the inheritors of plebeian principles, the locofoco Democrats. “If antiquity can hallow our name, ours is all hallowed. It took its rise at the very foundation of old Rome, and from that day to this has not lost its significance. The Chartists of old England are the present plebeians—God

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<sup>204</sup> “Our Name,” *Daily Plebeian*, 28 June 1842, 2.



speed their efforts—of that land; the Democrats, the advocates of equal rights and equal laws, are the plebeians of our own.”<sup>205</sup>

Many within or associated with the locofoco movement thought of historical development in stadialist, materialist terms. Arthur Brisbane, the associantionist socialist who regularly published a column in the *Daily Plebeian* on “Association; or Social Reform,” is an excellent example of the connections maintained between the Evansite Workingmen’s faction and the locofoco movement and Young America. Brisbane believed history progressed through distinct stages, each marked by a dominant class relationship in which the powerful few that controlled social institutions made war on the less powerful many, who responded in kind. “From the earliest times to the present day,” Brisbane’s most complete discussion in the *Daily Plebeian* argued, “we find that man has preyed upon his fellow-man... War, bloodshed and spoliation have been the grand characteristics of human societies since the Fall, or the dissolution of the simple primitive societies, and their lapse into savageism or barbarism, through the violation of the original laws of social order and harmony.” Every human society has been subject to this dynamic, he argued, and “SOCIETIES HAVE ALTERNATED ONLY IN THE MODE OF THEIR INJUSTICE, BUT INJUSTICE HAS NEVER CEASED TO BE THEIR FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTER.” Over time, historical progression through a series of class conflicts and resolutions had produced the modern era, a period relatively rife and roiling with liberty and prosperity. Lest political and social radicals become complacent in their relatively comfortable positions within history, however, Brisbane’s work cautioned and forewarned. “The same rapacious spirit is alive and as fiercely active among modern nations,” he assured readers, “but in civilized societies, with some exceptions of still existing slavery, *indirect* violence accomplishes as effectually the same ends. The producer is robbed of the product of his toil, and

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

is as much the victim of social tyranny, under our false system of Industry, as the producer or slave of antiquity.”<sup>206</sup>

Brisbane condensed historical development to several critical stages defined by particular class relationships. First, and “Among the most ancient nations, the two distinctions of rank and condition were those of *warriors* and *slaves*.” This primary social distinction, enabled by the brute force and power of the warriors, resulted in a host of evils: the occupation of warfare “absorbed all the power of intellect and science, leaving productive industry to ignorance and slavery. The consequence was a constant recurrence of famine and pestilence, which are stamped upon every page of ancient history.” Whenever advances in standards-of-living were made, they were made by the productive classes and benefitted (gradually, at least) all classes everywhere. In ancient Rome, society divided between the patricians and plebeians; in the medieval period, lords and serfs; “and at the present day, into Rich and Poor, Employers and Employees.” He thought all people everywhere and at all times were engaged in the same battle for Liberty against the forces of Power. “The same iniquitous system of oppression overwhelms the mass in misery and poverty,” Brisbane argued, “they are the dependent slaves of capital, and are as much bound, under the name of ‘*the working classes*,’ to the toil and drudgery of Repugnant Industry, as the slaves of antiquity.” Wherever and whenever the power of some is employed to constrict the liberties of others, locofocos thought, historical space opened for the assertion of the people’s liberties against the aristocrat’s powers. Brisbane and fellow loco-Young Americans often, though not always, desperately sought to break the cycle of history and establish a permanent revolution. The counter-revolutionary reinstatement of the aristocracy, the

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<sup>206</sup> Laue, *Young America*.; “General View of the Condition of Mankind,” *Daily Plebeian*, 26 July 1842, 1.

reassertion of warrior power over the productive classes, “is not the eternal destiny of man. A great change must be wrought, which will bring real liberty, plenty, and happiness to all!”<sup>207</sup>

In addition to giving voice and platform to outsider Young American thinkers like Brisbane, Slamm himself was responsible for the most powerful of suffragist arguments, namely that the Rhode Island constitution was no longer republican in nature, necessitating positive action to reinforce the people’s rights against an entrenched, landed aristocracy. Clipping from Roger Williams, Jr.’s “Address to the People of the United States on the Affairs of Rhode Island,” Slamm identified the Dorr War as a clash of “republican liberty [and] aristocratic despotism.” Williams’ speech called for the formation of a league of pro-republican states to prosecute a civil war if necessary. After the abortive battle of Chepachet Hill in early July 1842, however, the military effort evaporated and many who were previously hopeful for the chance to rid Rhode Island of its British charter became disenchanted and lost their romantic edge. “What rights, under their Constitution, to be determined by Congress, or at law, the people of Rhode Island now have, remains to be seen,” a somber *Plebeian* reporter noted, “Their cause seems to be drawing to its end.”<sup>208</sup>

### In Practice: Toward A Policy of Manifest Destiny

The British troops made a glorious descent on Quang Whang, in China, which resulted in the complete destruction of the town, and the retreat of some thousands of helpless women and children into the water, or the wilderness, or elsewhere, ‘to escape the just indignation of her Majesty’s forces.’

Thus the world wags. Far-off calamities are read of, and wondered at for a moment, and then forgotten, her majesty’s troops may travel hither and thither, bearing destruction and

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid. See also the “On Association, or, Social Reform” columns in the following issues of the *Daily Plebeian*: 28 June 1842; 30 June 1842; 1 July 1842; 2 July 1842; 9 July 1842; 12 July 1842; 21 July 1842; 29 July 1842; 26 August 1842.

<sup>208</sup> “An Address to the People of the United States on the Affairs of Rhode Island,” *Daily Plebeian*, 29 June 1842, 4; “The Closing Scene in Rhode Island—A Brief Narrative of Facts,” *Daily Plebeian*, 12 July 1842, 2.

desolation in their path, and it is all right. Nothing is said against it, though they may proceed, as in the China war, against people who never injured them, and who so far from being aggressors, are too weak and timid to defend themselves against the attack of one-tenth their numbers; but *let a people rise up against oppression*, declare their hostility to monarchical government, and maintain their declaration by force of arms...In short, all the power that men can exert, fairly or unfairly, justly or unjustly, is brought to bear against a people struggling for their rights. Under such disadvantages do the people of Great Britain labor, and all men of feeling pity them. Under such disadvantages do the people of RHODE ISLAND labor, but who pities *them*? Will the Federalists answer?

--Levi Slamm, "Oppression vs. Freedom,"<sup>209</sup>

In Spring 1843, locofoco spirits once again rose to excitement as radicals throughout the country revived old causes and charted new courses for intellectual and political progress. In the 1842 gubernatorial elections, Marcus Morton marshaled enough support from his involvement in the recent rash of Dorrite clam bakes in Massachusetts to narrowly defeat John Davis. Though Morton and George Bancroft after him lost elections afterward, the 1842 victory coupled with successful constitutional reform in Rhode Island, a Democratic victory for Chauncey Cleveland over Roger Baldwin in Connecticut, and strong support building for the former president's imminent bid in 1844. As early as 9 February, 1843 the Democrats of Boston staged the next clam bake. Dorr himself was rumored to be in attendance, though he did not appear. Both Whig and Democratic presses claimed the rumor was "a hoax, got up to sell the tickets." As the *Daily Atlas* was quick to note, however, something of the original fire had gone out of the clam bakes, and the plot failed to produce a sizable audience. By September 1843, however, Democrats sufficiently replicated the original clam baking phenomena, including the convivial atmosphere Catharine Williams compared to meetings of Scott's Roundheads. Though exact attendance figures were not reported for the Bellingham, Massachusetts clam bake on 27 September, 1843, the assemblage was "quite large." "All were animated by a spirit of enthusiasm, and a determination to make the occasion a pleasant and a profitable one," reported the *Bay State*

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<sup>209</sup> "Oppression vs. Freedom," *Daily Plebeian*, 21 September 1842, 2.

*Democrat*. Festivities began “at an early hour in the forenoon,” and included military luminaries, “the Columbian Band,” a large raised stage, seating specifically for “the accommodation of the ladies,” and clams baking in the earth behind the stage, always within view of the no-doubt eager audience. No clergymen were on site to officiate and a lawyer was called upon as a worthy substitute. Welcome B. Sayles again spoke to the crowd, followed by a round of other speakers. The feast was then served, and the tables “presented a pleasant sight, loaded as they were with those potent whig scarers, baked clams, and other plain and acceptable fare.” When the meal was over, the speeches resumed. “Their remarks,” the *Bay State Democrat*’s report continued, “referred more or less to the failure of the suffrage cause in Rhode Island; and the sentiments of condemnation against John Tyler and his cabinet for the unwarrantable interposition of the executive authority,” and proclaimed Dorr a hero. They concluded by announcing support for Marcus Morton’s reelection in Massachusetts and by selecting Van Buren as their candidate for 1844. “In our national affairs,” the resolution declared, “no man should be selected as the candidate for the suffrages of the democratic party, who does not fully recognize and maintain the sovereignty of the people.”<sup>210</sup>

Van Buren’s failure to gain the nomination did not impair loco-Dorrite, Young American enthusiasm for Polk, himself widely recognized as the Equal Rights Democrat responsible for passing Van Buren’s program through the House during Polk’s term as Speaker. In Woonsocket on 22 August, 1844, Dorrite women activists gathered 6-8,000 people, including Welcome B. Sayles and Lewis Josselyn. “All the friends of ‘Polk, Dallas, and *Mr. Dorr*,’ were invited to attend,” the *Atlas* reported. “The meeting manifested strong and deep indignation at the imprisonment of Dorr,” and local Democrat politicians were “trusting the faithful in

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<sup>210</sup> “[Untitled],” *Daily Atlas*, 20 February, 1843; “[Untitled],” *Daily Atlas*, 21 February, 1843; “[Untitled],” *Daily Atlas*, 21 February, 1843; “From the Bay State Democrat of Sept. 28,” *New-Hampshire Patriot*, 5 October 1843.

[Massachusetts] to swell its numbers.” Despite the large turnout and enthusiastic crowd, the Whig presses declared the event a failure. What was more, Whigs argued, Loco-Foco Democrat activists who were once so concerned about the aristocratic demagoguery of Whigs had themselves been duped into supporting Polkite expansionist demagogues. Whigs foresaw conservative Democrats jumping the party ship and joining Clay, as “The course which the supporters of Anarchy and Rebellion have pursued in Rhode Island, has driven the most respectable and influential members of the Locofoco party into the Law and Order ranks.” This,” the *Atlas* spat, “is the *modern* democracy, that *professes* so much regard for the voice of the people,—that exclaims, ‘*Vox populi—vox Dei*’—And yet when the ‘voice of the people’ is spoken repeatedly against them, they heed it not.”<sup>211</sup>

A month later, twenty-five thousand Democratic supporters of “‘POLK & DALLAS,’ ‘Gov. Dorr,’ ‘Equal Laws and Equal Rights,’ &c.” hosted the final act in a long drama at Swamscot, Massachusetts, the largest clam bake of the era. The crowd greatly exceeded expectations and included at least 5,000 women. According to the *Bay State Democrat*,

At an early hour in the morning, omnibuses, stages, wagons, hay-carts, and vehicles of every description, freighted with the sturdy democrats of Essex county, poured into the town of Lynn in a perfect torrent, while steamboats from Boston, and the railroad cars from Newburyport, Salem, and the intervening towns, and from Boston, contributed their share to swell the mighty tide of democracy that arose at the bidding of the sturdy fishermen of Swamscott. The Boston Young Men’s Democratic Association, a bastion of locofoco activism, headed the grand procession. Joining with other groups from Lynn, Salem, Marblehead, and Newburyport, the Young Men arrived by ten o’clock. Cohorts of women activists led human trains from Marblehead and Charlestown throughout the day. The archway to the clam bake grounds greeted all arrivals, draped with a banner proudly proclaiming “WELCOME, FRIENDS OF

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<sup>211</sup> “Large Meeting in Rhode Island,” *Concord New-Hampshire Patriot*, 29 August 1844; “[Untitled,]” *Philadelphia North American*, 26 August 1844;

FREE SUFFRAGE!” Within sight of Bunker Hill, “the fires were lighted in seven vast ovens, thirty feet in circumference, for roasting of clams, of which 170 barrels had been provided, together with one thousand lobsters, with all the needful for a chowder, of which 200 gallons were cooked.” The hosts erected a stage, followed by military drills and a convention meeting, featuring speeches like that which “promised a majority of from ten to twenty thousand in New York for Polk and Dallas.” Robert Rantoul, Silas Wright, and Lewis Josselyn all addressed the crowd, as “The Rhode Island question—the Bank—Texas and Oregon—were in turn discussed to the visible gratification of all present.” Wright’s presence was especially important given his current role as peacemaker between the Barnburning locofoco and Hunker faction in New York. The New York Democracy nominated Wright to run for Governor in 1844 with the goal of increasing the Barnburner turnout for the expansionist, proslavery Polk. As a committed Van Burenite *and* partisan Democrat, Wright maintained a single focus on Democratic unity throughout the election season. As Horatio Seymour later commented about Silas Wright, “to him his party was everything--himself nothing.” With a series of quick resolutions “and a succession of cheers for Polk & Dallas, Bancroft and Childs and Gov. Dorr,” the meeting adjourned. “One of the strong Democrats who went to the Clam Bake,” the *Atlas* mused, “was so convinced by the Loco Foco speeches that they were enemies of the laborer, that he has left the party and joined the Whig, or Laboring Man’s party, and become a member of the Clay Club. How many more have left the Loco party for the same reasons, the vote in November will tell.”<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> “25,000 Democrats at Swamscot Hill,” *Portsmouth New-Hampshire Gazette*, 10 September 1844; “From the Bay State Democrat,” *Concord New-Hampshire Patriot*, 12 September 1844; Charles W. McCurdy, *The Anti-Rent Era in New York Law and Politics, 1839-1865*, Chapel Hill (NC): The University of North Carolina Press, 2001, 143-144, 182-184.

Levi Slamm continued the loco-Dorrite theme of class separation and warfare articulated at the clam bakes, fighting evolving battles with familiar arguments. Confronted with the charge that Whigs possessed greater talents for city management, budgeting, and good judgment, Slamm deflected the blow. “All Parties are Alike! Says the Whig when any one of the many delinquencies of his party is brought home to him,” Slamm opened. Though Slamm desired to create a slew of democratic converts, the American Everyman seemed to remain in a state of profound ignorance and inaction. “Talk to him of the bribery street sweeping contract,” for example, “and he will assert that the Democrats make contracts with others than the lowest responsible bidder.” In the face of contradictory evidence, the Whig remains intractably committed to his useful idiocy: “he will scratch his head and say there is too much party spirit these days and he don’t approve of it! But he votes the Whig ticket nevertheless.” Confront the Whig with the facts of massive state debts created under Whig administrations “whether city, state or national...and he will say it is all politics, and for his part he thinks there is too much of it!” Slamm reserved his most caustic criticisms for the Whig politicians who exercised their power to benefit the privileged few: “Thus it is—the thief is interested in making out that all the rest of the world are thieves—as well as he, and that he disapproves of the general practice! The honest, morally or politically, are never compelled to resort to such shifts.”<sup>213</sup>

Despite the long string of locofoco half-victories and the much longer string of failures, Slamm remained optimistic about the ability of *American Power* to advance the cause of Liberty geopolitically and historically. As the issues of Oregon and Texas annexation rose to prominence in the public discourse, the *Plebeian* charted a decidedly expansionist, yet radical liberal course. On 9 June, 1843 Slamm stated that “the late outrageous robbery perpetrated by

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<sup>213</sup> “All Parties are Alike!” *Daily Plebeian*, 21 March 1843.



the British Government, in seizing upon the Sandwich Islands, should warn us against the encroachments which she [Britain] meditates upon our own soil...Her lust of dominion is unbounded.” Convinced that the hapless Secretary of State Daniel Webster and President Tyler would continue bowing “to her rapacity,” the *Plebeian* informed readers that “Her ministers are now intriguing for the purchase of Calafornia [sic]; and that country will, in all probability, be the next one seized upon by her hired cut-throats.” British Power would slowly stretch itself across the vitals of the still-fledgling American republic until the moment was right. “She is intrenching herself in strong holds on our Northern and Southern borders to become complete mistress of the Pacific, so that, when she ultimately seizes upon the Oregon, her dominion there may at once be secure and her power permanently established.” Slamm desired military occupation of the Oregon territory “before the great Brigand of the World pollutes our soil by planting upon it the freebooters standard of Great Britain.” Slamm soon turned such sentiments into arguments in favor of Texas annexation, in line with influential members of the administration from President Tyler himself to Cass and Calhoun.<sup>214</sup>

When Levi Slamm was asked to speak at a meeting of the pro-Irish “Great Repeal Movement” in New York City, he accepted the invitation and prepared a new slew of anti-British remarks published in the *Plebeian* alongside demands for the Oregon. Ultimately, illness forced Slamm to send Gansevoort Melville as a stand-in, but Melville was well-prepared for the occasion. He echoed the Loco-Young American ideology and language that coursed through the pages of the *Plebeian* and the speeches of the earlier Dorrite clam bakes:

The cause of Ireland is the cause of human freedom: it is one and identical with the most sacred rights of man as man, and what power on earth can stop its onward impetus? (Great cheering.) Deeply convinced as we are that the great moral struggle which is now progressing in green Erin is a struggle of man against his master, is a struggle of natural rights against the iron oppression

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<sup>214</sup> “Oregon Territory” *Daily Plebeian*, 9 June, 1843.

of an artificial and thoroughly corrupt aristocracy, we pledge ourselves that there shall be neither stint nor stay in our conscientious advocacy of the great cause of Repeal. (Tremendous cheers.) Two days later, Slamm continued his assault on the British Empire. Again agitating the Repeal movement, he declared that “If nations, like individuals, must expect a day of retribution, assuredly the hour of England’s accountability will be, like that of Babylon drunk with the blood of nations, most fearful.” He pointed to the recent slew of imperial expansions, irrespective of the racial makeup of the oppressed groups: “Look at her robberies, spoliations, and murders for the last century in Hindoostan; at her recent marauding expeditions and massacres in Afghanistan, in China, in Scinde.” “But beyond all and above all,” he continued, with the despondent determination of a too-long-defeated activist, “look at her horrible acts of treachery, her hideous murders, her wholesale robberies, her shocking and deliberately created famines practiced and perpetrated in Ireland—not for 5, 10, 20, 50, or 100 years, but with slight intermissions, for nearly 700 years!” Still on the hunt, Slamm spent the bulk of a full issue dedicated to the British Empire on 16 June 1843. The number contained two articles on British efforts to annex the Sandwich Islands and an article condemning British “rapacity” in the Niger Expedition. He remained convinced that the British intended to guarantee their preeminence in the Niger River Valley trade at the expense of American influence in Liberia. Finally, “How They Live in Great Britain” and “The Shame of England,” decried the Corn Laws and declared them responsible for the near-starvation of almost ten million people.<sup>215</sup>

The great irony was that militaristic locofocos violated their own theory of social conflict by empowering the state or using violence to advance the cause of self-government. Even the democratic-republican state in which they placed such deep faith betrayed them by continuing to aggrandize power at the expense of liberty. State intervention, their theory dictated, inevitably

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<sup>215</sup> “The Great Repeal Movement” *Daily Plebeian*, 9 June 1843; “Repeal of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland” *Daily Plebeian*, 9 June 1843; “British Interference in Liberia,” “How They Live in Great Britain,” “The Shame of England,” and “The Sandwich Islands,” *Daily Plebeian* 16 June, 1843.

dramatized and spread social conflict. Abram D. Smith, who was once elected President of the Republic of Canada, gave an 1846 stump speech that burned with a fire hoping to purge tyranny from the continent and fulfill the liberal-republican manifest destiny he and his fellow Hunters failed to excite in the Canadas. His exuberant Locofoco Romanticism prevented him from seeing the errors in his logic:

The human intellect, emancipated by free government, has demonstrated its energy, and presented to an astonished world, its first trophy, in the bloodless acquisition to the United States of a foreign nation [Texas], achieved by moral power alone. A conquest made by the equity of our fundamental laws and the power of the great truths on which our system is based...The mind emancipated, its energies in full exercise, passed at once from that result to a still wider field of moral conquest. *A magnificent thought at first tremblingly entertained, has rapidly swollen into a universal sentiment, and already is demanding as a settled policy of the country, the union of the whole North American Continent,* with all its dependencies under one, free democratic government. This is our destiny.<sup>216</sup>

Smith and fellow unrepentant filibustering locofocos failed to heed the advice of James Gemmel, an American filibuster imprisoned in and escaped from Van Dieman's Land. Gemmel, unlike Smith, experienced the ultimate expressions of social conflict—war and revolution—firsthand, not merely vicariously through a meaningless election and a pretender's office. His escape narrative illustrates the rise and fall of Loco-Foco Romanticism among the captured Canadian rebels: "I joined the insurgents behind Toronto, of my own free will, and had long been anxious for such a movement...[but] It is visionary to assert that the exertions of a few dozens of men, uninfluential, unconnected with politics, and worn down by pain and privation, could have the least effect in changing the destiny of Canada." The warriors of Liberty could not and *should not* wield the weapons of Power, and Gemmel advised his fellow loco filibusters to hang it up and focus on peaceful intellectual and social change. "That is the true way to create admiration for institutions theoretically liberal and free." Gemmel therefore implored his readers: "But let us avoid all frontier movements—the best weapon in the hands of this great

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<sup>216</sup> Dunley, "A.D. Smith," 94-5.

republic, with which to revolutionize the world, is surely a strict adherence to that wise, just, and honest policy, which carries in its train prosperity and peace.”<sup>217</sup> Gemmel’s horrific experience in Van Dieman’s Land figuratively beat the romanticism out of him, but too few heeded his hard-earned lesson, Abram Smith and fellow expansionists among them.

Locofocos like Abram D. Smith, Thomas W. Dorr, Levi Slamm, Catharine Williams, and Frances Greene exercised lasting and significant impact on the United States, and the still-powerful sense of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny. These restless locofoco reformers dreamed of themselves as movers of history, shaping Man’s future as they conquered the West. In a story reported by the *Daily Plebeian* and *Cleveland Plaindealer*, a Rhode Island family of fourteen fled the Algerine state that overtook the Land of Roger Williams. This particular family relocated to Ohio, “their future residence for life.” The father was quoted as saying “For sixty years, I have been ruled by laws which I had no voice in making. My poverty has been the pretext for my oppression. I am going to settle my boys in your noble Buckeye State, where they may enjoy those rights of freedom denied to their father.”<sup>218</sup> These very real *personal, political* machinations forged the Free Soil coalition, transformed the Democracy, and killed both major parties. Loco-Romantics wove together the microcosmic battles at the Windmill in Upper Canada, the Providence Arsenal, Chapachet Hill, and the Alamo into a macrocosmic cataclysm. Many locofocos later found it perfectly natural to add Antietam, Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Appomattox Court House to the evolving list of the contests between the aristocracy and the Democracy, ‘Mushrooms and Men.’

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<sup>217</sup> “Two Years in Van Dieman’s Land. By James Gemmell, One of the Captives: Letter II.”, *Daily Plebeian*, 1 July 1842, 1.

<sup>218</sup> “Where Liberty Dwells There is My Country,” *Daily Plebeian*, 28 September 1842, 2.

The Loco-Foco movement and locofoco Young Americans were complex intellectual tableaux, and cannot neatly be categorized as either liberal-republican or “Anglo-Saxonist.” Intellectual and political activism diverged and collided in untidy patterns, creating a largely pragmatic policy of expansionism which served political ends more than theoretical purity. This very exchange of purity for pragmatism in fact underlies the shift between Edward Widmer’s Young America I and II. Loco-Young Americans, including even partisans like Levi Slamm, embraced a platform of Anglo-phobic, liberal-republican expansionism very different from a racialized Anglo-Saxonism. Like the young Walter Whitman, these liberal-republican expansionists gradually saw their hopes betrayed by the ruthless political pragmatism of the rising generation of Democratic politicians—Young America II.<sup>219</sup> The “Dupes of Hope Forever,” indeed, the Loco-Focos persevered through a decade of hopeful beginnings, mixed successes, and devastating failures only to remain convinced that republicanism would eventually reign ascendant once again over the aristocracy, and those who remained hopeful pushed ever onward. These divisions within the Democratic Party, prompted in part by Loco-Foco activism and political momentum, soon ruptured and once again, tore the Democracy at its vitals. The following chapter will detail the Loco-Foco role in Polk’s election, the radical reaction to the Mexican War and expansion crisis, and the decidedly *locofoco* origins of the Free Soil secession.

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<sup>219</sup> Widmer, *Young America*.

## Chapter 5

### Loco-Young America and Free Soil Republicanism

There he had come to die: scorning the world...  
He could not dominate—and fled to wilds  
To be a monarch there; but pride is torture—  
For in the wild the beasts would not obey,  
The winds blew where they listed, and the storm  
Beat fiercely e'en on him—He climbed the hill  
It was a foolish thought—that he might stand  
And look from high upon the world he hated,  
He gazed upon it and he wished for power  
To scatter lightnings into distant lands—  
And in the fury of excited pride  
Towards the clouds he raised an impious hand  
To reach the thunderbolt and fell and died  
By his own passion's lightening struck down.

--Thomas Cole, "The Man of Pride"

#### Cole to Whitman: The Spectrum of Loco-Young Americans

The mountain's airy summit soon we gain'd | And stood unwearied on its topmost cliff-- |  
Around us spread a rich and varied feast | for the unsated eye—Over our heads | The Heav'ns'  
blue curtain hung without a cloud | Faint and far off upon the reckless Wave | The dim horizon  
lay—The emblem fit | Of vague Futurity. So far we see | but all beyond is darkness doubt and  
fear—.

---Thomas Cole, Untitled Poem<sup>220</sup>

Though historians have thus far failed to treat the Loco-Foco movement as a coherent whole, spread throughout various aspects of American life over the course of several decades, recent studies exploring the culture of radical republicanism, republican nationalism, and the philosophy of Free Soil illuminate the locofoco role in the culture and politics of the late antebellum period. This chapter will show that the literary, artistic, intellectual, and political world of New York Locofocoism was not only a driving force behind Young America, but it

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<sup>220</sup> Marshall Tynn, ed. *Thomas Cole's Poetry: The Collected Poems of America's Foremost Painter of the Hudson River School Reflecting His Feelings for Nature and the Romantic Spirit of the Nineteenth Century*, York, PA: Liberty Cap Books, 1972, 41.

helped create a modern sense of American nationalism essential in both the territorial expansion of the United States and the philosophy of the locofoco Free Soil coalition which combatted the influence of southern slaveholders in the rapidly-developing American empire. In the earliest days of the Loco-Foco movement through to its protracted death, New York City stood alone as the radicals' heartland, home, and inspiration. As a swiftly rising center of commerce and culture, New York City was a hub of social change and cultural productivity. In a 1967 book, historian James Callow argued that "Knickerbocker" writers grouped around William Cullen Bryant and publisher Evert Duyckinck socially and intellectually mingled with visual fine artists like Thomas Cole and Asher Durand. Cole, a political whig, was a firm cultural liberal and his body of work represents a lifelong romance with American life and landscapes. His famous friendship with Bryant was, in fact, no mere friendship, but a continuous source of reciprocal inspirations for the two artists. As Callow argued, letters between Cole and Bryant "provided corroborative evidence of a certain similarity in the thinking and methods of those two men." Locofocoism—that is, a philosophy not comfortably associated with mere politics, a radical vision of virtuous republicanism and social life—developed in tandem with the careers of men like Cole and Bryant. The field currently possesses no general history of the locofoco movement, however, so we remain blind to the ideological force that bound men like Cole and Bryant together. The Knickerbocker *literati* and *intelligentsia* represented by Bryant provided the fine arts of Young Americans with imagery and subject matter, new techniques, structural support for their paintings including publicity and exposure, and a constant stream of economic and social change in New York City.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> James T. Callow, *Kindred Spirits: Knickerbocker Writers and American Artists, 1807-1855*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1967, 3-37, 68, 221-228.

Historians from Perry Miller sixty years ago to Edward Widmer in the past decade have recognized and emphasized the central importance of New York City to the development of an American national culture. The producers and expositors of this new period and style of cultural development were often locofocos themselves (like Whitman, Hawthorne, and Melville), or they were whiggish critics of democratic, party politics (like Cole). Perry Miller argued that the Young American literary movement ca. 1830s-1860s properly began in Evert Duyckinck's "Tetractys Group" in New York City, and novelist Cornelius Matthews claimed to have coined the term. The "Tetractys Group" sought to sculpt a uniquely American literature, distinct from European antecedents, inspired by their radical republican political philosophy. Duyckinck himself played the role of canon-builder, helping emerging writers, editors, and publishers network, workshop writings, and publish. He was a progressive, modernizing locofoco who thoroughly embraced the rapidly-transforming world of the late Jacksonian period. In "The Day Book of Life," Duyckinck wrote that "Nature is not enough: we need men in cities; we must join, in a certain way, in the throng and tumult; we must retire from solitude: the wave must return with the tide, or it is lost upon the shore." With William Cullen Bryant and other loco-New York *literati*, Duyckinck helped found the American Copyright Club in 1843, seeking international copyright protection ostensibly so that American books might compete with cheaply-printed British books. Bryant's primary contribution to the politics of Young America was advancing the career of William Leggett. Bryant encouraged Leggett to write political editorials though Leggett's own background was in poetry and theater criticism. The young man's editorials "brought public measures to a rigid comparison with first principles," in Bryant's words, and Leggett's reader "found himself seized and carried forward by something of the same warlike enthusiasm which courageous and high-spirited men may be supposed to feel in the heat of



battle.” William Leggett “radiated romantic heroism,” and his fiery battle with Democrats over the subject of slavery inspired Young American writers like Whitman and Melville; his writing polarized the individuals which soon dominated a full-fledged Young America movement and he influenced New York’s “Young Democracy” “more than any other person.”<sup>222</sup>

Though by the time of the Equal Rights Party secession, Leggett was disenchanted with politics and excommunicated from the Democratic Party, his temporary replacement Theodore Sedgwick relished in political disorganization. Sedgwick himself was “a linchpin between the activism of the 1820s and the 1840s,” and for his part, Bryant’s *Evening Post* remained committed to spreading locofoco ideas first and steering regular Democratic politics only when it could be accomplished without disrupting the chances for good men (like Van Buren) to implement good policies (like an Independent Treasury). By 1844, however, the coalition of Young American New Yorkers, New Englanders, and locofoco Northwesterners built throughout the Dorr War split over the issue of Texas annexation and impending war with Mexico. Bryant and a majority of intellectuals and artists remained committed to Van Buren and non-annexation, while Levi Slamm and the more militant, filibustering wing of locofocos accepted the nomination of Polk and embraced the expansion of American republicanism. The annexationist locofocos and Young Americans easily combined a decade of filibustering in Canada and Rhode Island with the emerging sense of American nationalism coursing through the New York and New England cultural world. This brief political coalition violently ruptured through the Polk years, however, in part because of Polk’s failure to fulfill the promises of Manifest Destiny and seize the full Oregon territory. Despite this falling out, the Young American impulse to build a

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<sup>222</sup> Perry Miller, *The Raven and the Whale: The War of Words and Wits in the Era of Poe and Melville*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956, 9-68, 69-117, 122; Widmer, *Young America*, 3-26, 94-96; Charles Brown, *William Cullen Bryant*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971, 18-31, 145.

national culture remained a consistent link between Loco-Foco (soon Free Soiler) Democrats and expansionist Hunker Democrats.<sup>223</sup>

The Young Americans were virtually all Democrats, while the previous generation of New York cultural elite—the “Knickerbockers”—were, almost to a man, Whigs. Bryant was the notable exception, and with J. F. Cooper and Washington Irving, Bryant dominated the world of New York culture. Whig and editor of the *Knickerbocker*, Lewis Gaylord Clark, published radical democrats like Hawthorne and Whitman alongside an established titan like Irving, while Bryant assisted Young Americans with his *Evening Post* and radical political ideas. Bryant once remarked to his literary colleagues that “I do not like politics...but they get only my mornings, and you know politics and a bellyful are better than poetry and starvation.” Bryant’s poetry and his stewardship over budding Young American writers, thinkers, and artists emphasized clarity and simplicity, providing a strong model example rather than an authoritative and stern master. Historian Charles Brown explains that Bryant’s poetry used natural settings and subjects “to find illustrations for moral ideas, a practice followed by Thomas Cole and the other painters of the Hudson River school in their use of symbolism and allegory.” Bryant was a life-long abolitionist and during a tour of Europe in 1845, “He attended Parliament several times, went to a Corn Law meeting, at which addresses were made by Cobden, Fox, and Bright,” who drew part of their economics and activist inspiration from Bryant’s *Evening Post*. The Knickerbockers and Young Americans both contributed to a decades-long process through which New Yorkers wrested cultural preeminence from Boston, after which American national culture no longer strongly identified with the Puritan past. New York Loco-Focos like Levi Slamm reveled in this process

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<sup>223</sup> Widmer, *Young America*, 155-184; Brown, *William Cullen Bryant*, 18-31, 145; Alasdair Roberts, *America’s First Great Depression: Economic Crisis and Political Disorder After the Panic of 1837*, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 2012, 85-136.

and enjoyed disproportionate influence within American life. Young America I was a movement of radicals, outsiders, romantics, and dreamers best represented politically in the Loco-Foco movement. Young America II built upon these dreamy, romantic, nationalistic foundations as southern and western expansionists populated the Polk administration and steered national policy in decidedly non-locofoco directions. Politically, the Equal Rights Party, the Canadian Rebellions, the Panic of 1837, the Dorr War, and a host of others events galvanized the attentions of Young Americans and they eagerly, almost dogmatically anticipated the fulfillment of their theories of history and the Manifest Destiny of republican government in world history.<sup>224</sup>

There were two distinct versions of “Manifest Destiny” for the two distinct Young Americas. Young America I’s version was metaphysical, philosophical, historical, composed of individuals; Young America II’s version was militaristic, expansionist, ruthlessly pragmatic, composed of nation-states. The story of Loco-Foco political activism helps us bridge this gap between Widmer’s Young Americas. Widmer writes that “With a mystical faith, these secular thinkers awaited some kind of divine vindication of the American political experiment,” but Young Americans approached Manifest Destiny not as a matter of mysticism, but of empirical economic and social history. What seems to historians like mysticism was in fact considered metaphysics. Locofocoism informed Young American cultural and intellectual production and *vice versa*, and events from Canada to the Dorr War provided the political support necessary for Young America II to rise to prominence and power. The “Dupes of Hope Forever” no more, “Most of the idealistic nationalists of Young America I emerged scarred and cynical from their brush with political reality,” and many could no longer tolerate politics. The anti-war Whig

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<sup>224</sup> John Bigelow, *William Cullen Bryant*, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1980 (Original Printing: 1890), xiii-xiv, 69, 76-8, 79-83, 89, 103-7; Brown, *William Cullen Bryant*, 18-31, 145; Miller, *The Raven and the Whale*, 9-68, 69-117, 122; Widmer, *Young America*, 12-18, 103.

*litterati* found little solace amongst Clay Whigs and as Perry Miller wrote, “Hence in New York many Whigs found that they could be friendly with ‘loco-foco’ Democrats like Duyckinck.”<sup>225</sup>

Fine artist and Young American painter Thomas Cole exhibited a pessimistic, whiggish locofocoism; a locofocoism shared by many of the voters and activists which joined the Equal Rights Party from the ranks of the Whiggery explored in Byrdsall’s history. Cole’s paintings and poetry encapsulate and display the loco theory of history and romantic republicanism, the very heart and soul of the radical liberal, locofoco cultural paradigm. Historians have interpreted Cole as a whiggish friend of New York aristocrats, and as Sean Wilentz and Christine Stansell have written, “although Cole found fellowship with such cultivated Democratic liberals as William Cullen Bryant, his politics became strongly anti-Jacksonian, in line with the views of most of New York’s gentlemen of property and standing.” Cole possessed a slew of whiggish values and proclivities, including a love of virtue (which he thought Jacksonians lacked), opposition to democratic demagoguery, and a distinctly pessimistic horror at the morally bankrupt Mexican War. Like many locofocos in New York City, New England, and the Old Northwest, Thomas Cole approached history and policy with a whiggish critique of Power and a conservative republican respect for modesty in government. He disdained participation in partisan politics and thought the entire process eroded true liberty. In a “Sonnet” from 8 November, 1838, Cole wrote “Holy peace and virtue fly | Before that fierce and multitudinous cry | For Liberty. Dishonoured name!...My soul is sad; for Freedom sinks to die, | Where Party hath usurped her sacred throne | and Love’s and Truth’s bright Altars overthrown.” Cole’s landscapes represented interior North America as a vast frontier for human history and Man’s development as a social being. His paintings were “crowded with historical and political allusions, but the empire

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<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

depicted is an imagined ancient realm, completely unlike the world of stump speakers and frontier squatters portrayed by his contemporary, George Caleb Bingham.” Cole’s frontier was a wild, untamed wilderness; a place of perfect Liberty in which Man struggled endlessly for mastery over Nature. Cole imbibed the rapidly changing world of Jacksonian America and translated its the political, cultural, and technological battles into historical allegory on canvas. “Only recently,” however, comment historians William Truettner and Alan Wallach, “have we begun to recognize that [Cole’s] work...offers a glimpse of the ambitions and apprehensions of a young republic rapidly being transformed during the era of Jacksonian democracy.”<sup>226</sup>

Thomas Cole was born in 1801 in Lancashire, Great Britain. The Coles moved to Philadelphia shortly thereafter, and then to Ohio. In 1823, the family moved back to Philadelphia and by 1825, Thomas settled in New York City. The elder Cole was a perpetually-indebted petty industrialist, and to supplement the family income, Thomas purchased a book on landscape painting and taught himself the fineries of the form. The landscape genre generally grew out of a fascination with upheaval and change throughout history, using the land as a relative constant against which to show the stark relief of human transience, development, and decay, the perfect artistic form to capture the rustic charm of a rapidly developing country and visually expressing romantic theories of history and social development. 1830s New York City buzzed with locofoco radicals and their romantic visions of an endless, democratic frontier, the pivot point in human history. Cole’s politics responded with trepidation, deeply suspicious of the supposed virtues of democracy. While most of his peers equated liberty and democracy, Cole saw the potential for immense conflict. Locofoco social and historical theory asserted that

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<sup>226</sup> Lawson, “‘Song of Myself,’” 381-5; Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Lord Acton: A Study in Conscience and Politics*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1952; McNeill, ed. *Lord Acton: Essays in the Liberal Interpretation of History*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967. Also see Peter Bellis, *Writing Revolution: Aesthetics and Politics in Hawthorne, Whitman, and Thoreau*, Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003; Truettner & Wallach, eds. *Thomas Cole: Landscape into History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, x, 3-21, 99.

conflict (whether between individuals or nations), was caused by clashes between social forces seeking Liberty and social forces seeking Power. When the capitalist compelled his workers to labor longer hours or face unemployment, the Power of property met the Liberty of free laborers in open battle. When the national government offered constitutional protection for the “rights” of slaveholders, the Power of an entrenched aristocracy met the Liberty of the downtrodden slave. When *democratic majorities* used their suffrages to exert the forces of Power against the Liberty of the *minority*, they became Leggett’s “most cruel of all despots.” This unfortunate though natural tendency in human beings violently clashed with the equally natural tendency to seek and enjoy liberty. Cole produced his most important work virtually in tandem with the most important political writings in the *Evening Post*, the activities of the Equal Rights Party, and the careers of artists and intellectuals who within a decade would adopt the label “Young America.” Cole’s paintings did not merely *reflect* these changes in the cultural landscape, but positively contributed to the intellectual developments within the locofoco movement. The *Evening Post* itself praised Cole’s paintings as authentically and indisputably *American* art.<sup>227</sup>

In Cole’s work, Nature represents the forces of Liberty, while the accoutrements of civilization—wealth, material opulence, social hierarchy and aristocratical mysticism—represent the forces of Power. *The Course of Empire* shows the cyclical theory of history through a series of five paintings, each representing a particular stage of civilizational development. Truettner and Wallach write that in this series, “he set forth in allegorical form his pessimistic philosophy of history and his essentially agrarian-republican critique of Jacksonian democracy.” In *Savage State* (Fig. 7), we see a great swirling wilderness dominating the entire canvas. The lone individual in the foreground stalks a deer by the riverside and appears at perfect liberty, in

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<sup>227</sup> Truettner & Wallach, *Thomas Cole*, 23-31, 33-49, 51-77, 79-101; White, *Democratick Editorials*, 52; Brown, *William Cullen Bryant*, 212.

concert with his surroundings, free of any forms of social conflict. There are only the slightest indications of economic development. *Arcadian State* (Fig. 8) quickly shifts tone to bright and idyllic, the setting resembling an ancient Greek pastoral. A shepherd tends his flock in the foreground, expanding his power over Nature. There is a rudimentary road and, perhaps more importantly for the highly religious Cole, the figures have far more clothing. In the mid-ground stands a clear and central sign of the early institutionalization of Power: a temple with the smoke of recent offerings pouring from the top. The hopeful tone continues in *The Consummation of Empire* (Fig. 9), and we see the human domination of the natural world at its apogee. Cole's subject civilization has introduced sharp social hierarchies attended by the familiar material history of imperialism: vast public displays of wealth, opulence, and power by rulers alongside the absolute domination of the ruled. Church and state visually fuse and the momentum of the series appears in favor of Power as Nature disappears into the background.

Cole shifts from unveiling the greatness of a developing society to warning his audience that those who value Liberty should not embrace the methods and trappings of Power.

*Destruction* (Fig. 10) alarms and arrests the viewer. The rich and glowing empire has been obliterated by its enemies and the horrors of war swallow the frame. But for the Loco-Romantics, the battle between Liberty and Power was natural, never entirely good and never entirely evil. "For Cole and many of his contemporaries," Truettner & Wallach explain, "cyclical theory stood as demonstrable historical law." In *Desolation* (Fig. 11), the orgy of violence has exhausted itself and Nature has returned to dominate the scene. Our space and any survivors are once again at perfect liberty, without the constraints of Power. What men remain must rejoin Nature, embrace the virtues required of a life of liberty, and rebuild their world through peaceful union with the land rather than conquest. Nothing remains but the frontier.

From this point in the subject civilization's history, the "Voyage of Life" begins again in a new historical cycle. In the poem which inspired the later series of paintings, Cole explored history through the microcosm of a single individual during the phases of the life cycle. Man begins his life as an infant full of wonder upon encountering the natural world for the first time. During his youth, however, Man gains greater knowledge and self-confidence, literally taking the helm of his life's ship from his personal angel. From this stage, Man attempts to balance the forces of Liberty and Power in his life. If he is to be at liberty to reach the celestial palace in the distance, he must achieve power over Nature and safely steer his vessel, but attempting to do so reveals his lack of virtue and overconfidence. By his period of old age, Man has realized his imperfections and again places his trust in the God of Nature, who in turn beckons Man to Heaven. Man must maintain his trust in the natural order, including firm moral commitments to liberty.<sup>228</sup>

Cole's groundbreaking juxtaposition of Man and Nature to pose moral criticism cemented his position as an original American artist. I would suggest further that his work helped formulate and visually represent the Loco-Romantic moral critique of Power throughout history, a view with much purchase among locofoco Democrats and anti-Jackson Whigs like Cole himself. Cole was not content to merely represent historical scenes, but insisted on comparing the *historical* roles of Liberty and Power. His work is wary of transformative change unmatched with proper virtue, and counseled those who favored Liberty to harmonize themselves to the natural order and resist the desire to shape Nature to suit Man's lust to dominate. In the poem "The Man of Pride," Cole argued that those lacking in virtue craved power but would destroy themselves in their ambition. Cole feared a world where Power morphed in form too frequently for the virtuous defenders of liberty to match its movements and

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<sup>228</sup> Truettner & Wallach, *Thomas Cole*, 79-101; Tymn, *Thomas Cole's Poetry*, 123-125, 145-160, 191.



he worried that the Young Americans of his generation would indulge in the riches, vainglories, and ultimate decline of Empire. Cole's personal poetry looked to the future with uncertainty and fear he thought both natural and justified. Cole lamented the "vile Mexican War" which confirmed his fears for the country: Americans embraced the horrors of war and the path to Power, grinding themselves under the wheels of history. By embracing the tools of Power, romantic locofoco filibusters took some of the first major steps toward the consummation of the American empire.<sup>229</sup>

Cole exercised a tremendous amount of intellectual influence for a nineteenth century American artist. Not only did he transform the landscape genre and generate uniquely American art, but his moral critique of history shaped the thought of Loco-Focos (and others) who saw his work and kept his personal company. Asher Durand, born in 1796 in Jefferson Village (now Maplewood), New Jersey, was likely the second-most important landscape painter of his day and shared John Trumbull's patronage with Thomas Cole as the "two American boy wonders." Cole and Durand's Hudson River School "constituted the first indigenous artistic achievement of major significance" for American painting and transformed the landscape genre. Durand lived and worked his entire life in lower Manhattan, supporting himself through his painting and as a "designer and printer of currency." Though Cole and Durand certainly were not Loco-Focos, they shared a Loco-Romantic "allegiance to naturalism" and firm moral commitments to liberty and republicanism commensurate with the natural order. To many (or perhaps most) Young Americans, politics was of but little importance when compared to the impact of culture and ideas. In a speech to the American Art-Union, the very first free public art museum, Joel Headley implored his audience: "Give me the control of the *art* of a country, and you may have

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<sup>229</sup> Tynn, *Thomas Cole's Poetry*, 41, 185.

the management of its administration...The tariff, internal improvements, banks, political speeches and party measures, are put paramount to them [office-holding conservatives], and yet they all together do not so educate the soul of the nation.” Cole and Durand shared the same intellectual, cultural, social, and physical spaces as a slew of Young American New Yorkers from the elder Knickerbocker poet and locofoco William Cullen Bryant to the actually young Young American poet and locofoco editor Walter Whitman.<sup>230</sup>

Whitman was born and raised in New York a generation after Cole on May 19, 1819 in the rural-urban border town of Brooklyn. Whitman biographer David Reynolds notes that “No American city witnessed the effects of the market revolution as dramatically as Brooklyn.” The old Dutch town at the westernmost tip of Long Island was a hotbed of freethinking and Quaker thought and religious poetry. It was a bustling country town, increasingly influenced by its neighbor on Manhattan Island. In the days of Whitman’s youth, traveling the length of Long Island could take days and would require journeys through farms and forests, across roads and rivers, and with undeveloped beaches on all sides. It was a place of fairly liberal sentiments which fostered Whitman’s tolerant temperament and his deeply romantic respect for Nature. From an early age, Walter was a “great friend” of a West Hills, Long Island slave named Old Mose, and as a young teacher, he refused to use corporal punishments against students. Instead, Walter wrote impromptu short stories before the class where the malfeasant characters clearly represented students in the classroom. Like William Leggett, the journalist busily writing fiery editorials from across the river and “one of Whitman’s political mentors,” Whitman preferred social means over violent or political means to solve social problems. As a fiction writer, Whitman was always a Young American and as a journalist and editor, he was always a locofoco

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<sup>230</sup> Linda Ferber, ed. *Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and the American Landscape*, New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2007, 15, 30, 84, 123; Widmer, *Young America*, 127, 142-143, 148-150.

Democrat. His career in both aspects of writing flourished in the late 1830s and early 1840s. Whitman published a total of seven short stories in John L. O'Sullivan's *Democratic Review* and was a "penny-a-liner for the *Daily Plebeian*." Whitman was uncomfortable with his relationship with Slamm, however, and when ethnic tensions in bustling New York City boiled into political conflict in the early 1840s, Whitman adopted a variety of Nativism. Slamm followed Tammany Hall in courting immigrant supporters and Whitman bristled at pro-Catholic rhetoric in Democratic papers, calling Slamm's *New Era* (the parent paper of the *Daily Plebeian*) "a stupid, wishy washy Catholic paper." While he never embraced racism or ethnic hostility, Whitman maintained his Brooklyn community's distrust of Catholicism. As a journalist, he wrote for radical locofoco papers, including the *Aurora*, an "American newspaper" focused on promoting nationalist culture, and Mike Walsh' *Subterranean*. He began editing the Brooklyn *Daily Eagle* in March 1846, the Mexican War a mere month away.<sup>231</sup>

In his capacity as editor of the *Eagle*, Whitman expressed a thorough faith in the naturalism and incorruptibility of democracy. When the 1844 Baltimore convention bypassed Martin Van Buren and selected James K. Polk as the Democratic nominee for president, Whitman dutifully endorsed the ticket. By 1846, however, Texas entered the Union and war seemed imminent. Whitman curdled at the prospect of a war for the extension of slavery and "strongly and early" supported the Wilmot Proviso that proposed to ban slavery in any conquered territories. The president's opposition to the Proviso fueled the poet's discontent with both the Democratic Party and democratic politics. His *Daily Eagle* steered a moderate abolitionist course and Whitman became enthralled with Silas Wright and the developing Free

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<sup>231</sup> David Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*, New York: Knopf, 1996, 20, 30, 33-34, 62-63, 66, 83, 98-110.

Soil coalition. He attended the Free Soil Party National Convention in Buffalo as a representative from Brooklyn and supported John P. Hale in 1852.<sup>232</sup>

Examples of Loco-Foco political activism throughout the decade 1835-1845 unified radical democratic New Englanders and New Yorkers behind the Young American movement and the New York-led agitation of the Democratic Party. Writers like Hawthorne combined locofoco politics with Young American literature and intellectuals like George Bancroft, Frances Greene, and Catharine Williams combined professional history with radical politics. Bancroft studied history at Göttingen, where he read Kant, Goethe, and Herder, though he never adopted idealist Transcendentalism and retained his home-grown Jeffersonian naturalism. He believed in an “organic theory of evolution,” of human morality and social institutions in which “The interconnectedness of all things under providential supervision promised an inner core of sameness and only the superficial appeared new.” This naturalistic realism informed Bancroft’s Van Burenite republicanism and his practical approach to politics while a leader of the Massachusetts Democracy. Bancroft and his state ally Marcus Morton joined Democratic politics from an anti-Jackson position. They believed Jackson’s influence harmed Massachusetts Democrats and were both affiliated with the National Republicans until 1834, the year the first volume of the *History* appeared. By the 1840s, locofoco political economy and the Dorr War allowed Bancroft and Morton to firmly attach themselves to Democratic policies and politicians.<sup>233</sup>

Bancroft’s history reflected an extreme faith in the moral efficacy of democracy, and approached politics as a matter of natural cosmology and ideological determinism. He connected

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 115-122.

<sup>233</sup> Lilian Handlin, *George Bancroft, The Intellectual as Democrat*, New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1984, xv, 136-139.

contemporary radical politics with historical examples of ideological conflict, identifying the antinomians and dissenters as the “loco focus of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.” The whig Boston *Daily Atlas* called Bancroft’s *History*, in Lilian Handlin’s phrasing, an “unholy alliance of literature and Locofocoism.” In Volume Four of his *History*, Bancroft wrote that “We are the children and the heirs of the past with which as with the future we are indissolubly linked together.” To Bancroft, democracy and republicanism were forces of Nature, like gravity and electricity, and he believed that attempts to constrain it were ill-founded. Bancroft urged Van Buren to join New England radical Democrats in their lust for Texas and having failed to convince the New Yorker, he joined Gideon K. Pillow and Benjamin Butler of Massachusetts in support of Polk at the 1844 Baltimore Convention. Throughout the late antebellum period, however, he became deeply disenchanted with his party and the influence of southern militants surrounding the Kansas statehood debacle and the *Dred Scott* decision. Bancroft and many of his fellow Young American, locofoco New England peers joined Walt Whitman and William Cullen Bryant in their growing distrust of and dislike for the Democratic Party.<sup>234</sup>

Women writers and activists were especially important in both practical politicking and literary and intellectual production during the loco-Young American period, 1830s-1840s. Women in the Jacksonian era were far from atomized individuals tending to private households with little interest or activity in the world of public life. They increasingly carved social, political, economic, and cultural space for themselves in a period rife with aggressive masculinity. Women writers followed the ideology of “Republican womanhood.” From the Revolution forward, women increasingly thought of themselves as the moral guardians of the Republic, responsible for educating themselves and, in turn, their children, in the proper private

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<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 148, 175, 180-182, 190-191, 193-195, 257.

and civic virtues. Historian Mary Kelley explains, “In claiming that wives and mothers once educated would school their families in republican virtue, this ideology promised the post-Revolutionary generation a role in shaping the character of America’s citizens.” Seneca Falls was hardly the beginning of the women’s movement, which in many ways owed more to education and intellectual activism than to political agitation for women’s suffrage.<sup>235</sup>

By the Jacksonian period and the rise of Young America in the late 1830s and early 1840s, the children of the newly-educated “Republican women” translated generations of academic instruction and female contributions to literature, history, and practical ethics into a substantial and innovative set of contributions to both Young America and women’s history before the suffrage movement. Despite an on-going process of cultural and political backlash from white men against women’s involvement in public life, women continued to express themselves through writing and political activism not normally recognized by historians, like the Dorrite clam baking phenomenon. Especially by writing history, women of the Jacksonian era--including Catharine Williams, Frances Greene, and their clam baking compatriots in Rhode Island--expressed their political and moral philosophies, which “put them in the historical vanguard.” Between 1776 and 1860, at least 150 women writers published 350 volumes of history. One recent study which surveyed a massive catalog of women’s private writings from antebellum New England argued that political women were commonly associated with being “loco,” and gravitated toward the Democrats, especially during the Dorr War. Historians Ronald and Mary Zboray argue that the Dorr War was the very first mass movement of Democratic

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<sup>235</sup> Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995, 4, 239; Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 1-65; Rosemarie Zagari, *Revolutionary Backlash: Women and Politics in the Early American Republic*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007; Sally McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women’s Rights Movement*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 138-139.

women, and the event brought many Whig and Democratic women throughout New England together, providing common ground for future cooperative efforts. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, a Massachusetts native and New York City denizen, exercised “power and influence” over “domestic and international political causes,” by virtue of her family’s political ties to multiple administrations, including Jackson and Van Buren, as well as her literary and social ties to Knickerbockers like William Cullen Bryant and Young Americans like John L. O’Sullivan. Sedgwick in fact helped O’Sullivan found the *Democratic Review* in 1837 and planned to sculpt herself into a “party orator.” By 1844, however, Democrats pandered to white men and Whigs attracted a majority of female support, excepting a critical corps of locofoco, Dorrite, Democratic women. For Catharine Sedgwick, the seizure of Texas by “the worst and most dangerous body of criminals in our country—our Congressmen,” and the extension of slavery was too much to bear. She renounced the Democrats and partisan politics generally, focusing the remainder of her writing days on various reform causes.<sup>236</sup>

#### From Loco-Focos to Barnburners: The Election of 1844

Loco signifies locality or place; and Foco signifies fire; and when applied in a political sense, its meaning is to give immediate light—light to the wandering and bewildered whigs, who have been groping in darkness for years, that they may have an opportunity for returning to the first principles of *Democracy*, as they were understood and practiced by our forefathers in the years 1775-6; and like the prodigal son, say that they have sinned against *heaven* and their country, and ask to be forgiven of their political sins; and when thus repented and returned, and turned from their waywardness into the true path of *democracy*, they will be received into the *democratic* ranks and be made equal with their brethren, and not before.

--Pittsburgh *The Loco Foco*, “Locofocoism,” 22 August 1844

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<sup>236</sup> Baym, *American Women Writers*, 239; Ronald & Mary Zboray, “Introduction” and “The Rise of the Second Party System” in *Voices Without Votes: Women and Politics in Antebellum New England*, Durham, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2010, 1-16, 17-129; Charlene Avallone, “Catharine Sedgwick and the Circles of New York,” *Legacy* (2006), 23 No. 2, 115-121.

Historians have presented Free Soil ideology and politics from a variety of perspectives and methodological approaches, but largely fail to identify it as a *locofoco* phenomenon born primarily out of the efforts and ideas of ‘Equal Rights’ Democrats throughout the North. Locofocos split between expansionists and anti-expansionists over the Texas issue, many of them joining the Democratic Party and its emerging Young America II politicians to support annexation and conquest. This should not be construed as an argument that all Young America II actors were locofocos--far from it. As with the personal cases of William Cullen Bryant, Walt Whitman, and Catherine Maria Sedgwick, a great portion of American politics gradually broke with party regularity in the face of tremendous sectional interest in the territorial question. The Wilmot Proviso in particular provided a strong and lasting example for Free Soil defectors and their Republican progeny. The birth of the Free Soil Party was the first great example of this steady wave of political disruption and realignment. Though the parties reasserted themselves through compromise in 1850 and Young America II politicians gained control of the Democratic Party, the territorial question once again captured the attentions of Young America I Whigs and Democrats. The Republican Party arose as a fully sectional party in 1854-1856 and signaled a new party system. In New York, this process followed a long prehistory of locofoco intellectual development, Young American cultural production, political and intellectual coalition with Workingmen and Anti-Renters to remake the state constitution in 1846, and often militant political activism throughout the geography of the continent spreading republicanism around the globe from the Empire State.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Joel Silbey, *The Shrine of Party: Congressional Voting Behavior, 1841-1852*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967, vii-viii, 22, 27, 54, 63, 90-97; Mark Berger, *The Revolution in the New York Party Systems, 1840-1860*, Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1973, 1-4, 5-16, 17-23, 32-42; Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy*, 215-224.



Martin Van Buren cut his teeth in republican politics from the earliest he could remember. His father was a tavern keeper in Kinderhook, New York, who used his bar as a meetinghouse for Jeffersonian activists. As historian Joel Silbey argues, Van Buren held “an unflinching devotion” to Jeffersonian Republicanism, especially the principles of localism and limited government. Early in his career, he recognized that conflict drove political events—conflicts between individuals, interest groups, institutions, parties, nations, states, and every social unit in between—and politicians could either embrace and manage conflict or deny it while society destroys itself. “He had come to understand,” Silbey writes, “that policy consensus and political calm were not normal elements in his world.” From his entrance into state politics in 1812 and through the controversy over the new state constitution in 1821, Van Buren learned that political leaders who championed suffrage extension could win the support of the people and with enough popular support, politicians could politically manage social conflict. He was, therefore, a committed partisan, employing a vision of political parties in which managers like himself organized huge blocs of the population to best protect liberty and prosperity. Van Buren remained a strident pragmatist ideologue throughout his career in New York, combining an uncanny penchant for wrangling factions and votes with a fierce commitment to first principles. He was a brilliant politician, perhaps the most talented of his era, and Edward Widmer describes him as America’s first “ethnic” president who represented a new, non-Anglo-Saxon, non-yeoman democracy, a coalition of people Widmer identifies broadly as Young America. For Van Buren and most of his locofoco followers, the Democracy was “More than just an organization, it was a movement, perhaps even a religion.” Loco-Focos remained a thorn in Van Buren’s pragmatic side from the days of the Equal Rights Party, and these “legendary” radicals gradually pushed the philosophically sympathetic Van Buren in more radical directions. For the

already fairly-locofoco Van Buren, the New Yorkers provided a great deal of political cover for the implementation of both his preexisting ideas and their fresh perspectives on old problems.<sup>238</sup>

Van Buren was one of a new class of men birthed by the institutional changes in American life after the Revolution, including the expansion of markets, communications technologies, and transportation. The Revolution opened space for common people to gain economic, social, and political power. Middling families sired a generation of sons that used this new-found power to organize masses of the population and shape public policy according to Paineite and Jeffersonian principles. With Van Buren in New York, Amos Kendall in Massachusetts and Kentucky, and Jackson and Polk in Tennessee, the Democracy coalesced around Jackson in 1828 but retained a variety of republican opinion. The young Amos Kendall, for example, was neither an ideologue nor a partisan, and after a string of business failures and an abortive attempt to achieve political success through his personal connections with Henry Clay, Kendall joined organizational efforts with Van Buren. Van Buren's Albany Regency combined with Kendall's "Frankfurt Junto" and Isaac Hill's New Hampshire "Concord Regency" to coordinate political efforts behind sufficiently Jeffersonian and Jacksonian candidates. Kendall, Van Buren, and Hill, writes historian Donald Cole, "were little men, highly intelligent, crafty, insecure about their place in society, eager to make money, and above all inordinately ambitious." Van Buren's Democracy was a new beast in American political life. Cole writes that Jackson and his allies "were organizing a new party, based on patronage, state organizations, a national convention, a chain of newspapers, and a Kitchen Cabinet." Men like Kendall, of middling birth and achievement but great organizational talent, had a "finger in

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<sup>238</sup> Joel Silbey, *Martin Van Buren and the Emergence of American Popular Politics*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002, 12-13, 15-34, 35-58, 59-82; Edward Widmer, *Martin Van Buren*, New York: Times Books, 2005, 7, 106.

almost every pie.” If the Jacksonian Democracy was not necessarily a party “from below,” it was in many ways, at least, a party from the middle.<sup>239</sup>

By 1844, three factions dominated New York City Democratic Party politics: the conservative “Old Hunkers,” the locofoco expansionists called “Young Hickories,” and the locofoco anti-expansionist “Barnburners.” The city’s radicals once again rallied for reformist causes, inspired by the rash of “Young” European nationalist movements spreading across the Atlantic. As John Stafford wrote, “The more exclusively political and social Young America movement...grew out of the desire of democratic young men in the United States to match the democratic movements abroad—Young Germany, Young Italy, Young Ireland, and the like.” As Widmer explains, “When looked at individually, events like the Dorr Rebellion, the Mexican War, the Wilmot Proviso debate, and the Astor Place riot have a circumscribed significance. But considered together, as part of America’s restless struggle...they assume a cosmic meaning that helps explain the frenzy of Young America.” While historians have treated the developments of Young America, Manifest Destiny, Free Soil, and the collapse of the Second Party System as largely independent subjects, the radical ideology and activism of the Loco-Foco movement links them together in a decades-long process of change. George Henry Evans changed the name of his *Workingman’s Advocate* to the *Young America*, and publishers like Mike Walsh and Levi Slamm devoted their papers *The Subterranean*, the *Democratic Republican New Era*, and the *Daily Plebeian* to the bundle of concepts involved in the Young America movement. Politically, these men were far from monolithically locofoco, though their shared ideas and activities shaped American cultural, political, and social life from the 1830s to the 1860s or longer, when Van Buren himself provided much-needed support for Lincoln’s war effort. Meanwhile, Van Buren’s

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<sup>239</sup> Donald Cole, *A Jackson Man: Amos Kendall and the Rise of American Democracy*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004, 7-30, 80, 103.

clearest and most successful heir remained the Young American partisan Democrat, Samuel Tilden, himself deeply involved in both locofoco Democratic politics and the New York Anti-Rent conflict and the constitutional convention of 1846.<sup>240</sup>

James K. Polk, too, was one of these eager young American upstarts (though hardly of middling origins), gaining national prominence based upon his eloquent and impassioned defense of Jeffersonian governance and the language of Equal Rights locofocoism. Polk and his Democratic Party compatriots oversaw a time period in which “Entrepreneurship was being democratized. To nascent capitalists in every village of the land, democracy was coming to mean equal opportunity for exploiting the boundless wealth of an expanding economy.” Polk Democrats in the Nashville *Republican Banner* worried in March 1841 that the recent majority for Harrison of over twelve thousand votes meant that Whigs would “rid Tennessee of every vestige of Loco Focoism,” and Polk himself stumped (unsuccessfully) for governor in 1841 repeatedly invoking the phrase “Equal Rights.” “Young Hickory,” as Gansevoort Melville called him, quickly became a darling of Young America Democrats in New England and the Old Northwest, especially Marcus Morton, John Fairfield, George Bancroft, and William Allen. Morton and Bancroft knew from their personal experience in the Dorrite clam bakes that Young America Democrats were eager for a sufficiently locofoco candidate that could also cleanly win the nomination and election. Though Morton originally wanted Silas Wright on the ticket should Van Buren fail to gain the nomination in convention, he and Bancroft suggested Polk for president and Wright for vice president (though he later declined the offer to run alongside Polk). Polk attracted support from southerners suspicious of Van Buren, while Polk’s own support for

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<sup>240</sup> Stafford, *The Literary Criticism of “Young America,”* 2, 19; Widmer, *Van Buren*; Alexander Flick, *Samuel Jones Tilden: A Study in Political Sagacity*, Westport (CN): Greenwood Press, 1939, v-vi, 1, 11, 22, 33, 44, 62, 64-5, 72-3, 103-4, 113, 125, 137.

Van Buren at the convention reassured northern locofocos seeking a southern route to regain hegemony over the party. The chief instigator of the latter faction was Levi Slamm. J. A. Scoville called Slamm “the venal publisher of a popular Van Buren newspaper” and accused him of organizing “a little group of scheming politicians...as a secret Calhoun committee, professing Van Burenism while they burrowed from within to seize control of the Democratic organization.” With Van Buren’s success highly doubtful, Slamm’s locofocos sought a sound alternative. Polk boosters on the convention floor called him “the pure, whole hog, Locofoco democrat, who goes against a bank of the United States and all corrupting monopolies,” and on the strength of the New York locofoco votes, he was elected President and Young America II took its place alongside Young America I. “In my opinion,” Edward Widmer writes, “the tension felt by New Yorkers following the disappointment at Baltimore in 1844 set the stage for the explosion of nationalist culture that followed immediately afterward.”<sup>241</sup>

Approaching the Baltimore nominating convention of 1844, locofoco newspapers like Levi Slamm’s *Daily Plebeian* and the Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco* supported Van Buren, but quickly acclimatized themselves to Polk. These papers expressed different strains of locofocoism, but they maintained contact with one another throughout their shared lifespans and published materials from each other. Both *The Loco-Foco* and the *Daily Plebeian* followed Van Burenite Democrats like New York’s Preston King and John A. Dix in supporting a compromise candidate at the Baltimore convention, a candidate who they thought represented their primary interests, who had long been associated with the Equal Rights faction of the Democracy, and someone they thought would fiercely advance the interests of American republicans around the

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<sup>241</sup> Charles Sellers, *James K. Polk, Jacksonian: 1795-1843*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, 431-432, 447; Charles Sellers, *James K. Polk, Continentalist, 1843-1846*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966, 26, 84-85, 96, 140-142; McCurdy, *The Anti-Rent Era*, 143-144.

world. The relatively brief moment of political unity among radical Democrats in the Van Burenite territory of New York and western Pennsylvania undoubtedly drove the slim Polk margins and propelled him to victory. In turn, Polk drove the country to war with Mexico and appointment policies that isolated Van Burenites, rending locofoco-Democratic unity.<sup>242</sup>

While *The Loco-Foco* in Pittsburgh spent the 1844 election season tearing down Henry Clay and courting Whig voters with pro-Polk editorials and campaign songs, Levi Slamm's New York *Daily Plebeian* struggled to prune away unsavory elements of the developing Democrat coalition and encourage regular relations between New York and the rest of the Democracy. Perhaps a more difficult task, he attempted to bridge the gaps between the New York factions, the Hunkers, Barnburners, and the Young Americans. To the nationalist Young Americans and the Barnburning locofocos, Slamm preached the doctrine of an expanding republic embracing ever-greater portions of the planet and history. "Opposition to the British Empire," Slamm wrote in June 1843, "is the sentiment of the whole world." He therefore advocated occupation of the Oregon territory. Britain, after all, "has earned the reputation of the Great Universal Robber," and "would unparadise the world to perpetuate its power, and the feeling of universal opposition which is developed, is but the consequence of its treacherous conflict." Clipping from an article on British imperial activities from the Cincinnati *Gazette*, Slamm reported that under European influence, India had become "the theatre of fraud, rapine, and blood." "There is no crime in the record of history so black that we shall not there find its parallel; no scene of human butchery so desolating that we shall not there witness its counterpart," in the very jewel of the British Empire. Since British occupation, "India has been visited by every evil which villainy breeds;

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<sup>242</sup> See Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco*, "The Tables Turned," "[Untitled]," and "The Presidential Contest," 5 June 1844; Chaplain Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism: The Wilmot Proviso Controversy*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967, 3-20.

she stands a living monument of the blackest oppression.” Quickly after “Avarice planted the European on her soil,” the aristocratic powers of the West set rival local leaders against one another and planned chaos throughout India. The *Gazette* recounted a long series of imperial travesties and massacres against the Indians. “And all this,” the clipping concluded, “is the work of a power which call itself Christian; which talks of its philanthropy; which boasts that there is no slavery on British soil!”<sup>243</sup>

Slamm leveraged such regular stories and sentiments attacking the British Empire to bring the wings of his party together on the basis of foreign policy. He attempted to convince anti-expansionist Barnburners and antislavery Young Americans that Oregon and Texas were the battlegrounds of the present against the British crown. In late 1843, Slamm published series of issues primarily addressing the Texas question. Two letters-to-the-editor on 21 November argued in favor of annexation primarily on anti-British grounds. “Antonia” claimed that “By rejecting Texas we give to England a country on our Southern frontier equivalent to Canada on the Northern, from which she can at pleasure pour invasion and distress into the border States.” The geopolitical and historical stakes were so high, “Antonia” believed, that northerners should acquiesce in the annexation of new slave territory as well. Texas brought with her too many advantages for northerners to pass up and it would be “ungenerous and impolite to insist upon what she will inevitably refuse[:] the instant abolition of slavery.” The next pro-annexation letter first noted that annexation itself would not increase the slave population, but stated that the more important questions involved were “questions of national policy, involving power and right, and possibly peace or war.” “It is almost certain,” the writer argued, “that a transfer of all that vast and fertile country to the all grasping power of Great Britain is in contemplation...With

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<sup>243</sup> New York *Daily Plebeian*, “Opposition to the British Empire,” 23 June 1843; “India,” 19 July 1843.

her Canadian possessions stretching along our whole northern frontier, pressing down upon us through the Oregon on the West, Texas filled with British vagrants on the South, and her West India possessions filled with armed soldiers, while in their harbors float a large portion of the British navy, ready at a moment's warning to pounce upon us." "Thus hemmed in on every side," the writer summed up this estimation of the state of affairs, "we shall virtually become subjects of Her Britannic Majesty Queen Victoria." Appealing to nationalists and would-be revolutionary young locofocos, the letter writer asked "Shall the stars and stripes wave over this beautiful and fertile region...or shall the British Lion quietly take possession and add this to other trophies of greatness and of guilt?" To the peacenik Young Americans, the author argued that if Texas were left to be absorbed by Britain, "war with all its horrors is inevitable." Therefore, "Bring it, with the Oregon Territory, into the Union, and we but take possession of our own, add to our means of wealth and happiness, and preserve the peace of this country."<sup>244</sup>

In the 23 November edition of the *Daily Plebeian*, Slamm published a strongly anti-annexation letter-to-the-editor that chastised the editor himself for his obviously pro-Texas proclivities. "Junius" pleaded against Texas, stating that "We ask for no more territory. We have too much already. It was the besetting sin of Napoleon that he *would* go out of the ancient limits of France," and a similar fate would no doubt await an American Empire. "We do not want Texas," Junius continued, "Let them remain as they are, half-way between civilization and brutality. The moment you admit Texas, that moment you admit the most worthless population in Christendom to a participation of the privileges of freemen." The lessons Thomas Cole hoped to impart in his *Course of Empire* ran deeply in Junius' thought: "Beware, sir! The seeds of destruction to our excellent Republic are in that embrace." In fact, Junius argued, if Britain

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<sup>244</sup> New York *Daily Plebeian*, "Annexation of Texas," "The Annexation of Texas," and "Annexation of Texas," 21 November 1843.



wanted to continue impoverishing her people and bloating her empire, her fall would be all the harder and pacific American republicanism would appear all the more attractive around the world. “It is hinted by one of your correspondents that Texas will pass into the hands of the petticoat monarch of Britain,” yet Junius declared, “Let it. Who cares a pin? Let her surround us if she chooses.” Republicanism had produced an incredibly large, dispersed, wealthy, and powerful nation spanning half a continent, and “There is more clear grit in the United States of America than would suffice to conquer twenty British empires. We can out-shoot, out-fight, out-lick and out-kick anything living.” “Let England take all the world,” let her conquer “all the States of this Union besides our own ‘Empire State,’ and we ask no odds of her.” Appealing to radical New Yorkers’ sense of local pride and republican idealism, Junius concluded: “We are equal to anything living: and, therefore, what matters it to us that we are surrounded by other powers? Let Texas go to Great Britain if she pleases. She has a right to be a slave in her own way.” Levi Slamm did not directly address his anti-Texas readers’ concerns, but he did continue the rash of pro-Texas articles through the Spring of 1844.<sup>245</sup>

From the beginning of its publication on 5 June 1844, the Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco* treated the defamation of Henry Clay as its primary mission, closely followed by efforts to bolster Democrats’ images of Polk and Dallas. In the first issue, *The Loco-Foco* clipped an article from the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* addressed “To the Universal Whig Party,” which claimed that Clay deprecated and disdained northern laborers, comparing them to southern slaves. *The Loco-Foco* implied that Clay sympathized with the denial of northerners’ equal political rights and supported the Gag Rule. A slew of smaller articles quoted great statesmen

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<sup>245</sup> New York *Daily Plebeian*, “Texas,” 23 November 1843; “Annexation of Texas,” 21 March 1844; “The Oregon Question,” 11 April 1844; “Texas and Annexation,” 19 April 1844; “The Annexation of Texas—Its Effect Upon the Perpetuity of the Union,” 20 April 1844; “Mr. Clay Against Texas,” 29 April 1844.

and emphasized widespread distrust of Prince Harry, including “opinions” from Jackson, Webster, Harrison, Jefferson, and even John Randolph. “The appearances which threatened the disorganization of the Democratic Party have happily vanished,” one editorial concluded, while another article whitewashed the tensions between Van Burenite and Polkite locos at Baltimore, saying that the New Yorkers’ differences “were healed.” The election, *The Loco-Foco* argued, would be the most important in twenty years, as “The contest is not merely between two men...The great question now is *Bank, or no Bank*...The day for Banks and overgrown monopolies is past.”<sup>246</sup>

The editor boasted that “Perhaps there is not city in the Union where more public spirit is exhibited than in Pittsburgh, all things considered.” The city offered excellent public services and what was more, “We are all emphatically working people; a greater portion being engaged in active employment of some kind or another, than in any other place of its population in the Union.” Pittsburgh possessed a wide array of political affiliations—“masonic and Anti-masonic, whigs, Loco Focos, Democrats, Anti-masonic Democrats, Straightouts, Native Americans, and...’Democratic Whig,’” but it seemed as of August 1844 that the political winds were shifting toward a successful coalition of Democratic factions. The 8 August edition of *The Loco-Foco* reported on “The Tremendous Mass Meeting at Broadhurst’s Park,” which was supposedly “The most unprecedented unlooked for and astounding occurrence that has ever taken place in the political annals of Pittsburgh.” The report continued, “It far outstripped the most sanguine expectations of the most enthusiastic of the party.” Locofocos took Pittsburgh Democrats by surprise with the vigor of their activist energies, and “The Park at Broadhurst’s was literally

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<sup>246</sup> Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco*, “To the Universal Whig Party,” “Jackson’s opinions of Mr. Clay,” “Webster’s Opinion of Mr. Clay,” “Jefferson’s Opinion of Mr. Clay,” “Harrison’s Opinion of Mr. Clay,” “Randolph’s Opinion of Mr. Clay,” “George M. Dallas,” “The Nominations,” “[Untitled],” “[Untitled],” [Untitled],” 5 June 1844; see also “The ‘Harry of the West’” 20 June 1844, pg. 3.

crammed at an early hour, and the display of Transparencies, Flags and Torches, and the Fine Bands of Music, made it appear like a scene of enchantment, and this, coupled with the enthusiastic cheers with which the speeches were received, has had the effect to arouse, and strengthen, and bind more closely together, the friends of POLK, DALLAS, and MUHLENBERG in the coming struggle.” The train of attendees stretched for a mile and a quarter and low estimates fixed their number at 2,800 individuals including “the hard working, hard fisted ‘huge paws’ of the manufacturer, the mechanic, and the farmer.” The enthusiasm among western Pennsylvania locofocos did not, however, translate to victories for Polk. Clay won nearly 57% of the vote in Allegheny County. Henry Muhlenberg died shortly before the gubernatorial election and his successor to the ticket, Francis Shunk, also received a sound beating from his Whig opponent in the western portion of the state (though Shunk won the election).<sup>247</sup>

*The Loco-Foco* of 22 August, 1844, reported on a host of similar mass meetings of radical and regular Democrats from the Revolutionary War battlefield of Oriskany, New York and across Pennsylvania. Twenty thousand Democrats gathered for Polk and Dallas at the Oriskany battlefield while Democrats in York County, Pennsylvania produced what was “Decidedly, and beyond all comparison, the largest county meeting ever held in York.” The *Daily Plebeian* likewise reported “A Tremendous Democratic Meeting in New York,” attended by fifteen thousand. On the Cumberland River, “in the neighborhood of the Hermitage,” an estimated fifty thousand “American Freemen Assembled in Council,” including a large cohort of

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<sup>247</sup> Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco*, “The Big Gun Fired. Allegheny Count Erect!: Tremendous Mass Meeting at Broadhurst’s Park—Enthusiastic Outpouring of the People—Magnificent Procession—Torch Light—Splendid Transparencies—WHIGGERY Knocked into a Cocked Hat—Campaign of 1840 Compared with the Campaign of 1844—Hurrach for POLK & DALLAS!” and “Wonders,” 8 August 1844; Dubin, *Presidential Elections*, 92-93; Dubin, *Gubernatorial Elections*, 224-225.

women, to listen to pro-Polk, pro-Democratic speeches by Gansevoort Melville and Lewis Cass. Three to four thousand Democrats gathered in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, and a smaller, though no less enthusiastic meeting took place in Perry County, central Pennsylvania. These meetings fused fiery locofoco idealism with practical politicking and the pragmatic exercise of American power. In New York City, speakers courted annexationists and the Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco* continued to stress that antislavery Democrats should not fear territorial expansion and that the hypocritical Clay was likely to double-cross anti-extensionists regardless. This expected hypocrisy was one of many reasons (forty-eight, in fact) “Why Henry Clay should not be President of the U.S.” His stance on Texas joined his consistent anti-Jacksonism, his economic policies, his comparisons of black and white laborers, his penchant for demagoguery, and his anti-Dorrism to disqualify him. Clay opposed the Dorrites, *The Loco-Foco* argued, “in their efforts to throw off a charter government given them by Charles II, King of England,” while he truckled to English diplomats on the Oregon and Texas questions.<sup>248</sup>

The Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco* combined their New York counterparts’ conception of republican government and the westward expansion of the United States with a republican construction of protective tariffs and government-sponsored development projects. Despite regularly charging Clay with duplicity, *The Loco-Foco* attempted to assure readers that Polk was actually a protectionist and Pennsylvaniaian manufactures would be supported by federal trade policy. In a letter-to-the-editor clipped from the *Augusta Age*, “The Tariff” frankly admitted: “Now here in Pennsylvania a Protective Tariff is deemed of more consequence to our interests than any other of the political measures of the day. A free trade man is regarded as an enemy of

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<sup>248</sup> Pittsburgh, *The Loco-Foco*, “Arrant Hypocrisy,” 8 August 1844; “The Mighty Voice of the Oneidas—Full 20,000 on the Oriskany Battle Field,” “York County. Democratic County Meeting,” “A Tremendous Democratic Meeting in New York,” “From 3,000 to 4,000 Democrats in the Field,” and “Great Gatherings of the People—The Democracy Aroused,” 22 August 1844; “Why Henry Clay should not be President of the U.S.,” 29 August 1844.

his country.” “The Tariff” explained that the trade issue “is not, never has been, and never can be a *party* question. It is a question of *sectional interests*, which ride over every thing else.” And although “the *democratic* Pennsylvanians go for monopoly in iron, quite as readily as the federal nabobs of Massachusetts do for the Lowell factories,” no political coalitions could achieve perfect balance between theory and practice. “Even Mr. Van Buren, when a Senator from New York,” after all, “was ready to go for a strong duty on *salt*.”<sup>249</sup>

Perhaps most notable and interesting among all extant pages of the Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco* are those precious few that investigate an invention which had the potential to virtually collapse time and space. Locofocos and non-radicals throughout the country stood similarly stunned by Samuel Morse’ magnetic telegraph, unveiled to the world in 1844. *The Loco-Foco* clipped an article from the Democratic New York *Herald* which concluded that “We are in the midst of a revolution in society and government on both continents and one which will produce the most important changes, and changes as beneficial as important in the physical and moral world.” The article paralleled British Prime Minister Robert Peel’s recent speech on the currency and the danger of monetary inflation with the invention of the magnetic telegraph, stating that both subjects provide “proof of the rapid solution in our day of...the problem of men’s capacity for self government.” The judicious application of technology in society could strengthen and reinvigorate republicanism. The telegraph would transform the Anglo-American financial establishment, necessitating that the two countries work even more diligently to maintain peace and commerce, “uniting vast communities in one firmly united republic.” Stable, strong currencies and close, regular contact could socially, economically, and even politically reunite Britain and her former colonies. The Americans were destined to be the senior partner in

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<sup>249</sup> Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco*, “To the Universal Whig Party,” 5 June 1844; “Western Navigation,” 1 July 1844; “Which is the Tariff Party,” and “The Tariff,” 4 July 1844;

the emerging Anglo-American establishment: “We...have passed them in the race of empire, and will soon entirely distance them. And one of the greatest elements which will give power, and energy, and force, and unity to the triumphant progress of the people of this country, under our free institutions, is undoubtedly the extraordinary and wonderful invention of the ‘Electric telegraph.’”<sup>250</sup>

Contemporaries recognized that they were at a crossroads in human existence. What historians have dubbed the Market, Communications, and Transportation revolutions converged in the spectacular, magical technology behind telegraphy. The New York *Herald* attempted to prognosticate exactly what this device might mean for world history and the development of the human species broadly:

Once this extraordinary invention shall have been fully applied all over the country, the wonderful spectacle will be presented, of a vast continent, as consolidated and united, and possessed as much, nay, in a greater degree, of the means of rapid communication, as the city of New York. It will tend to bind together with electric forces the whole Republic, and by its single agency do more to guard against disunion, and blend into one homogenous mass, the whole population of the Republic, than all the most experienced, the most sagacious, and the most patriotic government could accomplish. Every doubt of the safety of limiting the extent of our empire, only by those eternal boundaries by which nature herself has limited the continent, will now be removed. The extension of the republic to the uttermost extremities of this vast division of the earth, must now be seen to be as natural, justifiable and safe as the extension of New York to the Harlem river.

The Republic now could exist as a consolidated nation, a single “homogenous mass” of individuals sharing in the spoils of liberty without the deep cultural divisions that historically rend civilizations spread too thinly across space. The fears of anti-expansionists now seemed frivolous concerns much more relevant to the Roman Empire or the hundreds of ancient Greek city-states dotting the Mediterranean coast than the modern, coal-fired American Empire, what John L. O’Sullivan called “The Great Nation of Futurity.” The *Herald* concluded that Mankind

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<sup>250</sup> Pittsburgh *The Loco-Foco*, “In the Midst of a Revolution—A New Currency Plan for England, and Morse’s Telegraph in the U. States,” 27 June 1844.

was entering “the dawn of a greater era in the history of human progress on this continent than, perhaps, even enthusiasm itself has dreamed. With our railroads covering the land like a piece of network—with our vast steam power—our broad rivers—our ocean lakes—our innumerable safe and spacious harbors, with the means of constructing a vast navy of steamships, like the Princeton, we may, indeed, bid defiance to all enemies.”<sup>251</sup>

Young America II consisted of a generation of politicians and public intellectuals very different from the romantic radicals Leggett, Whitman, Dorr, Cole, and literary Young America. While the Mexican War and the annexation of slave territory deeply scarred Young America I’s faith in the Democratic Party and politics generally, the more hopeful and romantic, pro-expansion locofocos, however, generally continued to support the Democratic Party and provided further political support for a rising generation of pragmatic politicians in the late 1840s and 1850s. According to Edward Widmer, “political Young America (Young America II) had little interest in obscure matters of copyright and book publishing.” The Polk administration gained the support of New England Dorrites, locofoco New Yorkers, conservative Democrats, and southerners alike by supporting a new Independent Treasury, a low tariff, and territorial expansion. The new president alienated the New York Barnburners by favoring the Hunkers for spoils in New York, the Mexican War and territorial crisis divided the coalitions of locofoco and Young American Democrats in large part responsible for Polk’s election, and Young America II took full control of the Democratic Party during the years of Democratic-Free Soil division. By the end of the Pierce administration, Widmer states, “Young America had become a slangy nickname for the spirit of restless expansionism and ugly greed that characterized the decade.” Both Young Americas, including locofocos across the country, were in many ways Leggett’s

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<sup>251</sup> Ibid.; John L. O’Sullivan, “The Great Nation of Futurity,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* XXIII (November 1839): 426-430.

“Dupes of Hope Forever,” and their efforts to shape history, both romantic and pragmatic, unfolded in entirely unexpected ways. As many realized by 1848, the practice of Manifest Destiny actually entrenched the illegitimate Slave Power at national expense. Whigs and Locofoco Democrats reacted against the administration, ushering in a new Whig Congress in 1847 and sowing the seeds for another attempt to forcibly reform the Democracy.<sup>252</sup>

### From Barnburners to Free Soilers: The Loco-Foco Movement, 1844-1848

Now, first, what is the history of this Free Soil Party? Some years ago...there was known to be a schism to some extent in the great Democratic or Locofoco party of New York.—This schism increased by degrees; and...In process of time, it grew wider...But this party, now called the Barnburners, existed as one branch of the great Democratic party of New York, long before any question arose about the Wilmot Proviso, or any opposition in that party to the progress of Slavery, or the extension of Slave Territory. And up to the time of the annexation of Texas, every member of both branches of the party in New York, went straight forward and right ahead in supporting the annexation of Texas, Slavery and all.

Daniel Webster, Speech at Abington, Massachusetts, October 9, 1848<sup>253</sup>

Despite Levi Slamm’s optimistic hopes for annexation, the architect of the Second Party System remained convinced that acquiring Texas would upset his construction’s delicate balance. Van Buren’s “Hammet Letter,” of April 1844 declared against annexation because Texas would undoubtedly come with war on Mexico. Slamm followed the party chieftain and former president, calling the letter “one of the most masterly productions of that eminent man.” Slamm was careful to note, however, that though both candidates wished to defer Texas

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<sup>252</sup> Widmer, *Young America*, 19, 21, 43, 61; Scholnick, “Extermination and Democracy: O’Sullivan, the *Democratic Review*, and Empire, 1837-1840,” 123-141; Frederick Merk, *Manifest Destiny and Mission in American History: A Reinterpretation*, New York: Knopf, 1963, 29, 31-35, 40. The Whigs gained forty seats in Congress between the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Congresses while the Democrats lost 29 seats. The Democrats regained the majority in the 31<sup>st</sup> Congress, but by then reunionist sentiments between Free Soilers and regular Democrats were already growing strong. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788-1997: The Official Results*, Jefferson (NC): McFarland & Company, 132-156.

<sup>253</sup> Washington [PA] *Reporter*, “Speech of Hon. Daniel Webster,” 25 October 1848.



annexation, Van Buren and Clay differed on one key point: Van Buren believed that if relations between Texas and Mexico normalized, annexation would be both “expedient” and “happy.” In May, approaching the Baltimore nominating convention, Slamm published articles asserting that Mexico indeed was unable to continue in a state of war with Texas, virtually alleviating Van Buren’s concerns. When Cincinnati Democrats asked James K. Polk about his positions on Oregon and Texas, Slamm printed Polk’s reply letter. “Let the fixed policy of our government be,” Polk wrote, “not to permit Great Britain or any other foreign power to plant a colony or hold dominion over any portion of the people or territory of either.” By the end of May 1844, Massachusetts and New York locofocos compromised their support for Van Buren, and the *Daily Plebeian* proclaimed Polk’s nomination a “glorious result.”<sup>254</sup>

A locofoco like Slamm could have been very pleased with the nomination. Not only could the United States continue to fight the grand war of republicanism *versus* aristocracy in the West, but they had managed to find a *bona fide* locofoco that could be effectively packaged to the diverse elements of the Democratic coalition. Having stated as much and committed himself to the expansionist Polk, Slamm dedicated himself to delivering New York for Polk, directly addressing the concerns of antislavery, anti-expansionist, Barnburners and locofoco Young Americans. Slamm frankly admitted the evil of slavery, but he maintained the popular fetishism for the Union, the continuation of which was above all things “the most desirable, and of course a dismemberment, of all things the most to be dreaded.” Responding to “Veto,” Theodore Sedgwick’s old pen name, Slamm levied abolitionist arguments in *favor* of Texas. The complete abolition of slavery would best be effected by admitting Texas without restriction on the institution. Liberty could be maximized within the United States by acquiring south-westerly

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<sup>254</sup> New York *Daily Plebeian*, “Mr. Van Buren’s Letter on Annexation,” 30 April 1844; “Mr. Van Buren’s Letter on Annexation,” 1 May 1844; “The Right and Justice of Immediately Annexing Texas,” 4 May 1844; “Gov. Polk’s Position on the Texas Question Defined,” 8 May 1844; “[Untitled]” 13 May 1844; 31 May 1844.

territories into which older states with depleted soils could drain “the curse of slavery.” The ensuing “slave drain” would not only rid the soil of slavery, but African Americans as well. “At all events,” he argued, “admit Texas as a slave territory, and you open a door, through which...the African race will make its exit, and become incorporated with the various colored races that inhabit Mexico, Central and North America.” “Slavery cannot be abolished,” he maintained, “and the slaves remain among us and be happy. All experience, all history proves it. The very prejudices, if you please, of the North, are against it—prejudices that do not exist among the different races that inhabit Mexico and South America.” In his campaign to elect James K. Polk, Levi D. Slamm foreshadowed the Free Soil Party’s mutual desires for soil free of slavery *and* African Americans.<sup>255</sup>

Between Polk’s election to office and the beginning of the Mexican War, Whigs and Liberty leaders wagged their fingers at locofoco Democrats, accusing them of selling out their antislavery principles for the spoils of politics, including Polk’s support of particularly cherished locofoco economic policies like the Independent Treasury and the Walker Tariff. A letter-to-the-editor from “Wilberforce” to the Boston *Daily Atlas* identified Marcus Morton as a tool of slaveholding Democrats “and their abettors,” who enjoyed “the traitorous assistance of the Locofoco representatives from the free states.” An article ironically titled “Beauties of Locofocoism,” the Ossining, New York *Hudson River Chronicle* criticized the moral obliquity of imperial conquest, but the Democratic *Journal* claimed that though “Straight-laced political moralists may prate of the rights of Mexico—they may prate also of the rights of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the whole country.” Regardless, history moved on and “Still our course is onward.” The *Journal* continued, “Our destiny leads the way. It may be wrong, in a *technical*

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<sup>255</sup> New York *Daily Plebeian*, “The Annexation of Texas—its effects upon Slavery,” 25 June 1844.

sense, for us to acquire Texas—it may be wrong for us to lay hold on Oregon, and finally on California,” but regardless of Man’s moral values, the unstoppable hordes of American settlers inevitably continued to pour westward. “We may say we have territory enough now, without wishing to acquire more,” the clipping concluded, “and we may *amuse ourselves* in discussing the technical rights of races—still we keep moving onward. Our people will not be hedged in. They will have ‘ample room and verge enough’ for the full display of all their physical, moral, and intellectual powers.” Despite the *Chronicle*’s admission that one feels a sort of natural joy at the territorial extension of his country, the editor considered it his “duty to wage a ceaseless warfare against the piratical doctrine of Locofocoism that our territory can be extended or our interests advanced by a disregard of moral obligations and the principles of international law—or by taking undue advantage of powers who are unable to cope with us in point of military strength.” The “insatiable Locofoco spirit for plunder and acquisition,” displayed from Canada and Rhode Island to Texas once swept revolutionary France into the Terror and Napoleonic Empire that bled Europe for a generation. The editor begged his readers to seriously consider the fate of a country that demanded the right to lead republican revolutions around the globe, at will, without regard to existing and conflicting claims.<sup>256</sup>

Historian of the Free Soil Party Joseph Rayback appropriately described the Polk administration as a conclusion to what can be called the Jacksonian period (ca. 1815-1845), bringing the period to a close in a sort of expansionist-locofoco consensus. The disparate wings of the Democracy briefly united behind the party’s presidential nominee, as they had in 1836. New England revolutionary republican clam bakers, New York and western republican expansionists, and Young America II pragmatic imperialists alike responded to Polk favorably in

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<sup>256</sup> Boston *Daily Atlas*, “To the Liberty Party and Abolitionists—No. 3,”; Ossining, New York, *Hudson River Chronicle*, “Beauties of Locofocoism,” 21 October 1845.

1844, but what we might call an “Equal Rights Consensus,” such as there was one, was short-lived at best. In the years 1843-1848, most observers began identifying the Democratic Party at large with locofocoism, and “the Locofoco Party” became a common synonym for the Democracy. The actual reshuffling of political affiliations during the territorial expansion crisis quickly outpaced political nomenclature, however. Factions of antislavery locofocos calling themselves the “Independent Democrats” rallied around John P. Hale in New Hampshire as early as 1843, opposing themselves to Franklin Pierce’s “State House Gang” of pro-southern, expansionist Democrats. Both Hale and Pierce represented locofocos, Dorrite revolutionaries, and Young Americans through 1844, but the annexation of Texas, and the introduction of David Wilmot’s antislavery Proviso drove irreversible wedges between the factions. All-Oregon, loco-Young American Democrats like Ohio’s former champion of Dorrism, William Allen, opposed Polk’s continuing alliances with southerners and Whigs at the expense of northern expansionism, further complicating the factional arrangements of the parties. In New York, despite the lingering power of the Locofoco-Workingmen alliance in state Democratic factional politics through the constitutional convention of 1846, the Polk administration betrayed promises to Van Burenite Democrats (by way of communications with Thomas Hart Benton) that he would renegotiate terms of Texas statehood and admit the area as a territory rather than a new slave state. Upon entering office, the new president reversed his position and pledged the military and navy to defend the incoming state’s borders to the Rio Grande.<sup>257</sup>

Texas annexation did come, after all, with war on Mexico. After failing to entice the Mexican government to sell California to the United States, “The frustrated Polk then decided to provoke a war,” writes historian Michael Holt. The president dispatched soldiers under the

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<sup>257</sup> Roberts, *America’s First Great Depression*, 85-136; Michael Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War*, New York: Hill & Wang, 2004, 14-15.

command of General Zachary Taylor to occupy the disputed territory between the Rio Grande and Nueces Rivers and “In May 1846, after Mexican troops attacked Taylor’s soldiers for invading what they believed was Mexican soil, Polk told Congress that war had begun by an act of Mexico. He insisted that Congress raise the men and supplies necessary to fight Mexico’s alleged aggression.” In his August 1846 request for war funds, the president asked Congress for an additional two million dollars to purchase any land cessions from Mexico in peace arrangements, signaling to northern Democrats that Polk had indeed concocted the war as a land grab. In response, a clique of northern Democratic representatives gathered behind northern Pennsylvania Congressman David Wilmot to assert the now well-established loco-Young American position on expansion and slavery in the territories. The “Wilmot Proviso,” amended Polk’s funding appropriations bill to provide “that, as an express and fundamental condition to the acquisition of any territory from the Republic of Mexico...neither slavery nor involuntary servitude shall ever exist in any part of said territory, except for crime, whereof the party shall first be duly convicted.” On what Holt notes was a “starkly sectional vote,” the House passed the Proviso 134 to 91, though it died in the Senate never to be revived. It remained a remarkable and decidedly exceptional departure from the partisan battles over Polk’s locofoco economic policies, territorial acquisition, and even the war itself. Above all, the Proviso demonstrated the dangerous potential for sectional animosity and the breakdown of the party system under the influence of politicizing slavery. As Michael Holt has noted, northern Democrat’s need to maintain majorities in their own states, especially loco-Young American strongholds in New York and the Northwest, used latent sectionalism to their advantage by agitating not only Polk’s proposed expansion of slavery, but his failure to obtain All Oregon as well. Though partisan harmony was indeed the norm during the remainder of the administration, upon acquisition of

half of Mexico with the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hildalgo in Spring 1848, sectional concerns over slavery in the territories again rose to prominence in public debate.<sup>258</sup>

As Rayback argues, the Polk administration also represents the genesis point for a new, thoroughly *sectional* era in American history throughout which factions of northern Democrats one-by-one peeled themselves from the “shrine of party,” agitating for a new political coalition of antislavery activists from the Democrats, the Whigs, and the Liberty Party. New Yorker and Young American David Dudley Field argued to fellow radicals that “I am willing that our victorious standard should be borne to the Isthmus of Darien or planted on the highest peak of the Polynesian Islands, but the soil on which it advances must be free! As free as the untrammelled soil on which I stand.” In Ohio, the state’s Liberty Party leader Salmon Chase wanted to construct “a great Wilmot Proviso league” of northern antislavery Democrats and Whigs which could potentially upset enough northern votes to provide a majority in the Electoral College. This goal remained completely unattainable, however, so long as locofoco Democrats remained loyal to their party. Historian Frederick Blue notes, for example, that Van Buren lieutenant and antislavery locofoco Silas Wright beat Whig Millard Fillmore for governor of New York by ten thousand votes in 1844, a majority which proved decisive in Polk’s own election in which the margin for New York was half Wright’s. The Anti-Rent War and a series of fruitless attempts to hold the New York Democracy together consumed the Wright administration. Wright’s defeat for reelection in 1846 and his subsequent death, coupled with ongoing developments in national politics, however, enabled free soiler Salmon Chase to comfortably joined forces with the “leading locos of New York” to chart a Provisoist coalition. While most Democrats, northern and southern, supported the policy of popular sovereignty in the

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<sup>258</sup> Holt, *Fate of Their Country*, 15-16, 19-49.

territories, hardliners behind Calhoun in the South denounced popular sovereignty as inconsistent with the rights of slaveholders. In the North, the fact that the Democratic Party's new standard-bearer for popular sovereignty happened to be the man Van Buren believed responsible for blocking his nomination at the Baltimore Convention only sweetened the appeal of free soil for loco-Young Americans.<sup>259</sup>

As of 1848, however, Whigs like the moderate Abraham Lincoln withheld support from Van Buren thanks to “all his Locofocoism,” and the Free Soil coalition failed to attract the support Chase required for national victories. The Barnburners behind Van Buren dominated the provisoist coalition as state Democratic parties divided along the territorial issue. Van Buren himself hoped to use the Free Soil Party like the Equal Rights New Yorkers used their organization—to push the national party toward a more radical republican policy agenda, exercising enough political muscle force a Whig victory and convince conservative Democrats to accept a more radical candidate in 1852. Whigs and Liberty men scoffed at the Free Soil Party's close associations with locofoco Democrats and the ex-president. Like Lincoln, many remained suspicious of locofoco motives, policies, and political machinations. “Whigs insisted,” Joseph Rayback writes, “that the name *Barnburner* had been fastened to the radical wing because its actions were similar to the barnburning tactics of the Rhode Island Dorrites,” and many who balked at the radical position in that conflict retained their skepticism. Whig candidate for Congress from Massachusetts, John G. Palfrey, initially sought a joint nomination with Free Soilers for his 1848 campaign, but he determined the alliance not worth aiding the party's “Loco Foco dough-face leaders.” Ohio Free Soiler Norton Townsend accused Chase of “selling out to

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<sup>259</sup> Joseph Rayback, *Free Soil: The Election of 1848*, Lexington: The University of Kentucky Press, 1970, vii-ix, 57, 59, 76, 99-112; Frederick Blue, *The Free Soilers, Third Party Politics, 1848-54*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973, 1-15, 16-43, 44-80; McCurdy, *The Anti-Rent Era*, 143-144, 158-191; Holt, *Fate of Their Country*, 19-49.

the loco focus in the legislature,” while another ex-Whig complained that “When I mounted the ‘Free Soil’ platform I did not thereby intend to transfer myself to LocoFocoism *boots* and all.” New York Congressman and Barnburner Bradford Wood synthesized locofocoism and “Free Soil” in the same style as that offered years earlier by the Pittsburgh *The Loco Foco* and Slamm’s New York *Daily Plebeian*. In a speech to Barnburners in Albany in late 1847, Wood stated that he would not exclude southerners from conquered territory, but he would require that they “must do so upon the same footing with the white man of the North. *There should be no special privileges given to any one class.*”<sup>260</sup>

The Whig Boston *Daily Atlas* was among the many newspapers with correspondents in the field reporting on the May, 1848 Democratic Party national convention in Baltimore. The *Atlas* was especially interested in the divisions between locofocos at the convention. The battle in New York between the Barnburners and Hunkers spilled into the national convention when two delegations claimed the right to represent the state. The convention agreed to seat both delegations, but granted only the Hunkers the right to vote for nominations, leading sympathizers like Hannibal Hamlin of Maine to declare the move out of order. As the convention proceeded, the Barnburners made clear the level of their distaste with the national party. As a single body, the New York antislavery faction rose and exited the convention before balloting for president. In the end, the Democracy nominated Cass, who the *Atlas* claimed was being “repaid for all his cringing and sycophancy, his twistings and his twinings.” Cass represented “the continuation of the Polk dynasty,” one “of its most abject and subservient tool[s].” Whigs delighted in the sight of a re-fracturing Democracy, and eagerly quoted Barnburning papers to their audiences. The

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<sup>260</sup> Mayfield, *Rehearsal for Republicanism*, 110-111; Rayback, *Free Soil*, 60-61; Blue, *The Free Soilers*, 99, 135, 166; Richard Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States 1837-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1976, 208; New Hampshire *Sentinel*, “[Untitled],” 25 November 1847.



New York *Sun*, “a loco-foco paper,” which declared for Van Buren over Cass, wrote that they were in the midst of a “remarkable revolution going on in our political world...The star of the radical democracy is therefore completely in the ascendant in New York, while deserted Hunkerism is left to play the counterfeit of a party which no longer exists.” The *Sun* concluded that “The Van Buren party is now the *real* Democratic party.” While the Democrats and Whigs ran their candidates as provisoists in the North and anti-proviso men in the South, the Van Burenites offered a clear contrast to the *status quo* and a real choice for voters.<sup>261</sup>

By early August 1848 and despite his hesitancy to become a candidate it was all but certain that Van Buren would be the Free Soil Party nominee and his nomination was calculated to win “the free soil men of the Locofoco party,” including the New York Barnburners. The Washington, Pennsylvania *Reporter* diligently followed the defections of Democratic papers and activists to the Free Soilers, keeping records for each state with a substantial Free Soil presence, including “About fifty Locofoco papers in New York...sustained by Locofoco papers in each of the States of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana, Michigan, Iowa, Wisconsin, and some of the New England states.” In Pennsylvania, David Wilmot’s district “openly declared its hostility to Cass and Butler and raised the Van Buren flag.” David Dudley Field spoke on Van Buren’s behalf in West Chester, which was expected to provide 1,500 to 2,000 votes for Free Soil. The *Susquehanna Register* (wrongly) estimated that half of the Democrats in northern Pennsylvania were Free Soilers, and in southern Michigan the case was much the same. As Free Soil conventions raged across the land, Democrats flocked to the new banners. In Michigan, the Ann Arbor *True Democrat*, the *Allegan Record*, the *Grand Rapids Inquirer*, the Jackson *Patriot* and

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<sup>261</sup> Boston *Daily Atlas*, “Editorial Correspondence of the Atlas—Locofoco Convention—Fourth Day—The New York Contestants—Nomination of Cass and Butler,” 29 May 1848; Trenton *State Gazette*, “A Weathercock Yielding to the Gale,” 18 July 1848; Trenton *State Gazette*, “A Pretty State of Things,” 27 July 1848.

the *Battle Creek Press* all left the Cass campaign for Van Buren. In Massachusetts, Marcus Morton and his lieutenants spoke at county conventions while the Springfield *Sentinel* declared for Free Soil. In New York, the *Utica Democrat* published “a list of forty-nine Locofoco journals in N. York which repudiate the Cass ticket, and support Van Buren for president.” The Walworth County, Wisconsin *Democrat* and the Southport *Telegraph* also abandoned the Democracy, and Cass’ chances appeared grimmer by the day. Across the Union, “Those who abandoned their party in 1836, with the expectation of their carrying the State with them, by going over to Mr. Van Buren, have now mounted a new hobby under his lead, in the hope that they can ride on it into power.” Those Democrats scorned by the party would achieve vengeance by playing “the ‘Free Soil’ Game.” The most sanguine hopes of both Free Soilers and Whigs eagerly observing the Democratic schism remained largely unrealized outside of a few areas of relatively concentrated support for Van Buren in New York and Ohio’s Western Reserve.<sup>262</sup>

The Washington *Reporter* implored its Whig readership to reject the Van Buren candidacy, an obvious ploy to bleed Whig votes from Taylor and Fillmore. “How can any man,” the editor asked, “claiming the name of *Whig* or professing to hold to *Whig principles*, support Mr. Van Buren for the Presidency? We can easily see how the Locofocos can support him; *he is*

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<sup>262</sup> Washington [PA] *Reporter*, “Mr. Van Buren,” 2 August 1848; Washington [PA] *Reporter*, 16 August 1848; New Hampshire *Sentinel*, “[Untitled],” 3 August 1848; Middletown, CN *Constitution*, “[Untitled],” 9 August 1848; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, 10 August 1848; Brattleboro, *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, “Van Buren and the ‘Free Soil’ Game,” 21 August 1848; New Hampshire *Sentinel*, “[Untitled],” 24 August 1848. The *Utica Democrat*’s list of New York papers that switched allegiances from the Democracy to Free Soil is as follows: the *New York Evening Post*, *Globe*, *Democrat*, and *Barnburner*, the *Suffolk County Watchman*, *Long Island Democrat*, *Williambsburg Advertiser*, *Eastern State Journal*, *Putnam Democrat*, *Newburgh Telegraph*, *Goshen Clarion*, *Cattskill Recorder*, *Columbia Democrat*, *Ulster Republican*, *Delaware Gazette*, *Albany Atlas*, *Troy Budget*, *Fonda Sentinel*, *Fulton County Democrat*, *Mohawk Courier*, *Otsego Democrat*, *Hamilton Reflector*, *Utica Democrat*, *Lewis County Democrat*, *St. Lawrence Republican*, *Steuben Farmer’s Advocate*, *Keesville Democrat*, *Watertown Union*, *Jefferson County Democrat*, *Oswego Palladium*, *Onondaga Standard*, *Skaneateles Democrat*, *Free Soil Campaigner*, *Cayugo New Era*, *Ithaca Journal*, *Birmingham Courier*, *Tioga Freeman*, *Elmira Gazette*, *Chmong Jeffersonian*, *Ontario Messenger*, *Phelps’ Atlas*, *Lyons Argus*, *Palmyra Sentinel*, *Rochester Daily Advertiser*, *Northern Freeman*, *Allegany Reporter*, *Cattamugus Democrat*, *Buffalo Republic*, and the *Niagara Cataract*. See Washington [PA] *Reporter*, “Lying & Liars—The Bradford Reporter, &c.” 30 August 1848; Dubin, *Presidential Elections*, 96-115.

*one of their party*, thoroughly identified with them by his past life, his feelings, sentiments and associations.” Van Buren was always “one of the leading spirits of their party...one whom they always loved to follow, and delighted to honor,” and twice the candidate of both regular and radical Democrats. The *Reporter* argued that in 1844, Van Buren “by the treachery of his friends was thrust aside and James K. Polk, became the standard bearer of the so-called Democracy. Between Van Buren and Polk, it was a mere struggle for the leadership.” Van Buren himself gave Polk his “hearty support,” and only Polk’s favoring of Hunkers over Barnburners in the New York appointments soured their relations. Under Polk, elected “By falsehood and fraud, and chiefly by the agency of those who now support Mr. Van Buren...Texas was annexed—Whig measures were repealed, and locofoco policy, *the old Van Buren policy*, was restored.” Meet the new boss, same as the old boss. As the editor of the Philadelphia *North American* wrote, the Free Soil Party was designed to trick Whigs “who are inclined to follow an *ignis fatuus*, conjured from the brains of ingenious politicians, to lead Whigs into the mire of Locofocoism.” This theory of the Free Soil phenomenon was widespread among Whigs.<sup>263</sup>

Throughout the campaign season of 1848, the locofoco-Barnburner-Liberty coalition of Free Soilers suffered personal political losses while the movement grew beneath them. In Massachusetts, Benjamin Butler and Marcus Morton were both driven from office for their “political heresies,” including support for an antislavery plank in the Massachusetts Democratic

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<sup>263</sup> Washington, [PA] *Reporter*, “How can the Whigs support Van Buren?” 30 August 1848; Philadelphia *North American*, “A Candid Free-Soiler,” 31 October 1848. A similar sentiment is expressed in a letter-to-the-editor from “A Looker on in Venice,” to the Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, “For the Eagle” 31 August 1848; Trenton *State Gazette*, “False Friends of Freedom,” 9 October 1848; Trenton *State Gazette*, “Free Soil in Ohio,” 16 October 1848; Trenton *State Gazette*, “[Untitled]” 17 October 1848; Trenton *State Gazette*, “Ohio,” 18 October 1848; Philadelphia *North American*, “Mr. Wilmot Again,” 6 November 1848; The Keene, New Hampshire *Sentinel* expressed the view in explicit and simple terms: “The Locofoco branch of the free soil sizzle in every State but New York, will shout the loudest for Van Buren up to the 7<sup>th</sup> inst., when they will quietly deposit their votes for Lewis Cass. In N. York the question is about the ‘spoils,’ and the democracy go the death on that question.” Keene [NH] *Sentinel*, “[Untitled]” 2 November 1848.

Party's platform, along with "a dozen others, 'of the same sort.'" Alongside reports that John P. Hale, the Liberty Party nominee, declined in favor of union with Free Soil and Van Buren, the Washington, Pennsylvania *Reporter* notified readers of judges recently elected in Wisconsin. One "A. D. Smith of Milwaukee," the same man elected President of the Republic of Canada a decade before, was one of "three Locofocos" elected to the state Supreme Court. Free Soil continued to gain ground in Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, Iowa, Vermont, and Ohio. In virtually all of these states, it appeared to Whigs that most Free Soilers were "Locofocos," defecting to the new party, ultimately aiding Taylor. "In Illinois an electoral ticket has been formed," the Trenton *State Gazette* reported, "and six out of the nine gentlemen who compose it are known to have been decided and influential Locofocoës. In Wisconsin four out of every five who have joined the free soil movement are conceded to be Locofocoës." Virtually the entire cast of stump speakers for Van Buren in Pittsburgh's Allegheny County left the Democracy after the party nominated Cass. The Brattleboro, Vermont *Semi-Weekly Eagle* prognosticated that "the ruin of the Liberty party *by absorption*—of the Whig party by coalition—and the election of Cass in Congress" were the "*real* objects of the locofoco coalitionists. They mean to make the abolitionists their *dupes*—the Whigs their victims." "Whigs—beware!" the *Semi-Weekly Eagle* urged its audience, "Free Soil! Free Men! Free Labor!' are the catchwords for decoying *you* into the clutches of the coalition," with Martin Van Buren, "a willing slave to the slavocrats," and abettor of Polk's war of imperial conquest.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> New York *Herald*, "Removals of Government Officials," 4 September 1848; Washington [PA] *Reporter*, "News of the Day," 6 September 1848; Trenton *State Gazette*, "The Free Soil Movement," 16 September 1848; Trenton *State Gazette*, "Vermont Legislature," 19 September 1848; Washington [PA] *Reporter*, "The Prospects," 4 October 1848; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, "Whig Calculations before and since the Election," 25 October 1848; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, "To the Whigs of Vermont," 24 August 1848.

Support for the Free Soil Party came primarily from Barnburning Democrats in New York and New England. Historian Richard Sewell writes that “Van Buren’s count had come largely out of the hides of Democrats.” After his candidacy, Free State Democrats were forced to choose antislavery policies, compromise with antislavery Democrats, or gradually lose elections as radicals worked themselves away from the Democrats and into the Free Soil ranks. Frank Blair used his *Missouri Barnburner* to campaign for Van Buren, Walt Whitman’s support for Van Buren got him fired from the *Daily Eagle* and prompted him to run his own short-lived *Weekly Freeman*, and the philosophy of “free soil” rapidly spread throughout the North. As historian of the Liberty and Free Soil parties, Reinhard Johnson has argued, “Overall, the composition of the Free Soil Party varied from state to state, with Democrats contributing proportionally more support than the Whigs, even if the New York Barnburners are discounted.” In Massachusetts after 1844, a tide of activist Democrats overtook the Liberty Party in competition for antislavery votes and continued to steer the state Free Soil Party in the following years. In Rhode Island, Johnson writes, “It is probably safe to say that the few voters who had left their old parties to vote the Liberty ticket before 1848 voted for Free Soil in the fall and continued into the Republican Party later.” In New York, the Liberty Party literally dissolved itself into the Free Soil Party, merging state conventions in Utica and shrinking from 3.3% of the New York vote in 1844 to an almost non-existent 0.56% in 1848. Most New Yorkers who voted Free Soil also became Republicans by 1860. Van Buren did not draw much of his Free Soil support from New York City, and by 1860 New York became a solidly Democratic voting bloc though Lincoln beat his Democratic opponents decisively state-wide. In the Old Northwest, the language of “Equal Rights” dominated Free Soil politicking and Democrats controlled the state Free Soil Parties in Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois. Free Soil Democrats outvoted Free Soil Whigs

and Liberty men in New York, Massachusetts, Vermont and Maine while the Free Soil Whigs provided most of the party's votes in New Hampshire. Across the West, the contributions of Democrats and Whigs evenly divided. Cass' status as a "favorite son" of the Old Northwest assured him victories in the region, but Van Buren polled exceptionally well in Illinois (12.6%), Michigan (16%), Ohio (10.8%), and Wisconsin (26.4%). Historians have so far failed to produce a coherent history of the Loco-Foco Movement, and have therefore failed to recognize that it is *locofocoism*, not just Barnburning Van Burenism or Liberty Party abolitionism, that account for the formation and composition of the Free Soil Party. Free Soil support clustered tightly in those eastern states most affected by the history of locofocoism (notably New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont--Van Buren's three strongest margins) and in those western states in which locofoco Democrats were more dispersed, though strong enough to produce significant disruptions of state parties.<sup>265</sup>

When Louis Hartz argued in his landmark 1955 study *The Liberal Tradition in America* that Lockean liberalism was so hegemonic as to disallow vibrant, open debate about substantive social change in the United States, a generation of historians countered him. The social historians of the New Left in the 1960s and 1970s, among them Sidney Lens, dismantled the Hartzian interpretation by diligently exploring radical movements throughout time, space, and social classes, leaning on "history from below." Lens, however, discounted the idea of a "radical right" in the United States, and argues that locofocoism "was a challenge to some of the evils of nascent capitalism, but not to capitalism itself." Lens' interpretation of the Loco-Focos rests on an understanding of them which lacks a general history of their movement. Historians have

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<sup>265</sup> Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 168; Blue, *The Free Soilers*, 130, 132, 145-147; Reinhard Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2009, 91, 133, 136, 145, 150, 164-221. Dubin, *Presidential Elections*, 90-91, 96, 107-108, 176-177.

more recently reinterpreted the influence of the locofocos treated in this study, especially the long-term impact of the Free Soil election of 1848. Joel Silbey has recently argued that “Free Soil” was America’s great contribution to the revolutions of 1848. “For the first time,” Silbey writes, “an organized political program calling for the containment of slavery within then-established boundaries took a primarily electoral focus in the platform of the Free Soil Party.” This was the American attempt at socio-political revolution, though the real revolution did not take shape until 1861-1865, nor did it take the shape its Loco-Foco progenitors had foreseen decades before, while eager New Yorkers consumed Leggett’s fiery abolitionism.<sup>266</sup>

Historian Craig Calhoun very recently (2012) produced a study of radicalism in mid-nineteenth century England, France, and the United States countering New Left historians. Calhoun argues for “the importance of freeing the idea of radicalism from too tight a connection to those of revolution and class analysis but also those of liberal progressivism.” Tradition, culture, localism, and socio-political relationships between individuals were central elements in the radical movements in Europe and the United States that produced “nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and ethnic conflict.” Much nineteenth century radicalism was profoundly conservative, sporting “visions of an alternate future...drawn from myths or memories of a distant past.” For Loco-Focos and Free Soilers, their classical liberal theory of history and their almost mystical reverence for the Revolution steered them away from English utilitarian pragmatism; away from Cobbett’s communitarian traditionalism; away from the varieties of Utopian socialism proliferating across the country; and it drove them to a radical theory of republican citizenship. Loco-Focos shared philosophical commitments to anti-monopoly,

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<sup>266</sup> Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution*, New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc., 1955, 11-32; Lens, *Radicalism in America*, 86-90; Silbey, *Party Over Section*, xi-xiv, 11, 156.

*laissez-faire* economics, an ethics of equal, individual rights, and a revolutionary republican political order best exemplified in Rhode Island. Their practical politicking, however, betrayed their intellectual demand that individuals not be forced into any particular socio-political order. Put into practice, locofocoism demanded a revolutionary and fluid legal order in which every individual possessed equal rights and the state possessed no legitimacy without the will of its citizens and had no powers beyond the just powers of the individual citizen. The state could, therefore, be remade at will and should do virtually nothing but mediate relations between associated citizens and the outside world. Myriad levels of government and localities shared overlapping authority derived from the sovereignty and equal rights of every individual. The Free Soil “revolution” of 1848 determined that a significant portion of the locofoco philosophy would be put into practice. The later Republican Party was never a locofoco organization, though Loco-Focos participated in the long pre-history of Lincoln’s winning coalition.<sup>267</sup>

The great downfall of Loco-Free Soil politicking, that element which most diverged locofoco theory and practice, was the positive adoption of democracy. Locofocos hoping to implement policy change always formed political coalitions to acquire a voting bloc strong enough to force the parties in more radical directions. “As a result of this voter relocation and resettlement, the Free Soil Party of 1848 could now be seen as the ‘harbinger’ of its successor coalition,” Silbey writes, and the Republican coalition became strong enough to elect the “non-Free Soiler Abraham Lincoln, on what was essentially the Free Soil platform, against a badly divided—along sectional lines—Democratic Party.” “At that moment in 1860,” Silbey concludes, “in the words of the Ohio party address in 1848, the ‘crisis’ had indeed ‘come.’”

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<sup>267</sup> Craig Calhoun, *The Roots of Radicalism: Tradition, the Public Sphere, and Early Nineteenth-Century Social Movements*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012, vii-x, 1-11, 12-42.



Loco-Focos divided their political support between the Young America II politicians leading the Democrats and the ex-Whigs leading the Republicans throughout the 1850s and 1860s.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Silbey, *Party Over Section*, 156.

## Chapter 6

### A Proliferation of “Isms:” The Slow Death of the Loco-Foco Movement

About ten or twelve years ago, a variety of little streams of isolated fanaticism began to flow from various quarters in the northern States...A few years ago, too, agrarianism, or a general division of property, was made the object of a political organization [the Equal Rights Party] of this city, and its founders actually sent one member to the legislature...Abolitionism, amalgamationism, Fourierism, anti-masonry, socialism, and all other sorts of isms, have sprang up in single shoots during the last few years; but now an attempt has been made to unite all those various shoots into one immense movement, by the vast magical skill of Mr. Van Buren, of Kinderhook...The wildness, the insanity, the folly, the nonsense, and simplicity, of all these eccentric and extraordinary doctrines, are now brought together under one tent in Buffalo, and Mr. Van Buren has undertaken the task to unite them in one great and wonderful movement, for the purpose of preserving the freedom of the negro in California and New Mexico. Well, let us see how they will accomplish this task.

--New York *Herald*, “Fanaticism--Its Progress,” 10 August 1848

#### The Loco-Foco “New Age of Reform,” or The Existential Crisis of Jacksonian America

There never was a time since the division of parties in this country, when I had so little confidence in what is called the Democratic party as at present; and as at present organized and constituted, I believe it to be the most corrupt organization. It is made up of the odds and ends of all factions and parties on the continent, and is one of the most anomalous combinations of fanaticism, idolatry, prostitution, crime, and absurdities conceivable! The *isms* composing the party of which you are a member, are: Abolitionism; Free-soilism, Agrarianism, Fourierism; Millerism; Radicalism; Woman’s Rightsism; Mobism; Mormonism; Spiritualism; Locofocoism; Higher-Lawism; Foreign Pauperism; Anti-Americanism; Roman Catholicism; Deism, and modern Sag Nichtism! All this tide of fanaticism and error, originating North of Mason and Dixon’s Line, went for Pierce in the last Presidential contest.

--William Gannaway “Parson” Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism* (1856)<sup>269</sup>

In his 1854 and 1857 explorations in early sociology, George Fitzhugh articulated a sort of proslavery pragmatism virtually antithetical to the jubilant republicanism coursing throughout the locofoco movement and the lives of the tireless reformers that comprised it. Fitzhugh

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<sup>269</sup> William Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism, Romanism, and Bogus Democracy, in the Light of Reason, History and Scripture: In Which Certain Demagogues in Tennessee, and Elsewhere, are Shown Up in Their True Colors*, Ann Arbor (MI): University of Michigan Library, 2005 (originally published: 1856), 80.

famously argued that free society was a clear and demonstrable failure. *Sociology for the South*, dedicated “to the people of the South,” purported to examine the foundations of so-called “free” and slave societies and “prove that we are indebted to domestic slavery for our happy exemption from the social afflictions” plaguing northerners. Fitzhugh’s attack on free society included the deprecation of free trade, the rise of utopian and Marxist socialism in response to the working and living conditions in northern cities, the proliferation of religious heresies including Mormonism, and what Fitzhugh called “the thousand other isms that deface and deform free society.” He did not oppose progress; indeed he thought slavery the basis of all true economic and social progress. Fitzhugh complained about eastern Virginia, that “she opposes all innovations, and sticks to mud roads as pertinaciously as many of her old gentry did to fairtops, shorts and kneebuckles.” “But,” he concluded, “she must give way at last, for she is proud and highly civilized. Rapid intercommunication is the distinguishing feature of modern progress. Tis part and parcel of the civilization of our times.” “Daily mails, telegraphs and railroads,” he continued, “are becoming necessities of life. Fashion is omnipotent, and these things are exceedingly useful.” He advocated public schooling for all children, hoping to dash the northern attack that southerners lacked education. “Free schools should at once be established in all neighborhoods where a sufficient number of scholars can be collected in one school,” and southerners should fight to “Educate the people, no matter what it may cost!” Fitzhugh based his attack on northern society not in his distaste for progress or reform *per se*, but rather his conception of northern “free laborers,” as in fact “Cannibals All” or “slaves without masters,” deluded, unmoored, atomized agents of *isms*.<sup>270</sup>

In *Cannibals All!*, Fitzhugh continued his reproach of free society, in which supposedly free and autonomous laborers were in fact brutalized by the market, the division of labor, and

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<sup>270</sup> George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society*, Richmond, VA: A. Morris, 1854, 1-222.

their capitalist (and duty-less) masters. This brutalization resulted in a long train of political, economic, moral, and legal perversions productive of an explosive brew of seething conflicts between innumerable factions of rowdies, criminals, and indigents. Fitzhugh followed Carlyle in caricaturing the North (and industrial Europe), as hopelessly beset with disruptive and destructive “isms,” reform movements constantly upending natural life. “The isms on each side of the Atlantic are equally busy,” Fitzhugh wrote, “but whilst they dare invoke Anarchy in Europe, they dare not inaugurate New York Free Love and Oneida Incest, and Mormon Polygamy. The moral, religious, and social heresies of the North, are more monstrous than those of Europe. The pupil has surpassed the master, unaided by the stimulants of poverty, hunger and nakedness, which urge the master forward.” Free society lacked the reciprocal obligations of master to slave (or lord to serf in the feudal context) and replaced security with self-indulgent individuality. Fitzhugh flatly advised the slightly unhinged, constant and tireless reformers blazing their destructive paths through northern life to embrace the truth of the world: all without the power to be masters were either slaves or prey. “Slavery,” he remarked directly to reformers like the restless, radical locofocos, “is a form of communism, and as the Abolitionists and Socialists have resolved to adopt a new social system, we recommend it to their consideration.” The vast majority of Americans North and South would likely spit at Fitzhugh’s anti-democratic assertions and his support for white slavery, but the vast and dizzying array of “isms” he and others like “Parson” Brownlow identified with northern life indeed swept aside old issues, loyalties, and labels, including none other than “locofoco” itself. This chapter will examine the late history of the Loco-Foco movement, the period in which locofoco activists steadily detached from their Leggettian, Dorrite republican roots and rediscovered themselves and their missions awash in a sea of competing ideologies, agendas, and reform organizations.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! Or, Slaves Without Masters*, Richmond, VA: A. Morris, 1857, xix-xx, 102-103.

After her divorce from Charles Green, locofoco-Dorrism writer and historian Frances Whipple lived in Pomfret, Connecticut, with her sister's family until making the acquaintance of Samuel Brittan, one of the founders of American Spiritualism. Green lived with Brittan's family in Bridgeport for some time and immersed herself in the new faiths of a new industrial era: Transcendentalism, mesmerism, magnetism, Swedenborgianism, and spirit mediumship. For Green and her fellow Spiritualists, "These experiments were no more than a logical extension of the American ideal. If a man could engage in constructing a new country and a new society, why should he not equally devise his own form of religion?" Spiritualists like the Young American locofoco Frances Green drew inspiration from "the ideology of the Enlightenment and the American Revolution and were strongly individualistic." As Sarah O'Dowd argues, "Their view of heaven as open to all, with every spirit equal, was essentially democratic, a notion that appealed strongly to France Green."<sup>272</sup>

Spiritualism was but one, admittedly very small, variant of response to what can be described as an Existential crisis in Jacksonian America, and Frances' life-long philosophical locofocoism and Dorrism positioned her especially well to embrace a wide variety of other *isms*. Adrift in a swiftly changing world where individuals could easily get caught in webs of destruction woven from shadowy, unknown figures around the globe, many Americans embraced radical new answers to old questions about Man's place in history and the cosmos. Certainly Americans did not experience individual life crises in the same ways and institutions, from the majority of churches to the majority of states, on the whole successfully navigated the swirling currents of the Industrious, Industrial, and Jacksonian revolutions. For many on the margins of intellectual, social, and political life, including a wide array of our locofocos and

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<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.* 79-92.

Young Americans, however, moments of crisis tended to push them further to the fringes. “With the rise of science during the early nineteenth century,” O’Dowd writes, “including discoveries in geology that seemed to cast doubt on traditional views of the creation, came an unappealing view of a distant, abstract, impersonal God who operated according to natural law.” Darwin’s discoveries only exacerbated this question further, while the arrival of telegraphy transmitted one’s thoughts electrically across the globe. One historian has written that “By the 1850s telegraph keys tapped throughout the United States. Believers in spirit communication used the new technology to argue that certain people were charged with an aura that made them ‘batteries’ for spiritual telegraphy.” From its rise in the late 1840s with figures like Brittan, Spiritualism reached its peak of influence in the 1850s and early 1860s. Green wrote prolifically for Brittan’s various publications throughout the period, her subjects ranging from accounts of clairvoyant, magnetic healing to lessons for young people in botany. “By 1860, the year when a large Spiritualist convention was held in Providence,” writes Green’s biographer, “Green was advertising her services in Rhode Island as a healing medium, one of two in the state. Long known for its tolerance of unconventional ideas, Providence had been in the forefront in welcoming Spiritualism.”<sup>273</sup>

While Frances Green lived with Samuel Brittan, miners in California discovered gold and settlers poured across the continent for riches in the Sierras and on the Pacific. In the six years after the United States acquired the territory, almost 300,000 people migrated to California, the vast majority of them young men. Frances arrived in San Francisco a few months after Fort

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid. 92-101. See Green’s biography of the healer-clairvoyant, Samantha Mettle: Frances Green, *Biography of Mrs. Samantha Mettler, the Clairvoyant; Being A History of Spiritual Development and Containing an Account of the Wonderful Cures Performed Through Her Agency*, New York: The Harmonial Association, 1853; Green & Congdon, *Analytical Class-Book of Botany, Designed for Academies and Private Students, in Two Parts*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1855.

Sumter and Bull Run, where she wrote for the award-winning *Hesperian* and the *Pacific Monthly*. Frances regularly lectured on her “prophetic view of the power and destiny of California,” at churches and reading groups throughout her years in the West, and became famous for channeling the spirit of Union Colonel E. D. Baker, killed at Ball’s Bluff, Virginia in October 1861. Green claimed that Colonel Baker’s spirit communicated a funeral oration he wished her to deliver, in which he became the “first prominent Pacific Coast politician to advocate emancipation. He called for Americans to abolish slavery and ‘reassert your *own* freedom.’” Shortly after delivering the funeral oration, Frances married William McDougall, a Scottish Ohioan, former California state representative, and wealthy local miner. For the remainder of her days, Fanny McDougall enjoyed a modest lifestyle and domestic peace while producing a vigorous stream of new publications on Spiritualism, mediumship, and a mystical liberal vision for what America (and California) could make itself.<sup>274</sup>

France McDougall ended her life and her career in relative isolation and obscurity, though countless Americas felt her influence. Her impact on the Locofoco movement that nourished so much of her early literary career waned as her interest in only loosely-related movements like Spiritualism waxed in the late 1840s. The notable exception remained her contributions to abolitionism and feminism, both of which intersected a great deal with Young Americans and locofocos. As her biography concludes of McDougall, her most important characteristic was her fierce commitment to individualism “and her efforts throughout a lifetime of activism to promote the rights of others. She was passionate, humane, and committed to her principles.” Like many of her Loco-Foco contemporaries, “A number of her close relatives had fought in the Revolution, and she took to heart the ideals of 1776. Whether the issue was

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<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.* 119-147.

slavery, fair treatment of Native Americans, expanding the right to vote in Rhode Island, or the dignity of manual workers, she approached it from the perspective of universal human rights.” She stopped short of advocating for women’s suffrage, largely because she feared involvement in politics would weaken women’s social position of moral supremacy and objectivity. Her feminism is indeed what attracted her (and many other literary women of the day) to Spiritualism, “the only religion of that time giving women full equality.” Women-as-mediums channeling spirits “could evade some of society’s restrictions on their public speech while not challenging these constraints directly.” Every individual, regardless of gender, race, class, or any other distinction, could witness the mysteries of Spiritualism, and the individual knowledgeable of his or her own electric relationship with Nature had no need of clergy, political or religious. She lived a new sort of American’s life, fraternizing equally with both sexes; she was an empowered, individualistic feminist, “widely educated and well read in the political thought of her time...She was a visionary who enthusiastically adopted new causes,” and she was a radical locofoco before the philosophy had a name.<sup>275</sup>

The “existential crisis” inspired in large part by the ideological and activist influence of locofocoism encouraged Young Americans like Frances Whipple to embrace a wide variety of reform causes and exacerbated the transition from Whipple’s own metaphysical Young America I to the pragmatic and progressive Young America II of Stephen Douglas. Historian Yonatan Eyal has contributed greatly to our understanding of the Young America II progressive pragmatists which ascended to prominence during the Polk administration and largely controlled the Democracy throughout the 1850s. As Eyal observes, “Moving away from the agrarian roots of Andrew Jackson’s original coalition, Young America Democrats accepted the market

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<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.* 149-158.



revolution, loosened their interpretations of the Constitution, and adapted reform causes.” Throughout this process, two generations of young locofocos shaped American life in a wide variety of ways, from A. D. Smith and Frances Whipple, who “by trailblazing moves to the American West and subsequent efforts to establish themselves as lawyers, local notables, and then politicians,” to Samuel Tilden and William Allen, locofoco Young Americans active in political life into the 1880s. Young America II politicians and their helping locofoco voters embraced the corporation as a way of organizing private capital and generalized incorporation at the state level, following New York’s example. Those who favored territorial annexations did so largely as reformist, republican attempts to expand liberty globally. As this chapter will argue, locofocoism constantly affected Young America, and *vice versa*, and locofocos played a significant role in the development of the political coalitions that adopted major portions of the Young American reformist program.<sup>276</sup>

Eyal argues that beginning with the Polk administration, the “New Democracy,” Young America II, gradually enlarged their view of the law and the role of the state in society. Adopting and adapting locofocos policies, including general incorporation laws, Young America II embraced the industrial, corporate-capitalist paradigm, cleanly breaking with much of Young America I and Jeffersonian agrarianism. As historian Tony Freyer writes, “In corporate charters lawmakers attempted to reconcile society’s yearning for development and the producer’s and community’s desire for accountability, protection, and local control.” In the South, the transition between Young America I and II could be seen in attempts to modernize the slave economy. As historian John Majewski has argued, “the strong Confederate state was not a radical disjuncture but a natural outgrowth of southern attitudes established during the antebellum period.”

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<sup>276</sup> Eyal, *The Young America Movement*, 1-16, 84-86, 90.

Modernizing southern Democrats used the turbulent 1840s and 1850s to cultivate state investment in railroads (more than double the per capita rate of northern states), state direction of and support for agricultural reform, and a willingness to manipulate northern and foreign politics by using the cotton trade as leverage. Over the decades of their movement, Loco-Focos exerted their own influence over the shapes assumed by American political, legal, and cultural institutions not limited to general incorporation, but including extended suffrage, state constitutional reform, territorial expansion, and constant antislavery agitation. The Loco-Focos never knew exactly how their ideas and activism would affect the world or what politicians they would empower and enable in the process, but they remained hopeful in the face of constant progress in virtually all aspects of American life. Practically all Young Americans believed “that a critical juncture in world affairs was at hand, that 1848 represented an apocalyptic clash between democracy and aristocracy,” in the United States and Europe alike. Pro-filibuster locofocos and Young Americans “geared for battle alongside their European counterparts,” and pushed for the annexation of Canada as late as 1852. By the mid-1850s, Free Soilers and Republicans identified as such, leaving “Loco-Foco” bereft of so much of its meaning that those reared in the movement no longer strongly identified with it and young democrats ceased to be educated in the creed. The Loco-Foco Movement died with the last generations of Equal Rights Democrats, their activism and their ideas ca. 1850s-1870s.<sup>277</sup>

### Strange Bedfellows: The Free Soil Coalition & Loco-Democrats, ca. 1848-1852

A correspondent of the *Patriot* advocates a coalition of the Locofocos and Free-soilers *on the Freesoil platform*... It, however, it is a mere *ruse* to convert Free Soil men to *Locofocoism*—to

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid.; Freyer, *Producers Versus Capitalists*, 7, 17-35, 67, 93-97, 144, 202-228, 229-234. See also: Louis Hartz, *Economic Policy and Democratic Thought, Pennsylvania 1776-1860*, Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1948; John Majewski, *Modernizing a Slave Economy: The Economic Vision of the Confederate Nation*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, 1-21, 53-80, 81-107, 108-139.

demolish them by sinking them beneath a flood of Locofocoism...The Wilmot Proviso *will be carried, in the next Congress, unless prevented by Northern Locofocos...Then*, the Whigs will stand on the right side, and be sustained by the people of the North...The Whig party may possibly go to pieces on such a policy; but if it does, good old republicanism goes down with them, and the people will rue the day that permitted such a wreck.

--Letter-to-the Editor, Brattleboro (VT) *Semi-Weekly Eagle*, 10 May 1849<sup>278</sup>

After the election of 1848 and throughout the Union, regular Democrats and Barnburning Free Soilers scrambled to gain and maintain the high ground in various inter-election contests in the newly-constituted state legislatures. Democrats and Free Soilers quarreled over seating representatives in the Ohio state House, resulting in a protracted period of disorganization in the chamber and “anarchy” in the state. Ohio Whigs looked on the attempts of leading Free Soilers and Democrats to heal their wounds with a mix of political fear and principled disgust. “While Locofocoism...here in Ohio has been trying to consummate an unnatural connection with a portion of the Free Soil party,” the Columbus *Ohio State Journal* editorialized, “it has in other States openly repudiated every vestige of a relationship with it.” Nevertheless, the *State Journal* chastised the Free Soil Party for “rapidly losing its identity and sinking into the arms of Locofocoism,” and for allowing political concerns to “become stronger than that of principle.” In fact, “The merger of the Free and Locofoco Democracies into one mass is a process so natural” that any thinking man might have predicted it. The *State Journal* believed that locofoco Democrats only established the Free Soil Party to fulfill “dreams of ambition...in the hope to destroy and dissolve old organizations, and to build up a new party with themselves the recognized head of its movement and lords of its ascendant.” Just as the Equal Rights Party once dissolved into “Buffalo” reunionists and “Rump” separatists before the ultimate re-merger with

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<sup>278</sup> Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “Position of Parties,” 10 May 1849.

Tammany, Free Soilers jockeyed for position with Hunker Democrats within a reunifying Democratic Party. Whigs looked on in terror at the disarray in state capitols like Columbus.<sup>279</sup>

Similar divisions plagued New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Vermont. Regular Democrats in New Hampshire slandered the Free Soilers “calling them ‘a miserable faction,’ ‘nigger party,’ ‘nigger whigs,’ &c. &c.,” poisoning political wells as time progressed and politicians wondered what to do with New Mexico, a conquered territory as large as New England. Other Whigs carefully noted how few Democrats actually embraced Free Soil while they spoke about the need to once again coalesce with the Barnburners and Free Soilers. In August 1849, the Brattleboro, Vermont *Semi-weekly Eagle* reported that Rhode Island Democrats and Free Soilers joined forces to reelect B. B. Thurston to Congress though he was “an out and out Polk and Texas advocate, a zealous supporter of the Mexican war, and took the stump last Fall in favor of Cass and Butler, and ‘diffusion of slavery,’” Levi Slamm’s primary argument in favor of annexation. Dixon, the Whig candidate, “has been a consistent opponent of slavery from his boyhood up, but the self-trumpeted champions of freedom prefer his pro-slavery locofoco competitor.” Barnburner Free Soilers everywhere seemed ready and willing to abandon “free soil” if it meant fulfilling their desires to become stronger party leaders in the Democracy. The Van Burenties played a great “Double Game” on northern Whigs, Liberty men, and genuinely “free soil” Free Soilers. “The game of coalition of late attempted in the Northern States was cooked up *in Washington*, by the locofoco leaders” the *Semi-weekly Eagle* argued,

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<sup>279</sup> Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, “The House—The Locofocos reject the Peace Proposition of the Free Soil Members,” 9 December 1848; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, “The Locofoco Olive Branches,” 13 January 1849; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, “Public Printing,” 13 January 1849; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, “The Consistency of Locofoco Free Soilism,” 17 February 1849; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, “A Free Soiler Doubting the Purity of Some of his Party Leaders,” 3 March 1849; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, “Information Wanted” 25 April 1849; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, 12 March 1849; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, “Political Progressives,” 11 July 1849; New York *Weekly Herald*, “The Free Soil, or Anti-Slavery, Celebration in Cleveland,” 21 July 1849; Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, “The Coalition---Doubts of its perpetuity---Refusal of the Ohio Democracy to fraternize---Locofocoism dividing against itself,” 21 August 1849.

“and is but a part of the plan cunningly devised to overturn the present administration and bring the locofocos into power again...The *whole* plan is, to form SLAVOCRATIC COALITIONS in the South and pretended FREE SOIL ONES in the North—and *both* to operate against the administration.” Southern slaveholding aristocrats primarily perpetrated the conspiracy, and northern locofocos were their willing (though often unwitting) tools to crush the Whigs out of existence. The Whig proclivity to pronounce every single member of the Democratic Party a “locofoco” is partly explained by the politics of slander, partly by the widespread theory that proslavery wire-pullers manipulated northern Democrats. For their part, the eight new Free Soil representatives joined the newly-minted Senator from Ohio, Salmon Chase and John P. Hale, to form a small, though committed Free Soil delegation to the 31<sup>st</sup> US Congress.<sup>280</sup>

Despite his proud pronouncement at the Free Soil National Convention in Buffalo that the “National Democratic party was dissolved,” John Van Buren and his father’s corps of New York Barnburners felt themselves sufficiently bribed by joint nominations with Democrats to unify the state party. “After fifteen months of saintly bluster about ‘free soil,’ and the alarming encroachments of the Slave Power,” the *Semi-weekly Eagle* commented, the Van Burens, Preston King, and the other Barnburner chieftains “abandoned the Buffalo Platform...and returned to the embrace of old-fashioned Hunkerism!” The closure of politicized, partisan battles in New York, from the Anti-Rent War and 1846 constitutional convention to the Free Soil secession, and the

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<sup>280</sup> Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “Interesting Reminiscence,” 6 November 1848; Keene [NH] *Sentinel*, “For the New-Hampshire Sentinel,” 1 March 1849; Keene [NH] *Sentinel*, “Printed Votes—The Election,” 1 March 1849; Washington [PA] *Reporter*, “For the Reporter,” 25 April 1849; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “[Untitled]” 18 June 1849; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “Locofocoism and Slavery—Queries for Free Soil Whigs,” 30 July 1849; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “[Untitled]” 30 July 1849; Washington [DC] *Republic*, “Dissolution of the Locofoco Party,” 2 August 1849; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “[Untitled]” 20 August 1849; Washington [PA] *Reporter*, “[Untitled]” 26 December 1849; Washington [PA] *Reporter*, “Col. Benton,” 26 December 1849; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “The Double Game,” 25 June 1849; Columbus [OH] *Ohio State Journal*, “The Repeal of the Black Laws---Mr. Smith of Brown, and others,” 17 March 1849; Dubin, *American Congressional Elections*, 145-156.

triumph of partisan unity and compromise empowered scheming, power-hungry politicians and office-seeking sycophants. From Van Buren at the top to Marcus Morton and Levi Slamm, “They mounted ‘Free Soil’ the hobby-horse, not from any love they bore it, but simply as a beast of burden...But the game is now up.” The Salem, Massachusetts *Gazette* expressed the Whig interpretation of events in more humorous terms, reporting a fictional missing person’s report:

The whole affair came to light this morning. She [Miss No-Party Liberty Barnburner Free Soil] was seen to enter Lyceum Hall in company with her seducer, [Mr. Hunker Locofoco.] Since that time she has not been seen. Her friends entertain fears that she has been made way with, as the gentleman does not bear the best of characters in this respect, having before disposed of several young ladies in the same way without fulfilling his promise.” It is to be hoped she is still living, but it is hardly probable.

The *Springfield Republican* argued that this process of corruption was never clearer than in the Texas controversy, “when such men as Silas Wright, Martin Van Buren, Marcus Morton, the Sedgwicks, and John Mills and hundreds and thousands like them at the North, who were conscientiously opposed to the admission of that territory, but yet voted for its admission, to the end that their party might triumph, and the Whigs be defeated.”<sup>281</sup>

The desire for partisan reunion, however, only temporarily masked more deeply-rooted ideological differences remaining between the sections. As historian Michael Holt has argued, “those divisions widened markedly” during the early Taylor-Fillmore administration, “and increasingly threatened the Union.” By 1850, the increasingly populated western territories clamored for territorial organizations and statehood for California. In his 1850 annual address, President Taylor suggested that Congress divide the territory into two immediately admitted states, California and New Mexico, allowing the residents to handle the slavery issue as they

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<sup>281</sup> Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “Old Issues are Settled,” 6 September 1849; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “The End of Free Soilism in New York,” 20 September 1849; Salem [MA] *Salem Gazette*, “ABDUCTION! CLANDESTINE ELOPEMENT! SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE! GREAT EXCITEMENT! INFORMATION WANTED!” 6 November 1849; Washington [PA] *Reporter*, “The Necessity of an Efficient Whig Organization,” 8 August 1849; Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “North & South—The Position of Parties,” 9 August 1849. See also Keene [NH] *Sentinel*, “For the New Hampshire Sentinel,” 1 March 1849

will. Taylor hoped to avoid the explosive slavery issue by speedily bypassing any national debate on the subject. Free Soilers and northern Whigs bristled at the president's hurried dumping of the Wilmot Proviso while incumbent, non-Free Soil northern Democratic Senators Lewis Cass, Stephen Douglas, Jesse Bright, Daniel Sturgeon, and Daniel Dickinson, New York's Hunker chieftain, championed popular sovereignty throughout the territorial debate. Southern Democrats, for their part, fought Taylor's proposal and both factions of northern Democrats over the territories, arguing that any admission of new free states, whether by popular sovereignty or the Wilmot Proviso, threatened the balance of the Senate and the future security of slavery. The force of southern rhetoric pushed southern Whigs toward more hardline sectionalism while the influence of Free Soil votes strengthened northern Whigs' resolve in favor of the Wilmot Proviso. The increasingly difficult political impasse reached a turning point, however, with President Taylor's 1850 Independence Day speech at the Washington Monument. In an attempt to assuage himself of the taxing heat, Taylor ate several massive bowls of cherries and milk, contracted gastroenteritis, and died on 9 July. As Michael Holt comments, "No event was more important in securing passage of the Compromise of 1850." The combination of a new president more willing to modify standing executive plans for the territories and the failure of Clay's compromise "omnibus" bill opened a political path for passing the elements of compromise without the spirit; ideology effectively excised from the politics surrounding the territories. Throughout the late Summer and early Fall of 1850, both northern and southern forces for compromise in Congress passed a series of bills designed to put Clay's compromise measures into effect while allowing the sectional wings of each party to either abstain or vote against them without harming the fates of the particular bills. President Fillmore eagerly signed each measure, declaring the intractable, insoluble crisis finally settled. The "Compromise of 1850" established

a smaller Texas boundary than rival plans for one large slaveholding state, organized a popular sovereignty territorial government for New Mexico and Utah, passed the soon-hated Fugitive Slave Law, abolished the slave trade in Washington, D.C., and admitted California as a free state, each bill maintained by large numbers of abstentions among northerners and southerners responsive to the Free Soil and Calhounite critiques of Clay's maneuvering. The politics of compromise ruled the day, but sectional tensions never disappeared.<sup>282</sup>

As Free Soilers and Democrats, Barnburners and Hunkers all looked to the upcoming election of 1852, Jacksonians of all stripes lacked a clear national chieftain. In this political and cultural vacuum, locofocos and regular Democrats searched for suitable candidates to bear their respective standards. Many Free Soilers and Barnburners looked once again to Thomas Hart Benton in Missouri, long associated with the locofoco wing, the Dorrites, and Free Soil. The Richmond *Enquirer* damned Benton for his Free Soilism and his lifetime of courting rowdiness and locofocoism. According to the *Enquirer*, "The lowest and most abjectly ignorant and degraded of the Irish and German populations, together with the rogues and rowdies, abolitionists and barnburners...with some half a score of Virginians and Kentuckians, who are satisfied to be distinguished as the leaders of a faction...comprise the miserable *subjects* known here as Benton's friends." Other Barnburners and Free Soilers looked again to John P. Hale of New Hampshire, who was known to have been "originally a Locofoco of very marked character, and always an Abolitionist." Some even attempted to once again revive the Dorr controversy, as

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<sup>282</sup> Holt, *Fate of Their Country*, 50-91.



the former governor, once freed from prison, refused to take the required oath of allegiance and remained divested of his civil rights.<sup>283</sup>

The symbol of Thomas W. Dorr was an important component in the reunion of regular and Barnburning Democrats from 1848-1852. Dorr was so important that Franklin Pierce's very first campaign event was a visit to the former governor's private residence in Providence. Pierce was a firm supporter of Dorr's cause in Rhode Island while himself leading the Democratic Party in New Hampshire. Aghast at the prospect of a renewed Dorr War, the Whig press condemned the symbolic visit, demanding of locofocos and Democrats, "Why did they not nominate Dorr himself?...There are enough returned filibusters, if Dorr would not do, to fill the station. Why did not the Convention select a traitor or a filibuster, who has risked something in his cause?" "Pierce is thus incontinently unmasked as the Dorr and filibuster candidate," the *Ohio State Journal* concluded, "His greatest merit--his most exalted title to the gratitude of the country, is to have called to see Dorr." The Montgomery *Daily Alabama Journal* reminded readers of Dorr's lifelong abolitionism, and frantically asked "What in the world are Pierce and Dorr concocting? Is Dorr to be his Secretary of State?" More moderate Whigs, themselves conscious of the need to attract Barnburners and Free Soilers to their own attempts at coalition-building, treated Dorr much more mildly. A letter-to-the-editor excused Dorr for despising "the British Charter under which the people of Rhode Island lived, and which deprived the poor man and foreigner from

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<sup>283</sup> St. Louis [MS] *Daily Missouri Republican*, "The Locofoco Quarrel in Missouri," 20 June 1849; Richmond [VA] *Enquirer*, "Benton and His Prospects," 28 December 1849; Montgomery [AL], [Untitled], 24 April 1850. Sympathies for Benton outlasted Pierce's own election: St. Louis [MO] *Daily Missouri Republican*, "Locofoco Jollification," 12 January 1853; "Locofoco Troubles," 26 January 1853; "Spirit of the Locofoco Press," 25 April 1853; "Locofoco Troubles," 8 October 1853; Boston [MA] *Daily Atlas*, "The Missouri Election," 8 August 1854, "The Next House of Representatives," 4 August 1856.

voting.” The anti-Dorr *Ohio State Journal* shot back that “Mr. Pierce’s visit to that prince of humbugs, *Thos. W. Dorr*,” illustrated that “Locofocoism in Ohio has a pretty mouthpiece!”<sup>284</sup>

While Whigs scrambled to prevent a reunion of the Democracy, Democrats throughout the North celebrated a revival of party unity after the Compromise of 1850, though not all factions interacted pacifically. In Massachusetts, the state Democratic Party divided into the Hallett/Cushing group loyal to the national party and its southern influence, and the Rantoul/Morton Free Soilers bitterly opposed to the Fugitive Slave Act and advocating support for Louis Kossuth. Nationwide, however, anti-agitation spirits prevailed and compromise ruled the conversation. Historians always looking forward to the eruption of partisan dissent over the Kansas-Nebraska Act “have generally pooh-poohed popular sovereignty as a humbug, a fraud, a hoax,” historian Michael Morrison explains, “Yet to dismiss the concept and the values it embraced as bankrupt is...to assume in effect the position of either a free-soiler or a fire-eater.” “Locofoco” became a catch-all phrase for Democrats and Free Soilers because locofocos compartmentalized their political activities from their wider views of ethics, political economy, and history. Many accepted popular sovereignty not as an excuse, but a genuine compromise over a single facet of their political worldviews.<sup>285</sup>

The 1852 Tammany Hall Independence Day celebration boasted letters of support for Pierce from the full cast of Democratic leadership, including the Barnburners excluded during

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<sup>284</sup> Brattleboro [VT] *Semi-weekly Eagle*, “Governor Dorr,” 30 July 1849; Baltimore [MD], *Sun*, “Gen. Pierce in Providence,” 12 June 1852; Amherst [NH], *Farmer’s Cabinet*, “Gen. Pierce,” 17 June 1852; Columbus [OH], *Ohio State Journal*, “A Glorious and Noble Democratic Leader,” 22 June 1852; Columbus [OH], *Ohio Statesman*, “A Glorious and Noble Democratic Leader,” 22 June 1852; Montgomery [AL], *Daily Alabama Journal*, “Dorr and Pierce,” 25 June 1852; Columbus [OH], [Untitled], 13 July 1852. See also: Columbus [OH] *Daily Ohio Statesman*, “Gov. Dorr,” 26 November 1852. For a loco-Dorrite history of Abby Lord’s Dorr Liberation Society and their consistent attempts to restore Dorr to his full civil rights, see Francis Treadwell, *The Conspiracy to Defeat the Liberation of Gov. Dorr; or the Hunkers and Algerines Identified, and Their Policy Unveiled; to Which is Added, A Report of the Case ex parte Dorr*, New York: John Windt, 1845.

<sup>285</sup> Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 121-122.

the Polk administration and ostracized during the Free Soil conflict. A letter from Martin Van Buren expressed the former President's faith in Pierce's ability to represent Jeffersonian principles in the White House. The letter from Thomas Dorr expressed concern for "the preservation of the national Union and of the blessings of liberty," which he believed depended upon cordial relations among Democrats. Dorr again urged restraint in the face of resistance from Southern Democrats, and he advised peaceful coalition of all Democrats behind General Pierce. In a sharp example of ironic juxtaposition, Dorr's letter was followed by a short statement from John Tyler, similarly advising Democrats to unite like "the tribes of Israel, to do battle as of yore against consolidation, and nationality, in the name and on behalf of a great confederacy, composed of sovereign and independent states." Stephen Douglas and James Buchanan agreed that Democrats once again had the perfect opportunity to rally behind a new Young Hickory, smash the Whiggery, and reap the rewards of office. Southern Whigs saw immense danger in Democratic flirtations with Free Soilers and opportunistic Barnburners. Pierce, Dorr, the Van Burens, Benton, Preston King, David Wilmot--the *Daily Alabama Journal* denounced them all as dishonest in their professions of fealty to states' rights principles. The *Journal* commented that the broad course of the Democratic Party under the influence of locofocoism was to affect the abolitionist vision of the early *Democratic Review*: "that Democracy put forth the progressive principles which would in the end free the slave." "Van Buren, Dorr, Wilmot, &c. believe this," the editor continued, "and they fully know Pierce, and are satisfied that he fully agrees with them in this sentiment."<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Blue, *The Free Soilers*, 225, 228-229; Silbey, *The Shrine of Party*, 118-120, 124-126; Columbus [OH] *Daily Ohio Statesman*, "Tammany Hall Celebration. The Old Wigwam Awake!!!" 14 July 1852; Montgomery [AL] *Daily Alabama Journal*, "Gen. Pierce 'Hates and Deplores Slavery,'" 16 July 1852; "The Pierce and Van Buren Ticket," 21 July 1852; "The Van Burens," 28 July 1852; "The Progressive Democracy," 6 August 1852.

To Whigs, Dorrism represented the reckless disregard for order and established authority permeating the Young America movement, including a vicious and violent abolitionist streak. Pierce's involvement in the Rhode Island controversy remained both a major motivating factor for locofoco involvement in Democratic Party politicking and a significant point of contention between Free Soil Democrats and the Whigs. "Parson" Brownlow of the Knoxville *Whig* denounced Pierce for courting Dorr and the Van Burens while the *Daily Alabama Journal* identified Pierce as "an ancient and warm friend of Dorrism." When the *Washington Union* reported that the regular Democracy now openly accepted Free Soil Barnburners back into the fold and assured the Van Burenites that Pierce would show no factional favoritism in distributing offices, the *Daily Alabama Journal* denounced the deal as bargaining away southerners' rights to Provisoists. Pierce was hardly the choice of southern Democrats, after all, "and was only nominated as a *dernier resort* to prevent the democratic Convention from breaking up in a row, and the distraction and prostration of the party." "The Southern Rights democrats could not get their candidate, Buchanan or Dickinson," the *Journal* explained, "and it was necessary to take an outsider...simply because he was not known and had done nothing." Scott's nomination and the Whig convention, however, "was free from all taint of Freesoilism and fanaticism," leaving a clear choice for southern Democrats.<sup>287</sup>

Southern Democrats, and a sizable majority of American voters, decidedly did not want Scott. Pierce won every southern state except Kentucky and Tennessee, both bastions of Whiggery, and sailed to one of the most impressive victories in presidential history, amassing

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<sup>287</sup> Little Rock [AR] *Arkansas Whig*, "Parson Brownlow Vs. Pierce," 12 August 1852; Montgomery [AL] *Daily Alabama Journal*, "Intervention and Dorrism," 13 August 1852; Montgomery [AL] *Daily Alabama Journal*, "The Pierce Coalition and Bargain with the Freesoilers," 6 October 1852; "How Gen. Scott was Nominated," 15 October 1852. See also: Montgomery [AL] *Daily Alabama Journal*, "The Latest Calumny," 16 October 1852; "The Advertiser, Seward, Van Buren, Wilmot, etc." 25 October 1852; "Pierce, Van Buren & Co." 27 October 1852; [Untitled], 29 October 1852; Richmond [VA] *Enquirer*, "Scott and Seward," 29 October 1852.

almost six times Scott's total of electoral votes though having only a bare majority of the popular vote. The Free Soil Party under the Hale banner, historian Frederick Blue writes, achieved "only a little more than half of its 1848 total vote...primarily due to the permanent return of the Barnburners to the Democratic party," leaving only disgruntled locofoco Young Americans, Whigs and Liberty men continuing to support Hale. Even left with such supposed dregs, Hale polled strongly in Massachusetts (21.8%), Vermont (19.7%), Maine (9.7%) and his home state of New Hampshire (13%), with respectable showings throughout the Old Northwest including 13.6% in Wisconsin and 8.8% in Ohio. Young American Walt Whitman was "one of the few New Yorkers" who remained Free Soil and endorsed Hale. Whitman, now much tempered from his youthful arrogance and democratic hopefulness, scorned the morally bankrupt major parties and their skewed images of America's place in history.<sup>288</sup>

The *American Whig Review*, went to great lengths to certifiably and philosophically embrace democracy and republicanism with vigor equal to the strongest of Equal Rights Democrats and the most radical Young Americans, but the editor chastised Democrats for tilting windmills and inventing the idea of an American aristocracy. No such thing, in fact, existed, and the pretensions of Young Americans to the position of the sole defenders of liberty were obnoxious at best and dishonest fabrications for political gain at worst. The author argued that "Young America," like "locofoco" has become a mere "by-word," simply the moniker for the ruling regime, the current Caesar and his horde of office-holders. If the Young Americans realized the truths of Whig national-republicanism, however, and began thinking of their political rivals as partners in Manifest Destiny, progressive Whigs and progressive Democrats could crush their conservative opponents. "In Young America, year by year, is reposed the action of the

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<sup>288</sup> Blue, *The Free Soilers*, 232-268; Dubin, *Presidential Elections*, 115.

nation,” the editor complained, “It is Young America that is ambitious, aspiring and full of republican ardor.” But young men are tempered with age and wisdom, and by then “the same feelings will be manifested by another generation just arisen to a knowledge of their political privileges, and urged on by an irrepressible enthusiasm to a vague crusade against social evils everywhere, and often clamorous against the ‘inefficiency’ of those who are older than themselves.” The *Review* insisted that all American generations were obligated to cooperate in social and political life, “and it is only in their harmonious fusion that we discover the hope and the safety of republican institutions.” “Whether, therefore, we are Young America, or Middle-Aged America, or Old America,” progressive Whigs embraced the emerging world of industrialism, capitalism, democracy, and looked “forward to a glorious destiny, whose ultimate grandeur we cannot with our imperfect vision realize.” “Republicanism shall prevail over this entire half of the western continent...with our genius constantly manifesting itself,” and with such Young American credentials, “The Locofoco party, then, can put in no claim to republican progression as a principle.”<sup>289</sup>

The *Review* propounded a Manifest Destiny itself rooted in the history of the colonies and an almost mystical interpretation of the role of the frontier in human history, offering Mankind a chance to purify and perfect himself and his world. The colonial Manifest Destiny was, in historian Anders Stephanson’s words, “a whole matrix” describing the role of America in time and space, a *process* through which God’s chosen people could perfect themselves in His chosen country. Such beliefs were elements deeply seeded in the consciousness of innumerable Americans in the turbulent Jacksonian period, informing their responses to the ongoing existential crisis. What remained constant amongst Free Soilers, Whigs, regular Democrats,

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<sup>289</sup> Little Rock [AR] *Arkansas Whig*, “After ‘Democratic’ Principles,” 23 September 1852. See also: Middletown [CN] *Constitution*, “Progress,” 13 October 1852; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 222, 224.

southerners, northerners, westerners, virtually all Americans of every political stripe and affiliation, was a conscious recognition of the historical importance of what they were doing as citizens of the world's foremost democratic republic. Waves of Jacksonians--North, South, Whig, Democrat--embraced individualism, the proliferation of corporations pooling large amounts of capital to solve social and economic problems, and the conquest of time and space with a hopeful optimism that more often than not overwhelmed the voices of more cautious Young Americans like Thomas Cole and William Leggett. The great bulk of politically influential and voting Americans answered the 'existential crisis of Jacksonian America,' with progressive hopefulness, often including 'benevolent' territorial conquests and annexations. As William Appleman Williams has written about the United States, "our idiom has been empire, and so the primary division was and remains between the soft and the hard," a distinction which must be admitted to shift in meaning over time and according to context. The soft imperialist Whig William Seward believed so deeply in American Manifest Destiny that he envisioned the United States stretching across the Pacific to the Philippines and beyond to the coast of East Africa. As a global commercial-industrial superpower, the United States could embrace the entire planet with loving republican arms. Seward's heady visions far antedated America's actual ascension to the position of a global imperial power, but the Loco-Romantic, Young American penchant for expansionism sowed many of the seeds for further acquisitions of territory and foreign policies predicated upon the spread of democracy and republicanism.<sup>290</sup>

Conservative southern Whigs offered a Calhounite critique of the Young America project and its Barnburning, Free Soil political wing. "Ion," a correspondent writing to the Baltimore

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<sup>290</sup> Stephanson, *Manifest Destiny*, 3-27, 29-65; Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America's Place in World History*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2006, 218; William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Present Predicament Along with a Few Thoughts About an Alternative*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980, 30.

*Sun*, cautioned against further territorial extensions that might once again agitate the slavery issue and ignite sectional conflict. In particular, Ion worried about designs to annex the Hawaiian Islands, but Cuba was also in question. The *Daily Alabama Journal* could see no advantage in annexation, believing that new territories would undoubtedly vote as a bloc with the North against southern interests. “Southern institutions will not last ten years,” the *Journal* presciently forewarned, “if the present annexing ideas of locofoco Young America are carried out.” “The Fillibuster spirit is by no means dead,” commented the Trenton, New Jersey *State Gazette*, and locofoco, Young American voices multiplied for the Pierce administration to orchestrate a purchase (or seizure) of Cuba. Filibusters operated in the Canadian rebellions, Mexico, Honduras, Cuba, Nicaragua, Hawaii, and even Ireland, throughout the period, ca. 1830s-1850s. The Patriot and Brother Hunters involved in the attempt to overthrow British Canada, inspired in large part by locofocoism from New York, constituted the first, Young America I wave of filibustering. The second, Young America II filibuster wave consisted primarily of disaffected planters’ sons seeking to extend the power of the planter elites across the geography of the continent and freebooting urban ruffians from northern port cities. As May argues, the freebooting southerners and reckless northerners alike “discredited the process of territorial growth,” and contributed to southern isolation from more temperate northern Democrats of the Young America I stripe.<sup>291</sup>

Locofoco, Barnburning, Free Soiler support for Pierce remained strong through the lame duck period of the Fillmore administration, though many observers held their breath for the first round of impending executive appointments in early 1853 and legislation from the new Congress later that year. What appeared like a wave of Young American consensus behind Pierce thinly

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<sup>291</sup> Montgomery [AL] *Daily Alabama Journal*, “More Freesoil Territory,” 26 May 1853; Trenton [NJ] *State Gazette*, “The Annexation of Cuba,” 6 July 1853; Robert May, *Manifest Destiny’s Underworld*, xi-xvii, 10, 248.



covered deep divisions between the old Leggettian locofoco, Barnburning wing of the party and the conservative, pro-southern Hunker wing. Peace-makers like Marcus Morton in Massachusetts and Preston King, Samuel Tilden, and David Dudley Field in New York resisted both fusion with Whigs and belligerent Barnburner assertions of the Free Soil platform. In New York, the factions were dubbed “The Softs,” John Van Buren’s Barnburning Free Soilers remaining attached to the Democracy purely in the interest of partisan loyalty and the rewards of influence; and “The Hards,” or “National Democrats” who supported Cass in 1848 and identified with southern supporters of low tariffs in exchange for noninterference with slavery in the territories. Once again, the cracks remaining between locofoco and conservative New Yorkers belied perhaps insoluble fissures in the national party.<sup>292</sup>

As early as 5 April 1853, the Boston *Daily Atlas* reported on the coming “Dissolution of the Democratic Party” after “Several of the Locofoco Senators, during the debate in the Senate, on the subject of a railway between the Mississippi and the Pacific” conflicted over the wisdom of the proposition. Democrats clashed about how the railroad might affect relations within the party, many suspicious of a presidential veto. Expansion-hungry, power-friendly, Young America II Democrats bridged the old Barnburner-Hunker factions, rode Pierce’s political waves to prominence during these years and kept the Democratic Party intact. “The party is, we suspect, feline in its vitality,” the *Daily Atlas* commented, and “If anything of an unconstitutional nature could have killed the party, it would have died under Jackson, or...Polk’s Mexican war would have made it as stiff and dead as a door nail.” Despite the threat of partisan conflict over the railroad, Democrats continued to enjoy the electoral successes attending coalition with Free Soilers. The Whig Party collapsed at the national level and state organizations steadily died

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<sup>292</sup> Berger, *The Revolution in the New York Party Systems*, 17-23, 24-31; Trenton [NJ] *State Gazette*, “What the Hard-shells think of Pierce,” 21 September 1853.

away, but their supporters did not. As the *Ohio State Journal* wrote, “When Ohio Locofocoism develops itself the people will reject it. That party had power from 1841 to 1845 in this State. How did they use it? Let the history of the frauds and corruption and venality of that period answer.” With the Whigs to the rescue, Ohio recovered from locofoco misrule, but “Demagogues started new theories and humbugs, and on them they have again rode into power. But they are the men of 1842...They will disgust the people by their course.”<sup>293</sup>

When Stephen Douglas proposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in January 1854, he hoped to resolve the desire for a transcontinental railroad by quickly organizing territorial governments. The bill proposed to repeal the Missouri Compromise and officially enact popular sovereignty in the territories, allowing the voters in Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves the fate of slavery in their state. Horrified by what could well be tantamount to spreading slavery across a previously-free soil continent, locofocos, Free Soil Democrats, and ex-Whigs throughout the North once again looked toward an unlikely coalition of traditional enemies to fight the Slave Power. The earliest organizations were called “Republican Clubs,” proliferating in locofoco, Free Soil strongholds like Connecticut, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan, as well as Vermont and Indiana. Radical Democrats like those circled around Preston King in New York “were the vanguard of their party in the new Republican organization,” and moderate Republicans took great pains to prove that theirs’ “was not the old Whig party with a few Democrats placed up front for window dressing.” From 1854 to 1856, political observers witnessed a mass exodus of locofoco, Barnburner Democrats from the national party based entirely upon the issues of slavery and southern political influence over the national party. The emerging Republican Party was a

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<sup>293</sup> Boston [MA] *Daily Atlas*, “Dissolution of the Democratic Party,” 5 April 1853; Little Rock [AR] *Arkansas Whig*, “The Rustling of the Armor,” 7 April 1853; [Untitled], 14 April 1853; [Connecticut], 14 April 1853; Columbus [OH] *Ohio State Journal*, “The Whig Party of Ohio,” 24 May 1853.

genuine coalition, not a united party pursuing the common interests of its supporters. Former Democrats like William Cullen Bryant forced Republicans away from taking Whiggish stands on economic and financial matters, while their long-established antislavery *bona fides* made the ex-Democrats “the soul of the Republicans.” Between the 34<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> Congresses (1853-1855 and 1855-1857), Democrats and Whigs both lost seats (seventy-six and eighteen, respectively) while the Americans gained fifty-two seats and “Anti-Nebraskans,” “Republicans,” “People’s,” Free Soilers, and “Independent Whigs” accounted for the remaining fifty-six seats.<sup>294</sup>

Gradually but surely, anti-Nebraska Democrats and Whigs joined forces behind the Republican standard. “By the mid-1850s,” Michael Morrison argues, “there was widespread disagreement between parties and between sections over the nature of the threat to republican government.” Moderate or conservative Democrats followed the established line of popular sovereignty in Kansas and Nebraska in accord with “their understanding of the revolutionary heritage.” The newly-minted Republican Party drew upon the exact same bundle of revolutionary, democratic, republican concepts, principles, and preferences to reach “a wholly different conclusion.” In the proslavery South, Whigs and Democrats defended their institutions with similar defenses of republican government, “as much their birthright as that of their antislavery opponents...Southerners, too, saw the sectional conflict as a question of freedom versus slavery.” To Albert G. Brown of Mississippi, the rule of popular sovereignty or free soil would be “the Dorr rule, or the Brigham Young rule,” an “appeal to the masses without law.” Slavery and the territorial issue “sectionalized American politics and resulted in the election of a sectional president. The election of a sectional president produced disunion.” The issue

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<sup>294</sup> Berger, *The Revolution in the New York Party Systems*, 32-42, 43-50, 81; Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1995, 149-185; Dubin, *American Congressional Elections*, 163-174.

remained the only significant *sectional* anomaly in a sea of common revolutionary heritage which ordered Jacksonian politics and enabled economic and territorial expansion. It was an insoluble problem to a great many individuals' and groups' constant existential quests to define themselves and their nation in a rapidly changing world. As Eric Foner has argued about the Republicans, their nomination of Lincoln signaled the preeminence of moderates within the party, and "In a sense, the nationalism which the Republican party embraced during that secession winter was a synthesis of the previous views of the conservatives and radicals, and as usual, this was the ground occupied by the moderates, and their spokesman, Lincoln."<sup>295</sup>

#### Kansas Changes Everything: The Republican Party and the Late Loco-Foco Movement

This man Fremont is no statesman--has no experience in political life--has not the first qualification for this eminent and responsible station--and his nomination has not been made upon any plausible pretext whatever. He is an Engineer by profession--once penetrated with his companions to the Pacific coast, across the Rocky Mountains--is the son-in-law of *Tom Benton*--is a Free Trade Loco-foco, and an avowed Free Soiler... The leading men in the Convention were reckless and unprincipled demagogues, of the Loco-foco school of politics, including the British Free Trade policy, Filibusterism, etc., whose only aim is place and plunder. Their Free-soil principles, outside of their radical purposes, are scarcely skin deep!

--William Gannaway "Parson" Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism* (1856)<sup>296</sup>

Northern Whigs reacted with horror to Stephen Douglas' careless, characteristically Young American rush to organize the Nebraska territory at the cost of the time-honored Missouri Compromise. The Washington, Pennsylvania *Reporter* called the bill "unnecessary, impolitic, and iniquitous," challenging the Democrats to answer "whose wish is it?" Who would benefit from the hurried organization of new territories and states? The *Reporter* answered that "It is the

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<sup>295</sup> Morrison, *Slavery and the American West*, 158-159, 188-190, 202, 276; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 223.

<sup>296</sup> Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism*, 178-179

work and measure of a *locofoco President and party*, for merely selfish political purposes.” Whigs busily searched out the potential to seize upon anti-Nebraska sentiment. “The good work goes bravely on,” the *Reporter* explained, “The note of preparation reaches our ears from all sections of the North and West.” “Vermont, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, New York, and some others of the free States, have held or called Conventions to unite *all* the elements of opposition to the Pro-Slavery Aggressive Party, whose disregard of all compacts and compromises has spread alarm abroad over the country.” Pierce and the “locofoco” Democracy betrayed Equal Rights, Free Soil constituents, and Whigs called on honest Democrats to renounce those party leaders who would tolerate slavery in the territories. Long-time locofoco and Dorrite Franklin Pierce, “who has been faithless to the teachings of a lifetime--one reared almost in the light of the cradle of liberty--the Temple of Freedom,” who had won the sympathies of Free Soilers, sold out the rights of every northerner.<sup>297</sup>

The Nebraska bill irrevocably divided the interests of many locofoco, Free Soiler, Barnburning Democrats and the Young America II Democrats so tolerant of slavery’s expansion. As the Trenton *State Gazette* reported, “In some states this portion of the Democratic party has united with the Whigs, either by adopting the Whig nominations, or by a joint or union ticket, nominated by conventions composed of both Whigs and Democrats, and avowing as their platform hostility to the extension of slavery.” These fusionists agreed to set aside the differences in political economy that divided locofocos from conservatives, and focus on the territorial and slavery questions. “The new organization is styled the ‘Republican Party,’” the *Gazette* wrote, and “With that party, of course, the Free Soilers unite. In some states, again,

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<sup>297</sup> Washington [PA] *Washington Reporter*, “The Nebraska Bill,” 7 June 1854; “To the Presiding Genius of our Sanctum,” 14 June 1854; “Fusing of Parties,” 12 July 1854; Trenton [NJ] *State Gazette*, “The Sun of Austerlitz! Great Whig Victory in Philadelphia! Locofocoism Annihilated!!! The Nebrascals Routed!” 8 June 1854; “Isms,” 8 June 1854.

Democrats, Whigs, and Republicans, act as separate and distinct parties.” The *Gazette* envisioned the new Republican Party making war upon the “Lords of Monopoly and their hangers-on who infested not only the lobbies but every avenue to the legislative halls,” and the editor believed that no one should receive nomination to office “who is not at once an Anti-Nebraska and an Anti-Monopoly man.”<sup>298</sup>

Free Soil Democrats everywhere fled the party for the new Republican Clubs, Conventions, and state parties. In California, “The long threatened split in the Locofoco party...at last widened into a permanent breach, promising the total rout of the party,” Boston’s *Daily Atlas* reported in August 1854. In Wisconsin, Free Soil Democrats joined ex-Whigs behind the Anti-Nebraska, “Republican” banner. In Illinois’ first congressional district, the Democratic Party “broke up into two distinct conventions,” one declaring for Nebraska, and the secessionists passing anti-Nebraska resolutions. In Maine, “the excitement against the Nebraska outrage swept over...like an invincible tornado.” When a brash Abraham Lincoln challenged Stephen Douglas to host simultaneous events in Bloomington, Illinois in the fall of 1854, he “had a large and enthusiastic crowd, and Douglas so beggarly an attendance, that his organs have seen fit to ignore the matter entirely.” In Franklin County, Ohio at the 1855 Republican nominating convention, “Quite a number till last year acted with the Locofoco party, but the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and the course of the leaders on questions of taxation and State policy had driven them off, and they have taken their stand in the Republican ranks.” In Richland, Ohio, pro-Kansas Democrats drove “ten thousands of their sensible men into the Republican ranks.” Whigs constituted the largest group within the new party, but the locofoco, Free Soil

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<sup>298</sup> Trenton [NJ] *State Gazette*, “The State of Parties,” 16 August 1854.

Democrats commanded respect and station amongst Republicans. The fusionist sentiment was so strong that it prompted the *Chicago Journal* to ask, “Is there a Locofoco Party?”<sup>299</sup>

The question was apt, and struck at the heart of the political divisions between Democrats as sectionalism intensified. Martin Van Buren’s once-great Jacksonian coalition crumbled throughout the 1850s under the opposing influences of northern locofocoism and southern proslavery pragmatism. Himself a northerner, Van Buren was often forced to court his core of locofoco, Free Soilers, but whenever politically expedient, he placated southern interests to foster sectional comity and party harmony. Under such conditions, the Democracy could best exert its influence and implement national policy. Throughout the South, however, reformers clustered loosely around Calhoun, Robert Barnwell Rhett, James H. Hammond, George Fitzhugh, and many others gradually, yet sharply, broke with the very same tradition of Jeffersonian republicanism Van Burenite northerners so cherished. As historian Clement Eaton argued, “The defense of slavery led some proslavery advocates to reject Jeffersonian liberalism and the doctrine of majority rule.” Louis Hartz regarded this Fitzhughian defense of slavery the sole great exception to the domination of Lockean liberalism in American intellectual history.<sup>300</sup>

The developing sectional crisis advanced alongside the Kansas-Nebraska and fugitive slave issues, including widespread political violence. The presence of political riots, especially those instigated by proslavery mobs throughout the South, was “a piece of the ongoing process of democratic accommodation, compromise, and uncompromisable tension between groups with

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<sup>299</sup> Boston [MA] *Daily Atlas*, “California,” 25 August 1854; “Political Intelligence,” 25 September 1854; “Political Items,” 3 October 1854; “Political Intelligence,” 10 October 1854; “Milwaukee City Election,” 7 April 1856; “Hon. E. Wilder Farley,” 11 August 1856; St. Louis [MO] *Daily Missouri Republican*, “Is There a Locofoco Party,” 20 October 1854; Trenton [NJ] *State Gazette*, “Political Martial Law,” 10 November 1854; Columbus [OH] *Ohio State Journal*, “Franklin County in the Field,” 29 August 1855; “Richland,” 12 September 1855; William Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, 66.

<sup>300</sup> Clement Eaton, *The Mind of the Old South*, Louisiana State University Press, 1964, 37.

different interests.” Southern authorities largely ignored mob violence directed against abolitionist agitators, and “The South was so slave-committed that it demanded the cessation of white freedom where it touched that issue: petition, speech, press, assemblage, religion, and--in the 1850s--democratic majoritarianism.” This tendency among southern political life to use violence as a means increasingly isolated northern locofocos and Free Soilers, while simultaneously terrifying southerners away from dissent and into fears of being politically and culturally isolated in their own country. Defenders of slavery advanced “commitments to total mastery, and it was accepted because it terrorized to silence almost all public doubts about the peculiar institution that fathered it.” Proslavery southerners observing northern politics rightly felt themselves held with increasingly hostile regard. Isolated and physically surrounded by potential Nat Turners, southerners built a culture of fear and delusion throughout the late antebellum period. “Fear of the Negro,” historian Steven Channing writes, “physical dread, and fear of the consequences of emancipation--would control the course of the state,” in the South. As indicated throughout this dissertation, the political threats to slavery from the North were very real and potentially radical. In turn, “Support for radicalism in South Carolina rose in direct and exaggerated proportion to the apparent growth of abolitionism among the Northern people.” John Brown and his “Secret Six,” succeeded in intensifying sectional paranoia.<sup>301</sup>

Approaching the presidential election of 1856, Democrats attempted to stanch the flow of Young Americans, Free Soilers, and locofocos from the Democracy to the Republican Party by nominating James Buchanan, a well-credentialed candidate with long-term associations with locofocos and Dorrites. In the words of one editor: “We *Polk*-ed them; We *Pierce*-d them; And

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<sup>301</sup> David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998, viii, ix, 7, 16, 21-26, 113-116, 265; Steven Channing, *Crisis of Fear: Secession in South Carolina*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970, 5-6, 20-26, 92-93, 146-147.



now we'll *Buck* them." But Whigs insisted that Buchanan could not and should not be able to win popular support. "He is a woman hater," the *Boston Journal* argued, "a dried up old bachelor, and the ladies can have no sympathy for him. Without their sympathy he cannot be elected." Republicans nominated Colonel John C. Fremont to be "the gallant young leader of the great Republican host." Parson Brownlow denounced Fremont as "the representative of aggression: he is a Filibuster." Democrats like the Van Burens maintained their loyalties to Buchanan and the national party and with their support narrowly defeated Fremont in a largely sectional vote. Had the elder Van Buren "remained faithful to free soil principles," Henry Wilson commented, "he would unquestionably have been one of the foremost men of the Republican Party, if not its accepted leader." John Van Buren lusted after new territories, including Cuba, and supported Democrats in acquiring new land, while the elder Van Buren remained primarily interested in maintaining sectional and intra-party comity. John Bigelow, a long-time locofoco Free Soiler and Leggett's successor at the *Evening Post*, however, joined the Republican Party in 1856 as a campaign director and biographer for John C. Fremont. Fremont and the new Republican-Free Soil coalition dramatically improved upon Van Buren's 1848 results, accumulating victories in locofoco-Free Soil strongholds like Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio as well as sweeping as states from New York eastward. Though Buchanan won both the popular and electoral votes (with 45% and 59% respectively), Fremont's campaign demonstrated the possibility of a Republican electoral victory on the basis of northern votes alone if only Pennsylvania and one other state flipped columns. In 1860, Lincoln delivered the final states necessary for a Republican victory, supported by voters from Frances McDougall in California to William Cullen Bryant in New York.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Trenton [NJ] *State Gazette*, [Untitled], 19 June 1856; Washington [PA] *Reporter*, [Untitled], 2 July 1856;

A steady stream of political and cultural agitations of the slavery issue throughout the late 1850s constantly pushed locofoco, Free Soil Democrats into the Republican coalition. To many, the formation of the Republican Party was “the greatest historical event which has transpired in our country since the formation of the Constitution.” Whig Republicans joined locofocos in reforming what they saw as a corrosive, destructive, dangerous, and aggressive aristocracy: the Slave Power. As the *Ohio State Journal* argued, sectional politics inexorably pushed northerners toward Republicanism and southerners toward the Slave Power-controlled Democracy (with their ever-shrinking host of northern accomplices). “The party in the South which demands the most of the North will be the dominant party in the South,” the *Journal* explained, and “the honest men of the Locofoco party in the North won’t stand with them, and will be forced to quit the party and take position in the Republican ranks.” The *Journal* concluded that “there are but two parties in this country--that which favors liberty, and that which favors slavery.” As Michael Holt has written, “Because of its results, the Kansas-Nebraska Act is arguably the most consequential piece of legislation ever passed by the U.S. Congress.” The northern political reaction to the possible spread of slavery to the territories “devastated Democrats politically” and completely destroyed the Whigs. President Buchanan’s insistence that Congress admit Kansas to statehood under the proslavery Lecompton Constitution, despite the fact that most Kansans clearly did not support the document, violated both Free Soil principles and Douglas’ doctrine of popular sovereignty and the statehood bill died in the House on a sectional vote. The *Dred Scott* decision and John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry made it ever clearer that “There is no middle ground--the oligarchy of the south never had a middle ground; there can be no middle ground

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“Personal Abuse of Fremont,” 20 August 1856; Boston [MA] *Daily Atlas*, “Iowa Leads the Van,” 12 August 1856; [Untitled], 12 January 1857; Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party*, 149, 370, 376; Brownlow, *Americanism Contrasted with Foreignism*, 178-179; Dubin, *Presidential Elections*, 135, 159.

between the extension of slavery and the non-extension of slavery any more than there can be between vice and virtue.”<sup>303</sup>

Southern departures from core principles of Jeffersonian republicanism including the very concept of Natural Rights, much less equal, *universal* rights (values of increasingly militant importance to northerners), fueled the development of what historian William Hoffer has identified as the ‘second American state.’ This “second state was not a physical entity so much as a state of mind, a way that members of Congress began reconceptualizing the powers and limitations of government.” Young America II politicians, writers, activists, and voters joined proslavery southern pragmatists, and interventionist ex-Whig Republicans in reinterpreting government’s role in socio-economic progress. The trend toward support for an active, progressive state continued in the conservative wings of both parties well through the election of moderate ex-Whig Abraham Lincoln and his moderate locofoco, free soil running mate, the former Democrat Hannibal Hamlin. By 1858, lawyers dominated Congress and ideology failed to motivate them so much as the concerns of practical necessity. The ensuing decades of Republican and Democratic sponsorship of land grant colleges, the creation of supervisory and bureaucratic oversight of agriculture, the Freedmen’s Bureau, state standardization of education, and the bureaucratic regulation of commerce gradually entrenched the “second state” in ways never foreseen by loco activists in the 1830s, 40s, and 50s. Their activism and position within the parties, therefore, both contributed to and positively *bound* the growth of the democratic, bureaucratic-corporate “second state.” As of 1860, Locofocos found themselves confronted with a difficult political dilemma. While many once again acquiesced to southern influence and party

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<sup>303</sup> Columbus [OH] *Ohio State Journal*, “The Cry of Alarm from the South---Slavery in Danger,” 2 September 1857; “The Desperation of the Locofoco Party,” 25 November 1857; “The Attempt of the Douglas Men to Support the Administration of James Buchanan,” 23 December 1857; Holt, *The Fate of Their Country*, 92-127.

unity, many others fled the party to join ex-Whigs in agitating the Slave Power, the worst of any remaining monopolies in the United States. South Carolina prepared its secession convention immediately following Lincoln's nomination, fearing an inevitable abolition victory in 1860 and creeping Republican Party organizations increasingly capable of winning poor white votes in the border states. "Secession came to be understood...as the only predictable way to avoid a specific and terrible future: the erosion of white control over the Negro; and ultimately, the destruction of slavery." Southern fear was so deep, "so very vast and frightening that it literally consumed the mass of lesser 'causes' of secession which have inspired historians."<sup>304</sup>

Once secession arrived, locofocos predictably reacted in a variety of ways. Locofoco, Free Soil Democrats like California's John Conness, "educated in the school of Silas Wright and William Leggett," positively joined with Republicans to support antislavery policies within a forcibly-reintegrated Union. The life, legacy, and Democratic career of New York City's wartime mayor, Fernando Wood, however, illustrate a very different path for locofoco Democrats navigating the Civil War. Wood has been remembered primarily as a treasonous, corrupt political machinist, the man who threatened the secession of New York City during the rebellion. As Wood biographer Jerome Mushkat has written, however, Wood is better understood as motivated by "a consistent ideology rooted in Jacksonianism and the equalitarian politics of the Locofocos that generated his values and policies." Wood absorbed William Leggett's writings and embraced locofocoism early in his political career as "both an ideological

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<sup>304</sup> William James Hoffer, *To Enlarge the Machinery of Government: Congressional Debates and the Growth of the American State, 1858-1891*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007, x-xii, 1-7, 12-17, 55, 61-62, 86-90, 117-119, 141, 166-167, 171, 197-203; Channing, *Crisis of Fear*, 237, 289. See also: William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion, Vol. I: Secessionists at Bay, 1776-1854*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990; and *The Road to Disunion, Vol. II: Secessionists Triumphant, 1854-1861*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. See also: Jeffrey Rogers Hummel, *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men: A History of the American Civil War*, Chicago: Open Court, 1996; Richard Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

imperative and a useful political expedient.” The Panic of 1837 and the ensuing flour riots prompted Wood to fight for locofoco policies and joint nominations with the Equal Rights Party while a member of the Tammany Young Men’s General Committee. “Everything about his relationship with Locofocoism was critical in shaping his subsequent career,” Mushkat contends, including his support for Calhoun and Polk in 1844. “To the Calhoun people, Wood posed as a trusty ally, attended secret strategy sessions, and offered advice about how to approach potential delegates,” but the eager young New York politician double-crossed his southern friends. “Wood secretly corresponded with Van Buren and sold them out,” leading the Van Burens to despise him as well. He stayed neutral in the Hunker-Barnburner fracture of 1848 and curried political favor with poor white voters. Wood capitalized on the issue of Irish-American prisoners in Van Dieman’s Land from the Patriot War in Canada, maintained strong support for free trade in the interests of consumers and workers, and opposed emancipation by calling it an attempt on the part of capitalists to lower wages. Wood supported New York City’s secession from the Union in January 1861 to maintain the cotton trade with the Confederacy, continued to oppose black civil rights in the interest of his white constituency, and he supported the Irish Feinians in the 1860s. He was a leader in the “New Departure” Democrats’ renewed emphasis on *laissez-faire* during and after Reconstruction, preparing much of the way in the Democratic Party for the almost-election of Samuel Tilden in 1876 and the presidencies of Grover Cleveland. Wood was never a Barnburner, nor a Free Soiler or Republican, yet he remained always a locofoco.<sup>305</sup>

The later lives and work of Frances Whipple Green McDougall and Abram D. Smith, both Young America I easterners deeply touched by New York locofocoism, illustrate well the

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<sup>305</sup> Philadelphia [PA] *The Press*, “Letter from ‘Occasional,’” 18 January 1864; Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography*, Kent (OH): The Kent State University Press, 1990, vii-viii, 6-22, 41-42, 159, 164, 213.

fate of the movement during the transformative, if depressing, years of war and Reconstruction.

In 1867, McDougall published a long-form mytho-historical poem representing of the growth of liberty and slavery in the United States, culminating in the morally cleansing Civil War and a martyred president. The poem follows the Goddess of Liberty, an eagle that watches over American history. Man, freed from the shackles of feudal history, was free to conquer and remake his world on the frontiers of both time and space. The world Man created for himself in America was almost mystical in its astonishing implications for history: “No wilder tales of magic The Orient ever knew, Than concrete all around us.” McDougall’s vision of American Manifest Destiny included new heights of material prosperity and intellectual enlightenment unlocked by the productive potential of free individuals left free to pursue their goals.

McDougall believed that liberty was given an unprecedented opportunity to flourish in America, but the presence of a Slave-Power aristocracy corrupted free institutions and perverted the constitutional safeguards of Liberty into tools to enrich the aristocracy further. Americans’ willingness to tolerate institutional protections for property in slaves--normally considered an essential element of individual liberty--constituted their greatest passive contribution to the development of the Slave Power. With the appearance of the Liberty, Free Soil, and Republican parties, “the North, though so long hooded, Could NOT be made a slave...And on the People’s naked eyes | Fell Truth’s most potent ray.” As conscientious northerners rid themselves of politicians without principles, the goddess of Liberty cultivated Lincoln for the abolition war from the first of his days, guiding his heart and mind toward righteousness, and “With muscle strong, and spirit free, Thus grew the MAN OF DESTINY.” Lincoln himself was the ultimate of human sacrifices in the cause of “Liberty for All Mankind.” With his death, “The World wept, and the Nations | Came forth, like friends, to mourn.”<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> Frances McDougall, “The Genius of American Liberty,” 1-30.

Frances McDougall's mytho-history concludes with a grand prognostication about American destiny in world history, a triumphant and truly revolutionary republic exercising the kind of influence that could transform the entire planet and species. Abolition provided history's greatest example of a revolution for liberty, a titanic, freedom-expanding event which made "The inmost heavens burst open | With Freedom's quenchless fires, As the multitude of Angels | Smote the responsive lyres: 'The human step is forward; Hand, heart, and soul are free! Lead on the happy Age | To higher Liberty!'" The angels' herald of the age of human liberty rang throughout the world, "And Heavens and Earths together sang, 'To higher Liberty!'" With her work completed and her colonies of human freedom successfully defended from the Serpent, the Eagle goddess of Liberty returned to the skies. "ONE BROTHERHOOD OF NATIONS," she left "To Earth's remotest shore! Her strength still grasping truer Right, Her deep eye shedding purer light, Forever, ever more!" Frances McDougall had good reason to be hopeful. The world around her was one in which time and space had been conquered by pulling energy from the air and one in which electricity could reanimate dead tissues. She had communicated with spirits herself, after all. Mankind was poised to unshackle himself and make his world anew.<sup>307</sup>

Abram D. Smith shared Frances McDougall's almost messianic vision of America's place in history and the role of abolition within the United States' Manifest Destiny. When the attempt at Canadian rebellion promptly dissolved, Smith returned to a relatively obscure life in Democratic politics and practicing law in Cleveland. Smith joined the County Anti-Slavery Society and became a trustee for the Cleveland Female Seminary, "a private school for young ladies." His locofoco speeches drew crowds "the largest ever convened in Cleveland," and solidified his lifelong commitments to the New York philosophy. Smith moved to Wisconsin in

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid. 29-30.

the early 1840s, where he became a justice of the state Supreme Court and was even discussed as a possible vice presidential candidate for the election of 1860. During the war, the administration appointed Smith as a tax agent in the South Carolina Sea Islands and he worked to improve the lives of Freedmen. He was emblematic of “a mindset now lost; his career helps us to add another fracture line to the antebellum debate over slavery that splintered the Democratic Party, even as States’ Rights concerns still made it possible for some, including Smith, to take the final step of becoming a Lincoln Republican.”<sup>308</sup>

Smith’s most valuable contribution to both abolition and the Republican Party was his decision in *Ableman v. Booth* (1854), which recognized a state’s right to nullify unconstitutional legislation such as the Fugitive Slave Act. The Smiths moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1842, where Abram immediately practiced law and organized with local Loco-Foco leaders. Smith, styled “Governor of the People,” gave expansionist speeches laced with visions of American Manifest Destiny. His agitation for expansion and consistent opposition to slavery placed him squarely in opposition to the “Hunkers” of southwestern Wisconsin. He answered his critics with consistent support for reform, including full property rights for women and Free Soilism. When a fugitive slave case made its way to Smith’s bench on the state Supreme Court, he made a decision “that made American legal history.” Wisconsin, a firmly anti-Compromise of 1850 state, “deeply detested” the Fugitive Slave Act and “Some particularly militant factions were spurred to defy the Fugitive Slave Act by whatever means necessary.” Though Franklin Pierce won Wisconsin in 1852, the explosion of the Kansas-Nebraska Act guaranteed its transition to the Republican columns in 1856. In this context, Joshua Glover was arrested as a fugitive slave on 10 March, 1854. Glover was said to have escaped from the Missouri slave owner Benammi

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<sup>308</sup> Dunley, *A. D. Smith*, 15-16, 23-26, 48-51, 54-57.



Garland in 1852 and resettled in Racine, Wisconsin until arrested by federal marshals. The Marshals captured and beat Glover until locals alerted abolitionist Sherman Booth of the events. Booth “was an old Barnburner from the ultra liberal wing of the Democratic Party, and a member of the Liberty Party.” He was educated at Yale, where he taught the *Amistad* rebels to speak English. Booth, now publisher of the Milwaukee *Daily Free Democrat*, led a crowd of 5,000 in an assault on the city jail holding Joshua Glover on the 13 March, 1854 in which they broke into the jail, freed the slave, and paraded their victory throughout the city. Officials charged Booth with aiding and abetting a fugitive slave.<sup>309</sup>

Booth’s attorney, Byron Paine, appealed to the court to release his client, claiming that the Fugitive Slave Act violated the rights of Wisconsin by denying due process to citizens charged with violating the act. Smith’s decision of 7 June, 1854 declared in Booth’s favor and effectively nullified the Fugitive Slave Act in the state of Wisconsin. Smith articulated a compact theory of the Union more radical even than Calhoun’s, insistent that federal legislation in violation of a citizens’ equal rights was necessarily null and void. Smith rocketed to stardom within the developing antislavery coalition of northerners, especially as the New York *Evening Post*’s guest of honor at an 1857 public dinner. *Ableman v. Booth*, meanwhile, progressed to the United States Supreme Court where in 1859 Chief Justice Taney and a unanimous court overruled Smith’s claim that a state could infringe on federal authorities. While the Taney court aimed to smash Smith’s invocation of states’ rights to nullify the Fugitive Slave Act, a land scandal rocked Wisconsin state politics and upset the careers of many, including Abram D. Smith. When a director of the La Crosse & Milwaukee Railroad bribed “the governor, Smith’s former law partner, Henry Palmer, the editor of the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Rufus King, and Smith’s

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<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-97, 108-117, 127-130, 140-148.

brother-in-law, Alexander Mitchell, the first president of the Wisconsin Banker's Association" for preferential treatment in granting land, Smith himself "was accused of accepting \$10,000 in railway bonds, a charge he denied." He did indeed accept the bonds in question, but held that he never intended to alter his actions or opinions as a result. "In the end," Smith's biographer writes, "the 1858 Legislature revoked the grant to the La Cross & Milwaukee as the scandal ruined several political careers in the state." While Smith retained much of his antislavery fame, his credibility never recovered. Conservative, pro-Compromise of 1850 Democrats in Wisconsin seized the opportunity of the scandal to oust Smith from the Court, substituting William Pit Lynde in his place, a candidate "well known for his views opposing the decision of the state court and favoring the Dred Scott decree and other proslavery enactments of the federal government."<sup>310</sup>

He was thus rendered "a man without a party." Though the Republican Party still maintained a great deal of warmth for Smith as an antislavery crusader, the scandal-ridden Smith "looked very much like yesterday's man." Though forty Republican editors throughout the state endorsed Smith's nomination on the 1859 ticket, he received only fifteen of sixty-one votes in caucus. After having unsuccessfully pursued both parties' nominations, Smith announced his intention to seek no partisan nominations and (in all likelihood) retire from the court. With the Republican nominations for president in 1860 approaching, however, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* floated his name for the Vice Presidency, so great was his impact in the Free Soil-Republican history of his state. From December 1860 to early 1862, Smith published the *Milwaukee Free Democrat*, which he sold to Sherman Booth during the war. In late 1861, while visiting Washington, Smith co-authored the Direct Tax Act with Senator James Doolittle, a former

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<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* 118-123, 142-146.

Democrat who joined the Republican Party after the repeal of the Missouri Compromise in 1856. The act “authorized the federal government to collect war taxes from residents in those states that were in rebellion,” by assessing land taxes. If landowners failed to pay the tax, the national government assumed control “with authority to rent out the property or to subdivide and sell it at auction.” The following year, Smith joined the Direct Tax Commission in the South Carolina Sea Islands. The former President of the Republic of Canada arrived at his post in the conquered islands to a gaggle of northern missionaries there to help steer the Freedmen into virtuous lives of republican liberty and godly citizenship. As Dunley explains, these “Gideonite” missionaries, largely from Boston and Philadelphia, “left their relatively comfortable Northern homes to embark on an unprecedented social experiment in the South, their work financially supported by well-to-do abolitionists and philanthropists.”<sup>311</sup>

In a progressive atmosphere of managed education, development, and training projects, Smith adjudicated disputes relating to the divisions of property and delinquent taxes. The moderate Lincoln administration was deeply troubled by the influence of ex-Democrat, locofoco radicals like Smith within the Republican Party and so “adopted several strategies to control” them. Lincoln preferred to keep some of these more powerful ex-Democrats, like Salmon Chase, under a closer watch, but Lincoln thought it better to use the less powerful, though more radical firebrands like Smith on the front, far away from domestic politics. There Smith could aid the Union war effort and fulfill his own missionary complex with the Freedmen as he once longed to do with the downtrodden Canadian. Smith advocated full citizenship for Freedmen and he delighted in General Sherman’s Special Field Order No. 15 in early 1865, which granted huge tracts of land to freed slaves throughout the South, believing that “the betterment of the freedmen

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<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.* 142-161.

was inherently tied to their ability to own land in the area where they had been born and raised.” He struggled with alcoholism and possible drug use throughout his days in Wisconsin politics and until the end of his forgotten life. “If you catch him before ten, you will find him sober and clear; but then he doesn’t get up till quarter of ten,” a friend of Smith’s intimated, and he was removed from office in early 1864. Though Salmon Chase himself commented that he would “never forget the early services of Judge Smith to the cause of freedom when, to render them, required great courage and genuine manhood,” Smith set sail from South Carolina in 1865 clouded in alcohol and doubt. He died *en route* to New York and was buried on 11 June 1865 in Milwaukee with a remembrance ceremony conducted by the Freemasons of Wisconsin Lodge Number 13.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, 153-155, 159-168, 190-212.

## Conclusions

### Existential Crisis, Generational Change, & the Loco-Foco Movement

Years of the modern! Years of the unperform'd!  
Your horizon rises--I see it parting away for more august dramas;  
I see not America only--I see not only Liberty's nation, but other nations preparing;  
I see tremendous entrances and exits--I see new combinations--I see the solidarity of races;  
I see that force advancing with irresistible power on the world's stage...  
A stupendous Trio, all issuing forth against the idea of caste;  
--What historic denouements are these we so rapidly approach?  
I see men marching and countermarching by swift millions;  
I see the frontiers and boundaries of the old aristocracies broken;  
I see the landmarks of European kings removed;  
I see this day the People beginning their landmarks, (all others give way;)...  
The earth, restive, confronts a new era, perhaps a general divine war...  
Unborn deeds, things soon to be, project their shapes around me;  
This incredible rush and heat--this strange extatic fever of dreams, O years!  
Your dreams, O year, how they penetrate through me! (I know not whether I sleep or wake!)

--Walt Whitman, "Years of the Modern," in *Leaves of Grass*<sup>313</sup>

Smith was the quintessential, thickly-ideological *locofoco*: a fiery radical American, always in motion. He was "in a very American state of lifelong agitation," remaining in one place long enough to become a phenomenon, make a contribution, and move on all but forgotten. The source of Smith's energy, his constant motion and pursuit of new opportunities and causes, was shared by many locofocos, as this and Byrdsall's history can attest. Smith, like his locofoco ilk "abandoned ideas as quickly as he sought new ones, many of which were ill-conceived from the beginning." In the Canada affair, his peripatetic politicking across the Old Northwest, and his haphazard attempt as an early "second state" bureaucrat, Smith was a shaper of frontier cities, "seen by his peers as a doer and an organizer[,] a go-getter no matter where he had to go to get, a hard worker who invested in radical ideas, and a republican dreamer who believed whole-

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<sup>313</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Philadelphia: David McKay, 1900.

heartedly in liberty and equality to free the white working class of banks, African Americans of slavery, Canadians of monarchy and women of ignorance and the inability to own property.”

His conceptualization of liberty and rights knew no boundaries, and encompassed all peoples everywhere. Smith was exactly the sort of young man on whom Leggett commented in his poem “Hope,” the sort of idealist who would forever dash himself to pieces in pursuit of the Good. In his last documented public speech delivered shortly before the war began, 22 March, 1860,

Abram Smith rallied the people of his state to defend their rights during the impending crisis:

There is the only hope. Trust no longer in politicians. If Rome is saved, Romans must rush to the rescue. Fretting, scolding, denunciation will do no good. Action! Action!! Action!!! United, vigorous, determined Action alone will suffice. Arouse, one and all. Act, one and all, and together. Salvation is yet for us...millions of hearts will leap for joy, and all the people will shout AMEN!

Abram Smith drank himself into an early grave as the “second state” joined with corporations to create a new world out of the sectional conflict. The Loco-Foco movement disappeared with men like him, withered away into an Old and Forgotten America, rendered moot by the power of the “second state” and the astonishing economic and technological transformations throughout the later portion of the century.<sup>314</sup>

Locofocoism and locofoco activists both proliferated during the period which was perhaps the most transformative and turbulent in all of world history up to that point. Life for countless hundreds of millions around the globe transformed in dramatic ways during the nineteenth century, especially the period ca. 1820-1890, the lifespan of most of those who identified as “locofocos.” During this period, population and wealth in the Anglo-American world absolutely exploded and drove much of the growth in the rest of the world for the next century. In 1820, the US population was just under ten million, but by 1870 over forty million

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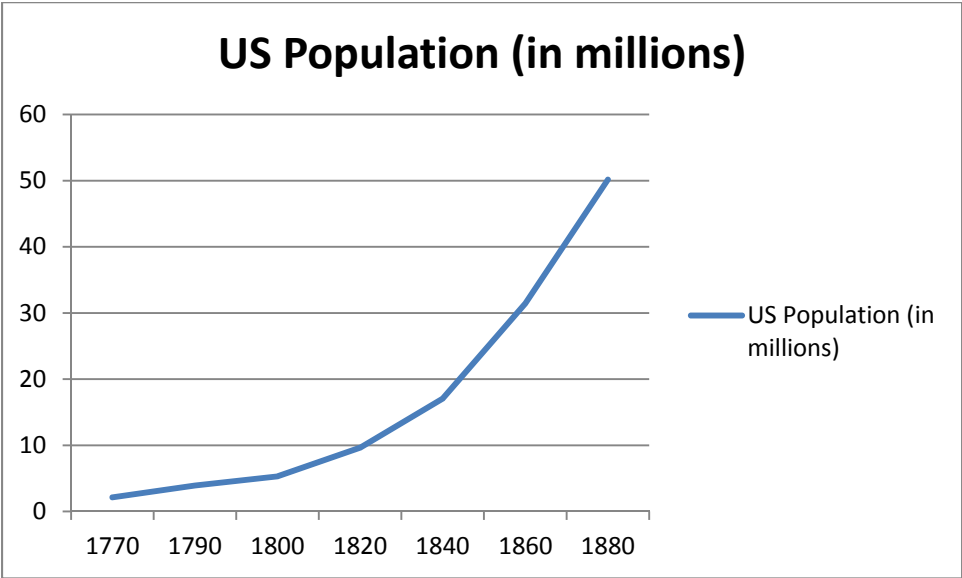
<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-240.

Americans crowded into cities and frontier towns. A mere forty years later, this figure doubled as well. In the period 1820-1870, GDP increased almost *eight times*. Between 1870 and 1913, GDP quintupled and Americans launched themselves into the position of global great power. The annual growth rate from 1820-1870 in the United States was an astonishing 4.2%, rivaled only by the periods 1870-1913 (3.94%) and 1950-1973 (3.93%). In 1820, Americans' share of global wealth was a mere 1.8%, but by the 1870s this figure quintupled to 8.9%. The share of American wealth then doubled once again by 1913 and reached 27.3% in 1950. The ever-eager, ever-*hopeful* (often disastrously so) locofocos looked out upon the increasingly free, increasingly wealthy, increasingly productive, healthy, and educated world with energy and optimism. American prosperity drove global prosperity, helping to lift people everywhere out of stagnant feudal existences chained to the earth with the weight of history. While they fought what they viewed as the most dangerous threats to liberty and prosperity, they rarely abandoned the fight and maintained their hopeful vision of primarily peaceful, voluntary, republican reform limited neither in time nor space.<sup>315</sup>

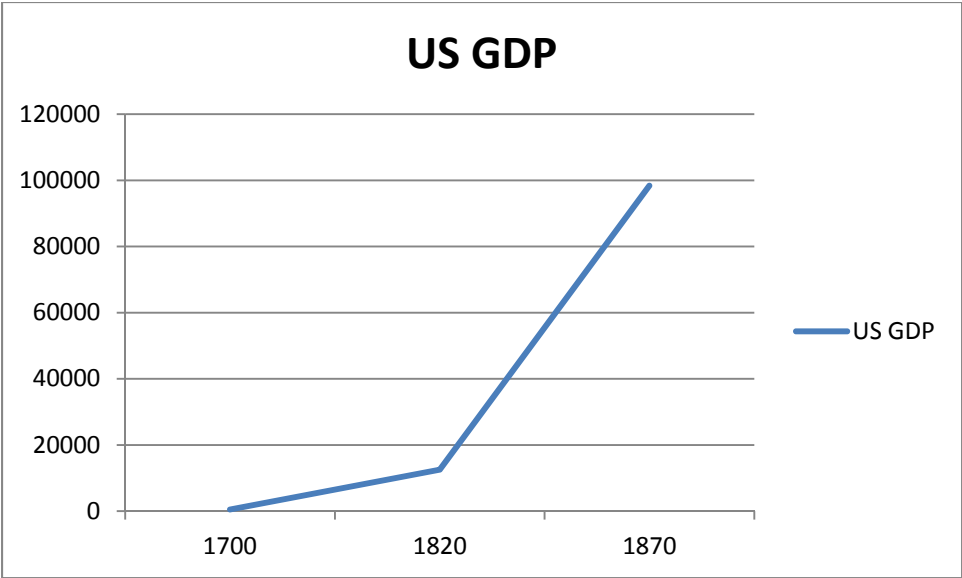
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<sup>315</sup> Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective*, OECD Publications: Paris, 2001, 28, 241, 261-263.

**Table 1: US Population, 1770-1880. (Source: Van Beck Hall, Course Materials Packet)**

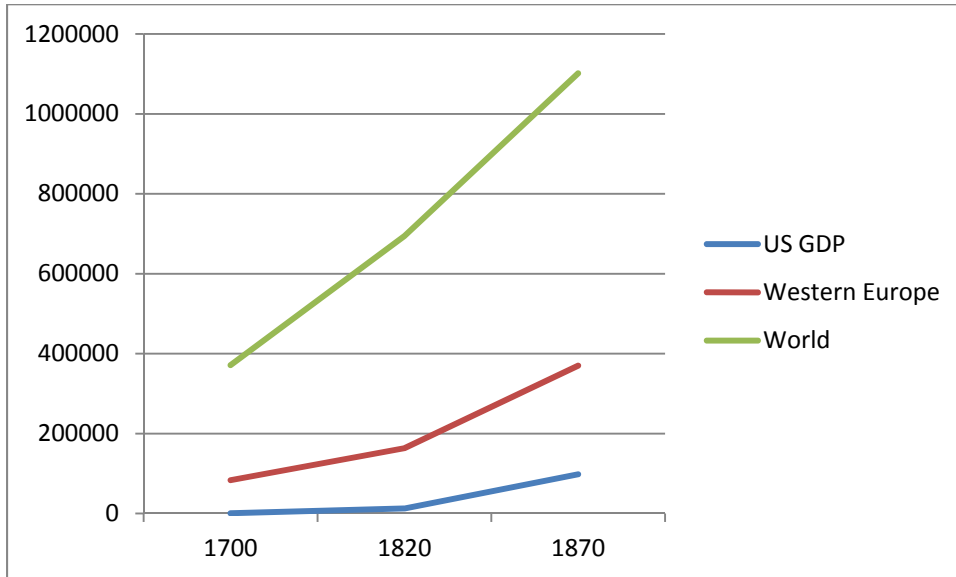


**Table 2: US GDP, 1700-1870. (Source: Maddison, *The World Economy*)**

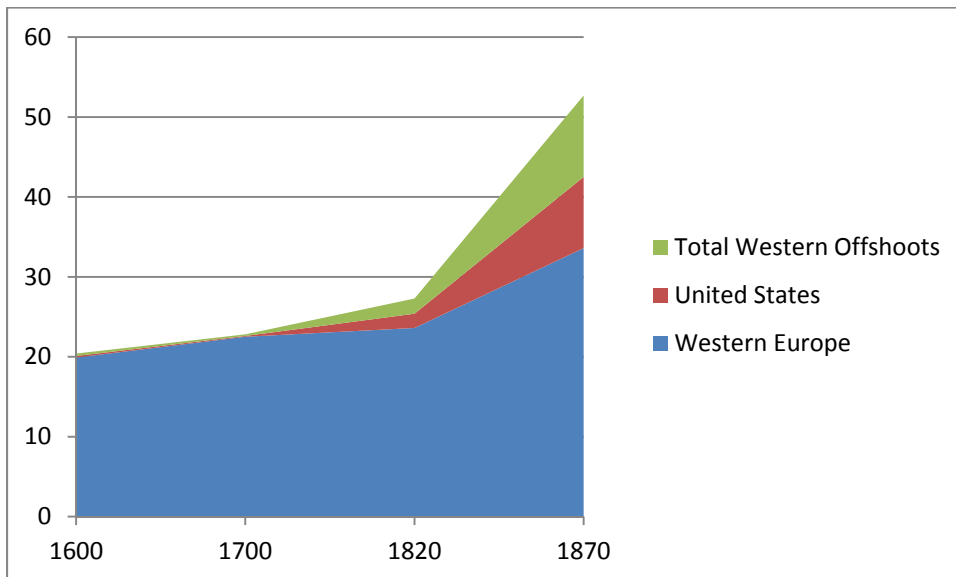




**Table 3: GDP (US, Western Europe, World), 1700-1870. (Source: Maddison, *The World Economy*)**



**Table 4: Share of Global Wealth, 1600-1870 (Source: Maddison, *The World Economy*)**



Few Loco-Focos better represented or helped more to cause the very changes that transformed the world during the nineteenth century than the ideologically-thin Samuel Jones Tilden. Born on 9 February, 1814, Tilden lived until 4 August 1886. His lifetime and career encapsulate much of what Dierdre McCloskey has called the most important question in the

social sciences: Why did wealth increase so rapidly in the nineteenth-century? Through Tilden, and the Loco-Focos, I hope to offer some conclusions in the search for an answer. From his days as a young man studying law at New York University during the 1830s, Democratic Party chieftains including Van Buren and Silas Wright regularly consulted Tilden for political and philosophical wisdom. By the time of his death, many considered him “the greatest political strategist of his time.” The young Tilden read widely and spent his formative days in the loco hotbed of New York City politics. Tilden served on the Tammany Hall Democratic-Republican Young Men’s General Committee and dutifully served the party while pushing the locofoco agenda. In 1844, Tilden pressed Silas Wright to overcome the Democracy’s slight against Van Buren, run for governor, and support Polk’s victory by driving Van Burenites to the polls. Tilden wrote for John L. O’Sullivan’s *Democratic Review* from 1837-1846 and the New York *Evening Post* in 1843, contributing to his reputation as “always the thinker, the coiner of apt expressions and the prophet of a better day.” He followed Van Buren in his Free Soil rebellion of 1848 but remained a dutiful Democrat throughout the remainder of his life. During the campaign of 1860, Tilden watched his ideologically-thick locofoco brethren at the *Evening Post* in horror as they marched gladly toward the destruction of their country. He wrote, “I would not have the responsibility of Bryant and Bigelow for all the wealth in the Subtreasury. If you have your way, civil war will divide this country and you will see blood running like water in the streets of this city.” After the election and secession winter, however, Tilden begrudgingly accepted a certain degree of war to maintain the integrity of the Constitution.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> Alexander Flick, *Samuel Jones Tilden: A Study in Political Sagacity*, Westport (CN): Greenwood Press, 1939, v-vi, 1, 11, 22, 33, 44, 62, 64-5, 72-3, 103-4, 113, 125, 137; Dierdre McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economic Can't Explain the Modern World*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010, 6.

Samuel Tilden's most important political and ideological contributions read as a series of locofoco-inspired reformist goals, pursued through democratic means, with highly compromised, though ostensibly highly successful results. In the New York State Assembly in 1846, Tilden helped end the Anti-Rent War by arguing that feudal tenures could be converted to mortgages. In this way, New York converted renters into landholders and patroons into creditors. He chaired the New York Democratic Party throughout the late 1860s and was elected Governor in 1874. Tilden's greatest achievement as executive was the purge of the Tweed Ring in New York City. Making good on his reformist promises, Tilden's justice department dismantled the infamous graft network and then turned on the lesser-known "Canal Ring." To Tilden, the accomplishment "was something more than a moral revolt--it was a demonstration of the triumph of democracy," the "thin" ideologue's way to successfully reform society. In his own way, Tilden offered a Democratic alternative to the corrupt Republican "second state," an alternative itself rooted in the long histories of locofocoism and its own antecedents. Tilden embraced Cyrus McCormick's "Jeffersonians" reformist group, saying the name "expresses in a single word what the country now needs. *That is a revival of Jeffersonian Democracy*, which for half a century formed the golden era of the reform ideas, systems and practices of Jefferson." In the disputed election of 1876, Young American locofoco and Democrat-turned-Republican David Dudley Field argued before the Election Commission that a decision for Hayes, Field's own choice, would rob the people of their proper nineteenth president. Samuel Tilden never became the nineteenth president, but his Young America I penchant for peaceful, democratic reform carried the day and perhaps averted another civil war. While "Most Americans desired to forget the horrors and errors of the Civil War," they also "wished to oust the party that had taken advantage of its great record and its popularity to lord it over a fallen foe, to pilfer public funds,

to gamble in patronage and to perpetuate its power. They wanted abuses corrected, hard time ended, taxes reduced, and the effectiveness of democracy demonstrated.” William Cullen Bryant and John Bigelow supported and voted for Tilden in 1876 and Field protested the Election Commission’s decision by resigning from the Republican Party and running for Congress as part of the New Departure Democracy. Locofoco reformers like Tilden helped clear much of the institutional and philosophical clutter preventing the kind of economic growth witnessed in the later part of the nineteenth-century, both in his work as a corporate lawyer and tireless fighter against corruption and as a later advisor on matters of corporate law and monetary policy to president Cleveland. “Tilden’s idealism was rooted in realism,” writes biographer Alexander Flick, and “In America’s list of illustrious sons, as time submerges the lesser lights, Tilden will survive in public esteem as one of the great builders of civilization.”<sup>317</sup>

Historians’ attempts to explain the “Big Question” of nineteenth-century economic growth have indicated a number of leading causes, one of which is of particular importance to the history of the Loco-Foco movement. Dierdre McCloskey (2010) and Joel Mokyr (2009) argue that ideas and attitudes toward experimentation, innovation, and change explain the most significant transformations in the past several centuries. Rather than structural, institutional, and materialist explanations of the “Big Question,” McCloskey and Mokyr isolate the Anglo-Dutch (including Britain, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United States) respect for bourgeois cultural values and Enlightenment natural philosophy as the primary causes of the modern world. In Mokyr’s phrasing of the argument, “the beginnings of modern economic growth depended a great deal on what people knew and believed, and how those beliefs affected their economic

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<sup>317</sup> Flick, *Samuel Jones Tilden*, 230, 262, 294-5, 330, 333, 475, 486-9, 534 ; David Quigley, *Second Founding: New York City, Reconstruction, and the Making of American Democracy*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2004; Roy Morris Jr., *Fraud of the Century: Rutherford B. Hayes, Samuel Tilden, and the Stolen Election of 1876*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003; Paul Haworth, *The Hayes-Tilden Election*, Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1906.

behavior.” Mokyr builds upon the work of economists and economic historians like Douglas North, arguing that ideas and cultural values, “*meta-institutions*,” shape other institutions and in turn affected virtually every aspect of daily life. McCloskey places keener emphasis on the generative importance of ideas. Ideas--abstract notions about cause and effect, notions which literally order our lives--“enriched us,” she argues, and “A big change in the common opinion about markets and innovation....caused the Industrial Revolution, and then the modern world.” Neither the exploitation of labor, the unstoppable progressive force of technology, nor religious or economic causes effectively explain the transformation of the pre-modern into the modern world. McCloskey argues that only a change in *particular ideas* about human dignity, virtue, and innovation could cause such immense upheaval. In McCloskey’s rendition, Holland, Britain, and America fostered a centuries-long “Bourgeois Revaluation,” ca. 1600s-1800s, during which the familiar bundle of liberal values became dominant, disempowering the state’s ability to constrain the bourgeois virtues and innovation. Ideas and moral values (like our locofocoism) preceded institutional, structural reflections of those ideas and values (like the democratized corporation, universal citizenship, or antislavery). McCloskey distinguishes between dignity and liberty, stating that “dignity is a sociological factor, liberty an economic one. Dignity concerns the opinion that others have of the shopkeeper. Liberty concerns the laws that constrain him. The society and the economy interact. Yet contrary to a materialist reduction, they are not the same.” Loco-Focos, over the decades of their movement and through their often life-long attachment to their causes and radical communities, constituted an important and overlooked component in this process. Like Tilden, they combined obvious imperfections with spirited pursuits of both dignity *and* liberty for “the common man,” *Homo democraticus*.<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Joel Mokyr, *The Enlightened Economy: An Economic History of Britain, 1700-1850*, New Haven: Yale University

Sean Wilentz has argued that “Counter-Progressive” historians, especially Richard Hofstadter and Lee Benson, could not and did not account for class consciousness in the antebellum period, leaving historians space to synthesize the New Social History and the “Counter-Progressive” critique of economic determinism. Attempts at synthesizing Progressive and Consensus historiographies, however, have lacked the critical history of the Loco-Foco movement. Locofocoism offered its own explanation for the classes, one which Consensus School historians have noted with diligence and clarity: the classes were organized according to individuals’ abilities and desires to exercise political power. Throughout their long history of political machinations and activism, “thick” locofocos gradually lost their identities *as such* in pursuit of related causes, like Fanny Green’s Spiritualism or Abram D. Smith’s states’ rights abolitionism, and a swiftly-transforming world. By the later nineteenth-century, the Loco-Foco movement ceased to exist, dissipated in a complex web of compromised ideas, policy positions, and priorities. In large part as a result of their decades of ideologically-thin thought and activism, locofocos lost their world to the shifting visage of modern industrialism, globalizing political and cultural life, and a never-ending train of opportunities to utilize new wealth and technology to improve the lives of average people from the bottom up. In *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman marveled at the truly democratic revolution taking place in the hearts and minds of people gradually freeing themselves from the limitations of pre-industrial, pre-republican life across the globe:

Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God...  
His daring foot is on land and sea everywhere--he colonizes the Pacific, the achipelagoes;  
With the steam-ship, the electric telegraph, the newspaper, the wholesale engines of war,  
With these, and the world-spreading factories, he interlinks all geography, all lands...  
Are all nations communing? Is there going to be but one heart to the globe?  
Is humanity forming en-masse?--for lo! tyrants tremble, crowns grow dim

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Press, 2009, 1-9; McCloskey, *Bourgeois Dignity*, xi-xiii, 1-19, 245.

Loco-Focos, now bereft of their once-distinct ideological class identities, granted too powerful a start to the “second state,” to do much more than constrain Leviathan’s gradual, though steady development and moderate the growth of American corporate-statism and imperialism--yet to the “Dupes of Hope Forever,” the future appeared brilliant on the horizon. Americans continued their individual quests to define themselves and their country, solving the existential crisis of Jacksonian America, though locofocoism never again commanded the recognition, importance, and relevance it once had.<sup>319</sup>

The Loco-Foco movement *as such* ceased to exist with men and women like Frances Whipple, Abram D. Smith, William Cullen Bryant, Samuel J. Tilden, Walt Whitman, and John Bigelow. Their deaths, scattered throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, marked a full turning in the very process of generational change that birthed their movement when each was young. By the turn of the century, “locofoco” was a word signaling antique curiosity. In the mundane sense, it meant a friction-ignited match. Its usage as a political or philosophical designation, however, speaks to the long-term success of political means in advancing an anti-political theory of society. “Locofoco” virtually disappeared from common usage in the 1870s-1890s, with occasional references to monetary policy dredging up old divides within the New York Democracy. In November 1900, the New York *Journal* urged Democrats to forget old differences and renew the righteous battle against the Republicans: “This civil war has lasted long enough. The time has come for Democrats to get together...Gold Democrats and Silver Democrats, like Locofocos and Barnburners, have become merely antiquarian names. They have no present or future political significance.” In 1905, recalling the Forty-Seventh Congress (1881-1883), former Speaker of the House General J. Warren Keifer commented that the “old animosities” that plagued his speakership “are silent now and the words ‘stalwart’ and

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<sup>319</sup> Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, Philadelphia: David McKay, 1900; Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*, vii-ix, 3-19.

'half breed' are become almost as hazy and in need of definition to the new generation as 'locofoco' and 'know-nothing.'" The Loco-Focos were lumped with the Bucktails, the Anti-Masons, the Free Soilers, Liberty Party, Hardshells, Softshells, Doughfaces, Fire-eaters, the Mugwumps, and the Half-Breeds as oddities of a distant and very different past, one which perhaps still affected the present and future, but decidedly did not define them. Loco-Focos democratized and generalized the corporation, rendered the banking system all but separate from the government, participated in massive territorial annexations for the Republic, and helped to abolish the worst of all monopolies in American life, the ownership of one human being by another; yet, locofocoism died rather quietly, having accomplished much, leaving future generations to fight their own battles for Liberty against Power.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Baltimore, MD *Sun*, "Get Together," 10 November 1900; Philadelphia, PA *Inquirer*, "American Political Parties," 4 June 1900; "Loco-Foco Politicians; How About Them?" 16 January 1906; Dallas, TX *Morning News*, "The Tale of Tammany," 1 November 1896; New Orleans, LA *The Daily Picayune*, "Factional Nicknames: Some of the Products of American Political Contests," 9 August 1896; Grand Forks, ND *Grand Forks Daily Herald*, "When Keifer Was Speaker," 5 December 1905; Macon, GA *Macon Daily Telegraph*, "Caught on the Win," 13 April 1907; Portland, OR *Morning Oregonian*, "Origins of Political Slang Are Diverse," 18 September 1910; Fort Wayne, IN *The Fort Wayne News and Sentinel*, "Questions and Answers," 11 August 1920.



## Appendix

**Figure 1**

Conservative Democrat Candidates, 1835		
<i>For Congress,</i>	Gideon Lee*	
<i>For Senator,</i>	Henry F. Jones	
<i>For Assembly,</i>	Prosper M. Wetmore,	Benjamin Ringgold*
	Charles P. Clinch,	Francis B. Cutting,
	Thomas Herttell,	John I. Morgan,
	George Sharpe,*	Peter A. Cowdrey,
	Ezra S. Conner,*	George Seaman,
	Jesse West.*	

\*Those candidates nominated by Tammany but opposed by the Equal Rights Democrats.

**Figure 2**

Equal Rights Democrat Candidates, 1835		
<i>For Congress,</i>	Charles G. Ferris*	
<i>For Senator,</i>	Henry F. Jones	
<i>For Assembly,</i>	Prosper M. Wetmore,	Job Haskell*
	Charles P. Clinch,	Francis B. Cutting,
	Thomas Herttell,	John I. Morgan,
	John W. Vethake,*	Peter A. Cowdrey,
	Rodney S. Church,*	George Seaman,
	John Windt.*	

\*Those candidates substituted by the Equal Rights Democrats in place of the Tammany candidates from Figure 1.

**Figure 3**

*The following is the Gilpinade Ballad, mentioned page 133.*

**THE ASSEMBLY’S VENGEANCE AGAINST WILFUL CONTEMPT:**

**A MARVELLOUS DITTY,**

TELLING HOW THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY WAS WICKEDLY CONTEMNED BY MOSES JAQUES AND LEVI D. SLAMM; AND HOW SAID CONTEMNERS WERE SCOLDED AND REPRIMANDED THEREFOR.

Down to the city of New-York,  
Past houses, fields, and farms,  
Swift came that mighty officer,  
Th’ Assembly’s Man-at-Arms.

And when he reached the City  
Hall,

He look-ed all around;--

“I want the Sheriff, quick,”  
quoth he,

“Where is he to be found?”

A Sachem of the tribes then  
spoke,

The tribes of Tammany,

“Behold, I am the Sheriff here,  
What do you want with me?”

“What do I want! Oh horrible!

Have you not heard nor dreamt?

The House, the House at Albany

Is treated with contempt!”

“Two Loco-Focos of this place  
Have scorned its digni-ty;  
Levi D. Slamm, and Moses  
Jaques,  
And they must go with me.”

“So haste, sir Sheriff, seek them  
out

Ere set of evening’s sun;  
For they must be in Albany  
Before three days are done.”

The Sheriff bowed to the black  
rod,

And both set out straightway;

They found and seized on  
Slamm and Jaques

About the close of day.

Next morn they were upon the  
road,

Despite of snow or rain;

And driver, whip, and horse, and  
wheel,

Were going might and main.

And when they reached the old  
toll-bridge,

The toll-man felt alarms;

“What is the matter, sir?” quoth  
he,

Unto the Man-at-Arms.

“What is the matter?” “Horrible!

Have you not heard nor dreamt?

The House—the House at  
Albany

Is treated with contempt!”

On, on, they hied, o’er hill and  
dale;

And every one they passed

Cried out aghast, “good heavens  
and earth!

Why do you go so fast?”

“Why go so fast? Oh horrible!

Have you not heard nor dreamt?

The House, where banks and  
stocks are made,

Is treated with contempt!"

And as they galloped through  
the towns,  
The dogs all barked aloud:  
"What is the news?—What is  
the news?"—  
Cried out the wondering crowd.

"What is the news! Oh  
horrible!—  
Have you not heard nor dreamt?  
The House—where rights and  
made and sold,  
Is treated with contempt!"

And great is all the Member's  
rage,  
And great their grief and sore;  
I wot their streaming eyes have  
shed  
A pint of tears or more.

And there will be no peace on  
earth,  
Until it vengeance takes;  
It must inflict its digni-ty  
On these men Slamm and  
Jaques."

At length they reached the  
Capitol,  
And there they were arraigned  
Before the Speaker and the  
House,

Whose summons they disdained.  
Busy-body Hackley felt  
A strange "*exigency*"—  
What legal nostrums had they  
bought?  
Their lawyer, who was he?  
The great Investigator rose;  
George Patterson by name,  
Who fancied every Jemmy Kent,  
A Chancellor of fame.  
"By heavens!" cried he, "these  
men have shown  
To my subpoena scorn,  
For which contempt unto this  
House,  
They'd better ne'er been born."  
Then Bank-director Talmage  
rose,  
A man not otherwise,  
Chosen for his stupidity,  
The Banks to scrutinize.  
Says he, "God bless the safety  
league  
Of State Banks, one and all!  
These Loco-Focos, or the  
Banks,  
One of the two must fall.  
"No constitutions can rule us,

We are the people here;  
As God rules all in heaven  
above—  
We rule on earth, 'tis clear!"

Tom Tucker rose with majesty,  
A man of awful sense,  
An orator of mighty pith,  
Of bank-nursed eloquence.

Quoth he, "I am indignant that  
Our power should be twitted;  
If we make terms with guilty  
men,  
Our honor's compromised!"

Up rose fop Burroughs on his  
legs;  
A petty bantam noodle—  
Quoth he, "let's send them both  
to jail,"  
Hey, cock a doodle doodle!!  
"Send them to jail," cried big  
Westlake,  
A 'Tater Broker small;  
While some slunk off like Tom  
Herttell—  
Who nothing said at all.

The members rose in great  
uproar,  
And this was their command;

“We must annihilate these men  
With our dread reprimand.”

The prisoners shrunk to  
nothingness,  
Which no one should surprise;  
The members swelled with  
dignity  
To twice their usual size.

Contempt’s dark stain upon their  
beaks,  
The gobblers could not stand,  
Wherefore their Speaker  
solemnly  
Read off this

**REPRIMAND**

“Oh Moses Jaques! Oh Moses  
Jaques!  
‘Tis painful and ‘tis true,  
A caucus of the Regency  
Imposed the task I do.”

“your condemnation by this  
House,

Last night was cut and dried;--  
(Alas! I’m but a puppet here,  
With all my pomp and pride).”  
[Aside]

“Our mandate you did treat with  
scorn,  
Which touches us quite near;  
We’re jealous of our privilege,--  
We hold it but one year.

“You’re old and educated, sir,  
As all can plainly see;  
Besides, like us, you hold large  
stakes  
In this communi-ty.

“Then why uphold the rights of  
those  
Who own no stakes at all?  
You’re one of us: why should  
you care?  
Let workies rise or fall!

“And as for you, Levi D.  
Slamm,  
You’ve intellect, ‘tis plain;

Apply it to wise purposes,  
Where profit you can gain.

“Subserve the views of wealthy  
men,  
Like us, who have large stakes;  
Make interest your politics—  
Don’t be like Moses Jaques.

“Now, in obedience to the  
House,  
To which I’m nothing loth,  
I here retrieve our dignity,  
And reprimand you both.”

And thus did end this woful  
farce,

Conceived in wrath and trouble;  
And never on this earth before,  
Did burst so big a bubble.

Long live our legislators all,  
Of high or low degree;

And when they next scold  
Slamm and Jaques,

May I be there to see!

**Figure 4: Thomas Cole, The Savage State**



**Figure 5: Cole, The Arcadian or Pastoral State**





**Figure 6: Cole, The Consummation of Empire**



**Figure 7: Cole, Destruction**



**Figure 8: Cole, Desolation**





**Table 5: New York City Local, State, and National Elections, 1835-1837**<sup>321</sup>

Year/Office	Tammany	Whig	Equal Rights
1835, Congress	Lee (8,345)	Munroe (7,388)	Ferris (2,931)
1836, Mayor	Lawrence (16,101)	Geer (5,989)	Ming (2,712)
President**	Van Buren (17,414)*	Harrison (16,246)	
Governor	Marcy (16,361)	Buel (15,971)	Smith (1,398)
Lt. Gov.	Tracy (16,577)	Barstow (15,984)	Jaques (1,401)
Senator**	Tallmadge (17,531)*	Smith (16,109)	
Congress**	Moore (16,673)*		
**	Cambreng (16,439)*		
		Hoffman (16,441)	
**		Curtis (17,523)*	
Register**	Gulick (19,443)*	Bunn (13,388)	

\*Major-party candidate endorsed by the Equal Rights Party or unopposed by an independent candidacy.

\*\*Loco-Foco candidate victory

**Table 6: Rump Loco-Foco Ticket for Local Offices, November 1837**<sup>322</sup>

Office	Candidate	Profession
Assembly	Robert Townsend, Jr.	Carpenter
	Job Haskell	Carman
	Warden Hayward	Agent
	Charles Dingley	Music Printer
	John Wilder	Ship-joiner
	Hugh Collins	Carpenter
	Daniel Gorham	Tailor
	John H. Hunt	Printer
	Charles F. Way	Blacksmith
	Levi D. Slamm	Locksmith
	James L. Stratton	Painter
	William E. Skidmore	Grocer
Sheriff	James Locklin	Tailor
County Clerk	Thomas S. Walsh, Jr.	Grocer
Coroner	Abraham D. Wilson	Physician

<sup>321</sup> New York *Evening Post*, "The Election," 5 November 1835; Byrdsall, *The History of the Loco-Foco Party*, 49, 94; New York *Evening Post*, "City of New York," 14 November 1836.

<sup>322</sup> Byrdsall, 187.



**Table 7: Loco-Dorrite Clam Bakes, 1842-1844**

#	State	County	Town/Locality	Size	Date
1	MA	Bristol	Pomham Rocks, Seekonk	800-3,000	8/4/1842
2	MA	Bristol	Somerset	1,500	8/24/1842
3	MA	Bristol	Medbury Grove, Seekonk	15-20,000	8/30/1842
5	MA	Worcester	Millville/Mendon	2,500-3,000	9/13/1842
6	MA	Bristol	Smith's Mills, Dartmouth	*	9/22/1842
7	RI	Providence	Chepachet	5-8,000	9/30/1842
8	MA	Worcester	Southbridge Grove, Southbridge	2,000	10/5/1842
9	RI	Providence	Woonsocket	4-5,000	10/13/1842
10	MA	Suffolk	Faneuil Hall, Boston	*	2/9/1843
11	MA	Norfolk	Bellingham	*	9/27/1843
12	RI	Providence	Woonsocket	6-8,000	8/22/1844
13	MA	Essex	Swampscott	25,000	9/6/1844

\*Figures not reported.

**Table 8: Presidential Elections, 1844-1852<sup>323</sup>**

1844--States with margins less than 2%

	Polk (D)	Clay (W)	Birney (L)
TOTAL	1,340,313 (49.59%)	1,300,197 (48.11%)	62,025 (2.30%)
Georgia	43,397 (50.84%)	41,975 (49.16%)	
Indiana	70,183 (50.07%)	67,866 (48.42%)	2,107 (1.50%)
New Jersey	37,495 (47.61%)	38,018 (50.26%)	131 (0.17%)
New York	237,588 (48.90%)	232,482 (47.85%)	15,814 (3.25%)
Ohio	149,011 (47.73%)	155,112 (49.69%)	8,050 (2.58%)
Pennsylvania	167,535 (50.48%)	161,203 (48.57%)	3,133 (0.94%)
Tennessee	59,917 (49.95%)	60,030 (50.05%)	

<sup>323</sup> Michael Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788-1860: The Official Results by County and State*, Jefferson (NC): McFarland & Company, Inc., 2002, 83-134.

1848--States including the Free Soil Party on the Ballot

State	Taylor (W)	Cass (D)	Van Buren (FS)
Connecticut	30,318 (48.59%)	27,051 (43.36%)	5,005 (8.02%)
Delaware	6,440 (51.81%)	5,910 (47.55%)	80 (0.64%)
Illinois	52,853 (42.45%)	55,952 (44.94%)	15,702 (12.61%)
Indiana	70,175 (45.88%)	74,684 (48.83%)	8,100 (5.30%)
Iowa	10,617 (44.62%)	12,051 (50.65%)	1,126 (4.73%)
Maine	35,125 (40.33%)	39,880 (45.79%)	12,096 (13.89%)
Maryland	37,704 (52.10%)	34,533 (47.72%)	128 (0.18%)
Massachusetts	61,072 (45.34%)	35,284 (26.20%)	38,333 (28.46%)
Michigan	23,940 (36.86%)	30,617 (47.14%)	10,393 (16.00%)
New Hampshire	14,789 (29.51%)	27,761 (55.40%)	7,559 (15.09%)
New Jersey	40,015 (51.43%)	36,881 (47.40%)	829 (1.07%)
New York	218,590 (47.94%)	114,320 (25.07%)	120,515 (26.43%)
Ohio	138,357 (42.09%)	154,773 (47.09%)	35,452 (10.79%)
Pennsylvania	185,535 (50.31%)	171,979 (46.63%)	11,263 (3.05%)
Rhode Island	6,779 (60.77%)	3,646 (32.68%)	730 (6.54%)
Vermont	22,932 (48.06%)	10,948 (22.94%)	13,837 (29.00%)
Wisconsin	13,639 (35.13%)	14,924 (38.44%)	10,261 (26.43%)
TOTAL	1,360,692 (47.31%)	1,221,289 (42.46%)	291,409 (10.13%)

1852--States in Which the Free Soil Party Impacted the Electoral Vote

State	Pierce (D)	Scott (W)	Hale (FS)
Connecticut	33,249 (49.80%)	30,359 (45.47%)	3,161 (4.73%)
Massachusetts	45,875 (35.72%)	52,863 (41.16%)	28,023 (21.82%)
Ohio	169,190 (47.94%)	152,577 (43.24%)	31,133 (8.82%)
TOTAL	1,598,363 (50.63%)	1,385,255 (43.88%)	155,441 (4.93%)

**Table 9: Selected Gubernatorial Elections**<sup>324</sup>

Connecticut:

Year	Chauncey Cleveland (D)	William Ellsworth (W)
1842	25,564 (49.9%)	23,700 (46.3%)
		Roger S. Baldwin (W)
1843	27,416 (50.1%)	25,401 (46.5%)
1844	28,846 (47.4%)	30,093 (49.4%)

<sup>324</sup> Michael Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1776-1860: The Official Results by State and County*, Jefferson (NC): McFarland & Company, 2003, 23, 114-15, 172-4, 235-6.

Massachusetts:

Year	Marcus Morton (D)	John Davis (W)	Liberty Party
1840	55,169 (43.4%)	70,884 (55.8%)	1,081 (0.9%)
1841	51,367 (46.3%)	55,974 (50.5%)	3,488 (3.1%)
1842	56,491 (48.0%)	54,939 (46.6%)	6,382 (5.4%)
		George Briggs (W)	
1843	54,242 (44.8%)	57,899 (47.8%)	8,901 (7.4%)
	George Bancroft (D)		
1844	54,714 (40.9%)	69,570 (52.0%)	9,635 (7.2%)

New York:

Year	Silas Wright (D)	Millard Fillmore (W)	Alvan Stewart (L)
1844	241,090 (49.5%)	231,057 (47.4%)	15,136 (3.1%)
		John Young (W)	Henry Bradley (L)
1846	187,306 (46.1%)	198,878 (48.9%)	12,844 (3.2%)

Rhode Island:

Year	Samuel W. King (W)	Thomas Carpenter (D)
1840	4,797 (58.4%)	3,417 (41.6%)
1841	2,648	
		Thomas Carpenter (W)
1842	4,864	2,281
	James Fenner (Law & Order)	Thomas Carpenter (D)
1843	9,107 (55.2%)	7,392 (44.8%)
		(scattering)
1844	5,560 (96.4%)	208 (3.6%)
		Charles Jackson (Liberation)
1845	7,795 (40.3%)	8,007 (50.7%)

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