

10-1975

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Recommended Citation

Ledbetter, Billy D. (1975) "Politics and Society: the Popular Response to Political Rhetoric in Texas, 1857-1860," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 13: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol13/iss2/5>

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**POLITICS AND SOCIETY:
THE POPULAR RESPONSE TO POLITICAL RHETORIC
IN TEXAS, 1857-1860**

by Billy D. Ledbetter

From 1857 to 1860 fire-eating secessionist rhetoric dominated Texas politics and helped prepare the way for disunion. Rather than representing an organized or planned conspiracy, the political rhetoric was part of a spontaneous movement to perpetuate the institution of slavery. This movement was supported by most of the regular Democratic party members, who were steeped in the states' rights philosophy of government. Their task was to present a united front to the North, forcing the election of another pro-southern President; if they failed to elect their candidate, the rhetoric of secession would have prepared the way for disunion. Focusing on three significant elections, this paper illustrates that the people listened to and were influenced by political rhetoric, but only when it reflected already established beliefs.

In the state elections of 1857, Texans seemed to be listening to the rhetoric of the states rightists and extremists. Strong in their memories were the national elections of 1856 when Black Republicans had made good showings in the national congressional elections and had threatened to elect a President. The Republican menace on the national scene strengthened the Democratic party in the state. Although it had been loosely organized, the state Democratic party had, since the beginning of political parties in Texas, been dominated by states' rightists who justified secession and made it clear that they would not hesitate to resort to it as a remedy. In 1857, the party held its first fully organized and representative state political convention for the purpose of nominating a gubernatorial candidate. The nomination went to Hardin Runnels, who had long expressed his states' rights philosophy of government as a member and later speaker of the Texas House of Representatives. His running mate was Francis R. Lubbock, a long-time supporter of the regular Democratic party and holder of numerous minor state offices. His approach to government made him compatible with Runnels to round out the radical ticket. Campaigning on the party's past stand, Runnels was a southern extremist.¹

Opposing Runnels as an independent was Sam Houston, who always placed the Union above slavery and secession. Having taken an unpopular stand against such measures as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Houston knew that the regular Democratic party, which firmly controlled the state legislature, would never return him to the United States Senate when his term expired in March 1859. Jesse Grimes, running on the independent ticket with Houston, opposed Lubbock for the lieutenant governor's office. Houston campaigned vigorously, making over sixty speeches across the state to justify and explain his pro-Union stand. Although Houston was a well known military hero, he was soundly defeated by a vote of 32,522 to 23,628. Lubbock also defeated Grimes, chalking up even larger margins than Runnels.²

In elections to the national Congress two regular Democratic candidates were also chosen to represent Texas. In the eastern congressional district John H. Reagan, district judge from Palestine, who was later Postmaster General in

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Jefferson Davis' cabinet, received the regular party nomination on May 13, at Tyler. His opponent, a Houston supporter, incumbent Lemuel D. Evans, was running as an independent while professing to be a Union Democrat and receiving the support of the Know-Nothing party. Evans attacked Reagan, at times unfairly, for being a disunionist because of his states' rights, regular Democratic nomination and support. On occasion Reagan's reactions made him appear to be somewhat more radical than he actually was. Generally, Reagan's rhetoric was more moderate than that of his Democratic friends. While he defended the right of secession, he urged preservation of the Union as long as possible. In the campaign Evans' alleged Know-Nothing affiliation, as well as his adamant stand for the Union, proved detrimental, while Reagan's united Democratic support helped insure him victory in the bitterly fought contest.³

In the western congressional district, Guy M. Bryan, of Brazoria, received the regular Democratic nomination at Waco. Having served numerous terms in the state legislature, he had shown himself to be one of the most radical states' rights men in the state. He had no organized opposition and won with few votes being cast against him. The regular Democratic party also fielded a complete list of state house and senate candidates and won most of the seats against scattered independent opposition. Thus, by a virtual landslide, the regular Democratic party dominated every facet of Texas politics.⁴

Almost every newspaper in Texas supported the states' rights candidates. According to the Marshall *Texas Republican*, twenty-eight papers supported Runnels, nine supported Houston, and a few were undecided. Even the Austin *Southern Intelligencer*, which became Houston's major supporter two years later when he again ran for the governor's office, went on record in support of all Democratic party nominees and urged its readers to support Runnels rather than Houston. Numerous influential individuals such as Bryan, Reagan, and Anson Jones, ex-president of the Republic of Texas, also denounced Houston. The rhetoric of the campaign against Houston and similar unionists urged that the political tactic of cooperating with the North would only destroy states' rights and ultimately endanger slavery. In 1857, the people of Texas believed that the regular Democratic party best served their interests.⁵

On December 21, 1857, Elisha M. Pease, governor of Texas 1853-1857, was replaced by Runnels. Pease had done all in his power to maintain good relations between the state and the national government and to quiet anti-Union sentiment in the state. However, the Democratic party interpreted the election of 1857 as a mandate to take an extreme stand and Runnels' course differed from that of Pease. He issued ultimatums to the national government and threatened secession if his demands were not met. Throughout his administration he made it clear that he would not hesitate to lead the state out of the Union if he believed that the institution of slavery was being threatened. Few southerners expressed extremist demands on the Kansas question more loudly or with greater determination than Governor Runnels. In his inaugural address, he demanded that Kansas be admitted as a slave state and warned that if this demand was not met the South would be justified in seceding from the Union. On January 20, 1858, he delivered a message concerned entirely with the admission of Kansas, in which he predicted that if the North refused to admit Kansas with its slave constitution, "the time will have come when the Southern states should look to themselves for the means of maintaining their future security." Then the Texas state legislature began to set up the machinery for secession. It empowered the governor to call an election of delegates to a slave state convention; or if Texas

needed to act alone, the governor could convene the legislature to call a special state convention. Following the lead of Runnels, newspapers and prominent political figures openly talked of disunion, usually not as an immediate course of action, but rather as an alternative if the South lost control of the national government as it would if a Black Republican were ever elected to the presidency.⁶

During Runnels' administration the rhetoric and actions of political leaders and of Texas newspapers became too extreme for most Texans and a conservative reaction developed among the people. Runnels and his party moved too fast for the people, resulting in defeat in 1859. Especially important in alarming the people of the state was the party's attitude toward the reopening of the African slave trade. In November 1857, after Runnels' election but before his inaugural, John Henry Brown, the representative from Galveston who was later editor of the *Belton Democrat*, introduced into the state house of representatives a resolution to petition the United States Congress to reopen the slave trade. The resolution was referred to the Committee on Slaves and Slavery, which was chaired by Brown. The committee returned its report a month later, after the inaugural of Runnels. Although most of the committee members personally favored reopening the African slave trade, the report recommended that no petition be sent to Congress making such a demand. Their reasoning was that to renew the controversy would cause adverse reaction from the North. Opposing agitation to open the trade for practical, not humane or moral reasons, the committee ordered 10,000 copies of the report published for distribution across the state.⁷

Although the state legislature did not approve petitioning Congress to re-open the slave trade, the more radical and less compromising element of the party continued the agitation, in spite of the trouble that it might cause. During the following year, Texas newspapers intensified the demand for re-opening the trade. To those who believed "that slavery is both just and expedient, and that it is in accordance with divine law, and that it is a moral, social, and political blessing," wrote John Marshall, editor of the *State Gazette*, the slave trade could not be wrong. The *Galveston Weekly News* contended that "slavery and the slave trade stand on precisely the same basis, and that the same arguments that condemn the latter will equally condemn the former. . . . The admission that the slave trade, when properly conducted, is a moral evil, is fatal to the institution of slavery itself." Contending that the Negro was better off as a slave in the Christian South than in the wilds of Africa, these agitators seemed determined to make the North accept even this ugliest phase of the institution.⁸

Agitation to reopen the African slave trade played a vital role in the election of 1859. From May 2 through May 5, 1859, the state Democratic convention met in Houston to adopt a platform and nominate candidates for the upcoming state elections. In this convention, agitation to reopen the slave trade reached its peak with the attempt of the radicals to make it a part of the party platform. After much discussion, the party rejected a resolution to reopen the African slave trade by the large majority of 228 to 81. Although many party delegates wanted to reopen the trade, they realized by this time that their demands would only cause trouble for the South and weaken the party's position in the state, since public opinion opposed needless agitation. Even Louis T. Wigfall, Texas' most vocal advocate of disunion and soon to be United State Senator, opposed slave trade agitation at this time, though he had openly supported the trade. Thus, the

party did not officially take a stand in favor of the slave trade, but Texans knew that many party members had favored it. Runnels had supported the movement, and Texans had connected the agitation with the party.⁹

Were the people of Texas listening to the rhetoric of Union or disunion? This was the question to be answered in the gubernatorial election of 1859. Hardin Runnels and Francis Lubbock were again the candidates of the state Democratic party. Opposing them was Sam Houston, running as an independent again, with Edward Clark as his running mate. In announcing his candidacy, Houston said, "The Constitution and the Union embrace the principles by which I will be governed if elected. They comprehend all the old Jacksonian National Democracy I ever professed or officially practised." Creating needless agitation, Runnels openly defended the right of secession, and many Texans feared that he might lead the state out of the Union. As the issues were clear to the voters of Texas, Houston refused to campaign actively, making only one speech in 1859, whereas he had made over sixty two years before. That he stood strongly for the Union and that Runnels did not was made clear without extensive campaign rhetoric.¹⁰

Except for Houston's refusal to campaign, the election preparation resembled that of 1857, with most newspapers supporting the Democratic ticket. Runnels received support from the most prominent newspapers, among them the *Dallas Herald*, *Austin Texas State Gazette*, *Marshall Texas Republican*, and *Clarksville Northern Standard*. The two major supporters of Houston, the *Marshall Harrison Flag* and the *Austin Southern Intelligencer*, both were overshadowed in their respective cities by a major press supporting the Democratic ticket. Thus most of the rhetoric Texans were exposed to in this election was that of the extreme states' rightists, the rhetoric that seemed to justify and threaten secession.¹¹

Even before the election, several prominent Texans noticed a conservative reaction to the party's radicalism. Soon after the Democratic convention, but before Houston announced his candidacy, Elisha M. Pease speculated that if Houston chose to run he would win with ease. The ex-governor contended that more than three-fourths of the people of Texas did not believe that the delegates in Houston supported their best interests, especially with regard to the African slave trade. Agreeing with Pease, Ferdinand Flake, editor of the Galveston German newspaper *Die Union*, perceived that the dominant forces in the Democratic party were not representative of the Texas people. He further contended that the delegates meeting in Houston actually did want to reopen the African slave trade and that their candidates were too radical to adhere to their adopted platform. Nor were Texans fooled by the convention, observed Flake, speculating that the people recognized the radicalism of the Democrats and that any good candidate could beat their nominee. To the people of Texas, claimed the *Southern Intelligencer*, Runnels and his party supported "the African slave trade, secession, and disunion," and Houston opposed all three.¹²

Although thousands of Texans had to change their decision of 1857, their choice was clear and the victory and easy one for Houston. The Old Warrior, who had lost the election in 1857 by almost 9,000 votes won in 1859 by almost the same number, the final count being 36,227 to 27,500. Edward Clark won over Lubbock by a small margin. The election had revolved around the issue of Union versus disunion, the voters of Texas chose Houston and the Union.¹³ His victory cannot be attributed to his popularity in the state nor to his reputation as

a military hero since he was overwhelmingly defeated just two years before. Neither can his victory be explained in terms of voter response to political rhetoric since most newspapers and influential political leaders supported Runnels. Voters had, in fact, responded adversely to the political rhetoric of extremism.

Not only did the disunionist element in the state suffer severe losses with the victories of Houston and Clark, but its candidates for both congressional districts in 1859 were also defeated. General T. N. Waul, a lawyer of distinction from the southwestern part of the state and a strong states' rights advocate, received the western district nomination at a convention also held in Houston. His opponent was an independent, Andrew J. Hamilton, ex-attorney general and state legislator, who was provisional governor of Texas immediately after the Civil War. As a strong Union man, he opposed the ultra Democratic party for the same reasons that Houston did, and the two men complemented and supported each other in the election.¹⁴

The Democratic congressional nomination for the eastern district was held in Henderson on May 2. Incumbent John Reagan announced for reelection prior to the convention, and the party had little choice but to nominate him, since he was likely to win with or without their blessings. By this time Reagan had become unacceptable to many Democrats, especially the extreme states' rightists. He had published a circular letter stating that he was totally opposed to reopening the African slave trade and to any wild schemes undertaken to expand slavery to promote southern interests. As opposed to the fire-eaters of the state as he was to the abolitionists of the North, he contended that he was first a Union man, who would do all in his power to prevent secession, as long as the North did not deny the South its constitutional rights. He realized that extreme measures on either side, the North or the South, could tear the nation apart. Although Reagan had been elected in 1857 with party support, this time his nomination caused a split in Democratic ranks. Because of Reagan's pro-Union policies, a number of radical states' rightists from the eastern part of the state bolted the convention and nominated Judge William B. Ochiltree, of Nacogdoches. He was a former Whig and had been briefly associated with the Know Nothing party, but by 1859, he was a staunch states' rightist and a well established member of the radical wing of the party. When the election results were in, both Hamilton and Reagan were victorious, largely because of their strong Union stand; in these elections, too, the rhetoric of disunion had failed. Most Texans believed in the right of secession, but until slavery was really threatened they would not attempt it, and no amount of political rhetoric could remold their way of thinking.¹⁵

Smarting from the Unionist victories in the August elections, the Democratic party, whose members still controlled the state legislature, were determined to even the score with their opponents. The best retaliation seemed to be to elect the most radical candidate available to the United States Senate seat which had to be filled when the legislature met in the fall. Louis T. Wigfall was the obvious choice; he had long served the radicals and his election would show the nation where the sentiments of the Texas Democrats lay. His newspaper support—especially from the *Dallas Herald* and the *Marshall Texas Republican*—was strong, and he had no strong, organized opposition. Backed by a Democratic party caucus, he was elected by a narrow margin after a bitter fight on December 5, 1859. His election was hailed as a mighty victory by the Democratic party and by most important newspapers across the state.

Nevertheless, the radical's election did not indicate that majority sentiment in the state had shifted.¹⁶ Throughout 1859 and early 1860, most Texans probably still approved of Houston, whose rhetoric remained consistently pro-Union. But later in 1860 national events changed their position; during the presidential campaign and election of that year secession rhetoric began to appeal to the masses.

Since Texans had already decided that they could not remain a part of a union controlled by an anti-slavery president, election of a pro-southern man seemed essential in 1860 to avoid southern secession. As time for the national Democratic nominating convention drew near, Texans were as determined as any other southern Democrats to force the nomination of a candidate with southern sentiments, hoping that enough northern Democrats would support him to win the election. The state Democratic convention remained in the hands of the strong states' rightist element, who had still not recovered from their past August defeat and were more adamant than ever in pro-southern demands. The unionist sentiment was not adequately represented, and the states' rightists were enthusiastic about their chances to redeem their recent defeat.¹⁷

The Democratic state convention assembled at noon on April 2 and remained in session until the fifth of the month. Since this was an even numbered year, only the attorney general, comptroller, and treasurer would be nominated for state offices; but it was the most important convention to date. Apart from the regular nominations and general party business, the delegates had to adopt a platform and choose delegates to the national Democratic convention, which was to meet in Charleston three weeks later. The rhetoric of John Marshall, chairman of the state convention, who addressed the convention on the opening day, set the tone for the meeting. He believed that the Black Republican party desired to destroy the institution of slavery and pleaded for the slaveholding states to present a united front to prevent this possibility. The South, he contended, must make its demands clear and stand by them. Having served in 1857 as the president of the Texas state Democratic central committee and since 1858 as chairman of the Democratic state convention, Marshall was one of the party's leading policy makers and one of the most radical men in the state.¹⁸

After making nominations for state officers, the delegates got down to the serious business of adopting a platform, choosing delegates to the Charleston convention, and choosing the Democratic electors for the presidential election. The rhetoric of the platform, as well as of the party leaders, was more radical than it had been in the presidential election of 1856. The earlier convention had adopted the Cincinnati Platform, insisting that the national government had no right to interfere with slavery in the territories, but the platform of 1860 went further. Although it still upheld the Cincinnati Platform, it now interpreted that platform to mean that the national government's duty was to protect slavery in the territories. Texas Democrats made a explicit denial of the popular sovereignty interpretation in their platform, making it clear that Texans would not compromise with northern Democrats.¹⁹

The rhetoric of the party convention also prepared the way for secession. Its platform asserted that a state, especially Texas, which had been a sovereign nation prior to annexation, had the right to secede from the Union whenever it believed that its constitutional rights were being violated. According to the Democrats, since Texas had joined the Union voluntarily and peacefully, parting "with no portion of her sovereignty, but merely chang[ing] the agent

through whom she should exercise some of the powers appertaining to it," the state could leave the Union and resume its position as a sovereign nation. The platform also expressed Texans' fear of the Black Republicans, urging that if a Republican were elected President, Texas should meet with her sister slaveholding states and decide what action should be taken.²⁰

The wording of the last part of the platform was the rhetoric of racism, with which most white Texans were much in tune. It reiterated Texans' belief in the supremacy of the white race over the black and contended that slavery was the only means of continuing harmonious race relations. Fear of the Republican party stemmed from Texans' belief that it would destroy this relationship.

We regard any effort by the Black Republican party to disturb the happily existing subordinate condition of the negro race in the South, as violative of the organic act guaranteeing the supremacy of the white race, and any political action which proposes to invest negroes with equal, social, and political equality with the white race, as an infraction of those wise and wholesome distinctions of nature, which all experience teaches, were established to ensure the prosperity and happiness of each race.

Any effort to elevate the Negro race would, they believed, merely degrade the white race. The government was designed to benefit the Caucasian race, and slavery "constitutes the only true, natural and harmonious relationship in which the otherwise antagonistic races can live together."²¹

After the platform had been approved, the convention nominated eight delegates to the national Democratic convention, which was to convene on April 23, 1860. These eight delegates were more radical than the average Texan, being among the most staunch states' rightists in the party. The four delegates chosen from the eastern congressional district were Hardin Runnels, Elkanah Greer, F. F. Foscue, and Richard B. Hubbard. The delegates from the western congressional district were Francis R. Lubbock, Guy M. Bryan, Fletcher F. Stockdale, and Joseph F. Crosby. Most of these men were prominent political figures in the state, leaders in the secession movement, and later staunch supporters of the Confederacy.²²

Once in Charleston, these delegates witnessed the breakup of the Democratic party. Southerners demanded a platform guaranteeing that Congress would protect slavery in the territories. When this demand was not met, most of them bolted from the convention, including all of the Texas delegates. Those remaining adjourned without nominating a candidate, but agreed to reconvene in Baltimore on June 18. The northern Democrats were determined to nominate Stephen Douglas and adopt a popular sovereignty platform, while southern Democrats were determined to accept neither him nor his platform. Reconvening in Baltimore failed to help the southern cause, as again most of the southern delegates left the convention. This time, however, the northern delegates nominated Douglas and adopted his platform. The southern delegates met, adopted the Alabama platform which would guarantee slavery in the territories, and nominated John C. Breckinridge as their standard bearer. The Constitutional Union party was organized and nominated John Bell, but it only further split the Democratic vote. With the breakup of the Democratic party, the Republicans were virtually assured of the presidential victory in 1860.²³

Texans overwhelmingly supported the action of their delegates in Charleston and Baltimore. Even before the Charleston convention, several county conventions had urged the delegates to demand a pro-slavery candidate and a platform that would guarantee the expansion of slavery and to refuse acceptance of Douglas and the popular sovereignty platform. After Charleston, most newspapers supported the bolt and insisted that the delegates stand by their position. Then after Baltimore countless mass meetings, newspapers, and states' rights politicians overwhelmingly supported the delegates and praised them for leaving the convention.²⁴

For the first time since the election of 1857, the rank and file in Texas turned back to the state Democratic party for leadership, listening carefully to their rhetoric as the crisis approached. Since Texans believed that Douglas' squatter sovereignty platform would have the same effect in limiting slavery as that of the Black Republicans, they overwhelmingly supported the southern branch of the party. Thus the radical states' rightists, who had long indicated that they had no opposition to disunion, began to attract a large following in the state. Rhetoric that had been too radical the year before now seemed justified. The real crisis lay just around the corner, and Texans began preparing for the election of a Black Republican.²⁵

In Texas the campaign during the summer of 1860 was not really an attempt to elect a President but rather to show the North where the sentiments of the state lay. The Breckinridge forces, who had an overwhelming majority in the state from the very first, realized that their nominee could not be elected as long as the field was occupied by four candidates; but they believed that they should show the North that Texans were united on the southern Democratic platform and would leave the Union if slavery were not guaranteed in the territories. The forces supporting Bell also realized that their candidate had no chance unless the number of candidates was reduced, but they wished to show the nation that they were willing to compromise, or at least delay a showdown on the slavery issue, since their platform was noncommittal. The campaign picture in Texas was somewhat confused by the nomination of Houston as a second Union candidate with the hope that all anti-Lincoln candidates would withdraw and support him. However, Houston withdrew his name from consideration in August.²⁶

As the election drew near and the victory of a Black Republican seemed inevitable, almost everyone stressed the right of secession. Generally, the Breckinridge supporters took the position that secession was a right that should be exercised if Lincoln were elected; threats of secession marked their campaign rhetoric. The Bell men, along with the small number of Douglas followers, generally defended the right of secession, but argued that Lincoln's election was not ample justification to exercise that right. Since Lincoln had said that he would not interfere with slavery where it existed, these people would wait for an "overt act" against the institution. The campaign and the election proved that the vast majority of Texans, regardless of their political affiliation, at least believed in the abstract right of secession.²⁷

For many years, Texans had accepted secession as a suitable alternative if it ever became necessary to preserve their institution of slavery. This attitude had not been sold to the people by political rhetoric; the rhetoric probably reinforced their beliefs, but it was their overwhelming support for slavery that

led them into secession. In 1860, even before presidential nominations had been made, the *Galveston Civilian and Gazette* summed up Texans' sentiments when it stated:

We have uniformly opposed, and still oppose secession and disunion in any shape, under past or existing circumstances, but we have never denied that *right* to resort to these desperate remedies. The right of revolution, by whatever name it is called, is inherent and inalienable. To declare its existence does not strengthen it; and to deny it does not destroy it.²⁸

Even strong unionists, for the most part, felt that secession under certain conditions was justified. Shortly before the election of 1860, William E. Burnet wrote his father, ex-president of the Republic, "A dissolution of the Union is, to my mind, the greatest evil that can befall this country; and nothing short of actual and continued oppression by one portion of the country over the other can justify it." John Reagan, whose election to the House of Representatives the previous year was hailed across the nation as a victory for the Union, believed that if Lincoln were elected the South should adopt "such a course as will secure out rights, in the Union, if we can, but out of it if we must." Texans generally favored both slavery and the Union, but were quick to choose the former over the latter.²⁹

With even moderates and unionists defending the right of secession, the radicals loudly, frequently, and openly advocated disunion. Louis T. Wigfall actually looked forward to secession if the southern concept of constitutional rights was violated. He contended that he would rather see the nation "blown into as many fragments and particles as gunpowder could scatter a glass vase," than see the South deny its domestic institutions. Across the state men like William S. Oldham, who was later chosen to the Confederate Senate along with Wigfall, did all in their power to destroy the effects of Houston's anti-secession speeches. Oldham, campaigning for Breckinridge, told his audiences that "The people of each state compose a political community effectively and efficiently commanded and controlled by the people. The people of any state, having the right to choose their own destiny, could secede anytime that they felt their constitutional rights had been violated." Guy M. Bryan told his listeners at a Democratic meeting that if Lincoln were elected he would "visit every county and speak from every stump in the state to counsel people not to submit but to dissolve the Union." As Texas newspapers printed numerous editorials defending the right of secession, the major issue that the campaign of 1860 presented to Texans involved deciding what action they should take if Lincoln were elected. Again the issue was one of Union or disunion. If Lincoln were elected the people believed that their greatest fear—emancipation of slaves—would become a reality. As they faced the possibility of abolition, Texans made it clear that they would secede rather than allow an abolitionist to take office.³⁰

Naturally, the Democratic party press in Texas staunchly supported the southern Democratic candidate, Breckinridge. Such influential papers as the *Austin Texas State Gazette*, *Galveston Weekly News*, *San Antonio Herald*, *Marshall Texas Republican*, and *Clarksville Northern Standard* all carried Breckinridge as their candidate. In addition, a large majority of all newspapers in the state supported the southern Democratic candidate. Attempting to convince Texans that "The Black Republican party are [sic] working for sectional supremacy, and the extinction of slavery," these papers argued that the South

must support Breckinridge to show the North that it would not accept such a party's elevation to the presidency. There was never any doubt that he would carry the state, and by the last couple of months of the campaign, there was no doubt that he would not win the presidency; but Texans were urged to vote for the southern candidate to prove their support of slavery and southern rights. Immediately prior to the election, the Breckinridge organs were admitting defeat, but rhetorically pleading for votes to indicate the feelings of the state.

In addition to their strong newspaper support, the Breckinridge forces held mass meetings, gave barbecues, and staged public debates in which the rhetoric of secession prevailed. As early as July, Wigfall, while campaigning for Breckinridge in the northwestern part of the state, pointed out that neither Bell nor Douglas could possibly be elected, nor could Breckinridge without northern support, which he was not likely to get. Wigfall's only hope was that a near unanimous front in the South for Breckinridge combined with threat of secession might draw the northern conservatives into his camp to keep the South from leaving the Union. However, he had little real faith that this would happen; the real purpose of his campaign rhetoric was to convince Texans of the need for secession.³²

Supporting Breckinridge and demanding secession if their candidate failed to be elected, the Texas Democratic party increased its support and political rhetoric as the election approached, lessening the possibility that Bell might even make a respectable showing. In Texas, the anti-Breckinridge forces actually had less chance of defeating the southern Democrat than in any other state in the South. Realizing that their chances were slim, the unionists attempted to form a fusion ticket which would allow electors to cast votes for the candidate most likely to defeat Lincoln, but the movement got little support. When the votes came in on November 6, 1860, 47,584 Texans had voted for Breckinridge and only 15,438 for the fusion ticket, giving Breckinridge over 75 per cent of the votes cast, a considerably larger percentage than he received in any other state. Nationwide, Lincoln received 180 electoral votes, 28 more than were necessary for election. With support coming entirely from the free states, he was to become leader of the nation on March 4, 1861.³³

The die was cast; after the election of Lincoln there was no doubt that Texas would leave the Union. The secessionists had to circumvent the unionist governor, Houston, but with the support of the people, this was accomplished, and a specially elected convention passed a secession ordinance, which the people of Texas approved by a three to one majority. The rhetoric of secession had not changed significantly as the crisis of 1860 drew near, but the attitudes of the people had. Therefore, the rhetoric does not seem to have been the decisive factor in Texans' determination to leave the Union. Texans listened to the political rhetoric only when it expressed their sentiments, as the elections of 1859 clearly indicate. But now an overwhelming majority agreed with the radicals, not because their rhetoric was convincing, but rather because the election of a Black Republican meant—sooner or later—the abolition of slavery in the South. Out of the Union they might have a chance to keep their peculiar institution; in it they saw none.

NOTES

¹Anna I. Sandbo, "Beginnings of the Secession Movement in Texas," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XVIII (July, 1914), 56; *Galveston Tri-Weekly News*, August 14, 1856; Speech of Anson Jones, July 29, 1856, Anson Jones Papers (Archives, University of Texas, Austin); *Galveston Weekly News*, October 14, 1856; Roy F. Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948), 60-61; Ernest W. Winkler (ed.), *Platforms of Political Parties in Texas* (Austin, 1916), 11-80. During this period in Texas, the Democratic party was dominated by the ultra states' rightist faction, commonly referred to as the regular Democratic party or simply the Democratic party or the anti-Houston party. The unionist element was commonly called the national Democratic party or simply the Opposition or the Houston faction.

²Houston to Rusk, May 12, 1857, Samuel Houston, *The Writings of Sam Houston, 1813-1863*, edited by Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker (8 vols.; Austin, 1938), VI, 444; James Reily to Rusk, Thomas Jefferson Rusk Papers (Archives, University of Texas, Austin); *Austin Texas State Gazette*, May 31, 1857; Oran M. Roberts, "The Political, Legislative, and Judicial History of Texas for Its Fifty Years of Statehood, 1845-1895," in Dudley G. Wooten (ed.), *A Comprehensive History of Texas, 1685-1897* (2 vols.; Dallas, 1898), II, 44-47; Llerena Friend, *Sam Houston: The Great Designer* (Austin, 1954), 242-252; *Journal, Texas Senate*, 7th Leg., reg. sess., November 4, 1857, 41-42.

³*Austin Texas State Gazette*, July 11, 1857; *Marshall Texas Republican*, July 17, 1857; John H. Reagan, *Memoirs, With Special Reference to Secession and the Civil War* (New York, 1906), 62-65; Ben H. Procter, *Not Without Honor: The Life of John H. Reagan* (Austin, 1962), 95-98; *Clarksville Northern Standard*, October 24, 1857.

⁴Friend, *Sam Houston*, 254; Roberts, "Political, Legislative, and Judicial History of Texas," 47-48; T. R. Fehrenbach, *Lone Star: A History of Texas and the Texans* (New York, 1968), 334.

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¹³*Journal, Texas Senate*, 8th Leg., reg. sess., November 11, 1859, 44-47.

¹⁴*Marshall Texas Republican*, May 20, 1859; Friend *Sam Houston*, 326; Roberts, "Political, Legislative, and Judicial History of Texas," 53-54; John L. Waller, *Colossal Hamilton of Texas* (El Paso, 1968), 18-20.

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¹⁹*Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention, 1860*, 11-13; *Corpus Christi Ranchero*, April 28, 1860; Ollinger Crenshaw, *The Slave States in the Presidential Elections of 1860* (Baltimore, 1945), 284-285.

²⁰*Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention, 1860*, 12.

²¹*Ibid.*, 13.

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