

States of the Union: The Rise and Fall of the Political Center in the Civil War North

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Introduction

Campaigning for governor of Ohio in 1863, John Brough told voters that, if it had been up to him, he would not have chosen to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Brough backed President Lincoln but asked voters only to sustain the administration “until the rebellion is crushed out.” If voters wanted to revisit wartime measures in a political campaign after Union victory, Brough promised them “I will go with you.” Stumping for reelection in Pennsylvania the same year, Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin supported emancipation as a military measure while assuring voters that not only would freed slaves stay in the South, “the free negro” already in the North would go to the South after the war “as its climate is adapted to his physical conformation.” Acknowledging that he had armed African-Americans to defend Pennsylvania, Curtin told voters that, with rebels on his state’s soil, he would have “equipped the clovenhoofed gentleman himself.” Brough and Curtin could not be characterized as celebrating the onward march of freedom and progress. Yet they both won crucial victories in October that helped cement emancipation and black military service as politically viable policies.¹

Unlike other nations that have postponed elections in times of national crisis, the United States never considered suspending the democratic process. Ballots, as much as bullets, brought military victory, an end to slavery, and a vastly enlarged federal government during the American Civil War. This dissertation examines the understudied elections and tenures of wartime Union governors in six states – California, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York, Kentucky, and Ohio – and argues that centrist politics played a crucial role in helping northerners to support revolutionary changes for conservative reasons.²

¹ [John Brough], *Dayton Speech of Hon. John Brough: President Lincoln's Response Relative to the Arrest of Vallandigham*. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach, Keys & Co., 1863), 7; *Philadelphia Press*, March 12, 1863; *Philadelphia Press*, October 7, 1863.

² Mark E. Neely, Jr. has calculated that the frequency and spacing of elections in the United States’ federal system meant that on average “the North witnessed a major election every other month of the war.” Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 39.

Prevailing scholarship depicts a polarized national two-party system of patriotic, progressive Republicans and anti-war, reactionary Democrats. But politics and governance within the states suggests that elections hinged on an ideological middle-ground where politicians jettisoned party labels and built new coalitions to appeal to centrist voters. Rather than embracing government centralization and revolutionary measures like emancipation, northern governors asked voters to accept these developments as temporary military necessities to save the Union. Understanding that non-voting groups, like recent immigrants, women, African-Americans, and soldiers in the field played important roles sustaining the war effort and influencing the electoral choices of voters, governors found ways to appeal to these constituents. Even as they were locked in electoral combat, governors promoted themselves as the most patriotic, non-partisan hands in which to entrust the imperiled Union.

Although governors are absent from much modern scholarship, contemporaries ranked them alongside generals and leading congressional politicians in terms of their contributions to the war effort. In 1860, the federal government did not possess the size, scope, or authority to wage war without the active participation of state governments. President Abraham Lincoln only expressed what all knew to be true when he told Governor Horatio Seymour of New York that the cooperation of the states was “indispensable” to saving the nation. Politically, governors figured as vital party leaders in a nineteenth-century party system where, as historian William E. Gienapp has argued, focusing on presidential politics “exaggerates the national cohesion and unity of parties at the expense of state and local variation and mutations.” During the war, fourteen men governed the six states examined here. All of their biographies are fleshed out in the course of this dissertation, but some deserve special introduction.³

³ Abraham Lincoln to Horatio Seymour, March 23, 1863, Lincoln Papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed online at www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/ [hereafter cited as Lincoln Papers]; William E. Gienapp, “‘Politics Seems to Enter Into Everything’: Political Culture in the North, 1840-1860,” in Stephen E. Maizlish and John Kushma, eds., *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1982), 48.

Andrew Curtin and John Albion Andrew led their respective states of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts for the entirety of the conflict, mobilizing two of the largest and wealthiest states in the Union. Politically, the radical Andrew and the conservative Curtin represented two ends of the flexible Republican wartime coalition. Ohio elected two former Democrats, David Tod and John Brough as their wartime Union Party governors. These men embodied the vital contribution that pre-war Democrats made to the centrist politics that sustained the Lincoln administration. Horatio Seymour won election as governor of New York in 1862 and from that point served as the most important Democrat in the nation. Seymour's campaign provides the best evidence for understanding the principles of the wartime Democratic Party and how, at times, they could appeal to elements of the national political center. Kentucky's Thomas Elliott Bramlette evinced the Unionism of those in the border states who became fierce political opponents of the president but, like Seymour, maintained their loyalty to the Union and to the war effort.

The importance of these individuals also lay in the overall contributions of the states they administered. Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, California, Pennsylvania, and Kentucky together provided 48% of the men who served in the Union army and 82% of the newspapers printed. They possessed 95% of the nation's bank deposits and contributed 88% of the nearly five million dollars raised by the United States Sanitary Commission. Politically, they made up 114 of the 213 electoral votes of states that remained in the Union.⁴

Historians' neglect of governors has left a distorted impression of wartime federalism. Heather Cox Richardson and Laura F. Edwards have both recently reiterated a longstanding consensus that the national government vastly expanded its powers during the war at the expense of the states and their

⁴ Bank deposits and newspaper numbers calculated from figures in the 1860 US census, Joseph C. G. Kennedy, *Preliminary Report on the Eighth Census, 1860* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1862), 322 accessed at www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860; Sanitary Commission figures from analysis of data in Charles J. Stillé, *History of the United States Sanitary Commission* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1866), 546-548.

listless governors. In fact, state constitutions and legislatures endowed governors with a host of additional wartime financial and legislative powers. Governors used these powers to mobilize their states for war and to lessen the burden of the conflict on their civilian populations. Much needed recent scholarship by William C. Harris, A. James Fuller, Richard F. Miller, and particularly Stephen D. Engle have acknowledged governors' critical contributions. As Engle writes, "Lincoln needed these chief executives more than they needed the president." Engle also makes the vital point, reinforced here, that governors served as "the Union's mainsprings of nationalism." In a federal Union, northerners frequently expressed their national loyalty through identification with and service to their state.⁵

This work goes beyond existing scholarship by delving deeper into governors' roles as politicians rather than as executives, in the process revealing a more complicated and strained relationship between the states and Washington. Governors were determined to aid Lincoln in waging war, but this would become impossible if they lost political support at home. Radicals like John Andrew challenged Lincoln to go further just as conservatives like Curtin urged him to slow down or hold steady. When faced with defending unpopular legislation, governors showed no qualms in criticizing elements of conscription or distancing themselves from the suspension of habeas corpus. Defending their independent authority, governors and their constituents recognized the need for Washington's remit to be enlarged temporarily, but few imagined this a precedent for a more active

⁵ Laura F. Edwards, *A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Nation of Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3; for discussion of governors' broad war powers and evidence of the wartime legislation enacted by state legislatures, see: any volume of the recent and excellent *States At War* collection, edited by Richard F. Miller and published by University of New England Press; William C. Harris, *Lincoln and the Union Governors* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013); A. James Fuller, *Oliver P. Morton and the Politics of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2017); Stephen D. Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation: Lincoln and the Union's War Governors* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 479. These insights on nationalism are an important complement to works on northern nationalism that overlook governors when describing a national identity that supplanted attachment to individual states; see Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Susan-Mary Grant, *North Over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000).

national government. Indeed, some governors assured voters that they could reconsider wartime policies in postwar elections, once the Union had been saved. President Lincoln understood that clashes over particular issues did not indicate opposition to the Union cause. Instead, they formed an essential component of a cooperative but contested federalism that demonstrated the survival of states' rights beliefs across the North.

Governors functioned as Lincoln's eyes and ears across the nation in an era when public opinion was hard to gauge. Governors had a larger constituency than congressmen and were more connected to the civilian population than senators. To mobilize their states for war, governors had to canvass the mood and opinions of the entire population, regardless of party affiliation. Men and women of all political persuasion flooded governors' offices with letters pertaining to practical concerns like the draft, economic conditions at home, or the welfare of loved ones in the Union army. This allowed state executives to hear from a broader, more representative portion of the population and encouraged them to advocate for everyone in their state who aided the war effort. Even when this led to conflict with Washington, the information governors conveyed to Lincoln provided the most accurate reading available of the pulse of the northern people.

Over the course of the war, Lincoln adopted many of the messages and strategies pioneered by prominent and powerful governors at the state level. By the time Lincoln won reelection in 1864 at the head of the National Union Party, he benefitted from a centrist coalition built across the states in gubernatorial elections over the previous four years. The political example set by governors—their skill at generating consensus—contributed significantly to Lincoln's own success.

Assessing the Civil War Party System

“Centrism” was not in the nineteenth century lexicon, but it provides a new lens through which to view and understand how both parties built wartime electoral majorities. Centrism involved different policies and rhetoric for Republicans and Democrats but, in both cases, it required finding formulas to keep the party base satisfied while appealing to wavering voters. The existence of a fluid center within

the North's political spectrum, comprised primarily of people who considered themselves "conservative," was the precondition for the success of centrist tactics. While not a majority in the North, conservatives commanded disproportionate influence because they held the balance of power in elections and because their weak partisan affiliations made them the most attainable of swing voters. As Adam I. P. Smith has written, conservatives inhabited "the space that everyone wanted to control in order to win elections."⁶

The conservative label applied to subsections of the Republican and Democratic parties and all unaffiliated former Whigs. Conservative Republicans tended to have begun as Whigs, joining the party late in the 1850s and often via Millard Fillmore's American Party. The most salient factor for wartime conservative Democrats was their fierce Unionism, which dictated their firm support of the war effort even when they criticized its handling. These Democrats grounded their response to secession in the memory of Andrew Jackson's handling of the Nullification Crisis and sometimes labelled themselves "true" Democrats to differentiate themselves from their extreme colleagues. The collapse of the Whig Party in the 1850s had happened against the will of many of its adherents and numerous former Whigs floated adrift between the two new parties. Although long-opposed to the tenets of Jacksonian Democracy, former Whigs watched as Stephen A. Douglas embraced the nationalistic economic improvement agenda of the Whig Party while also taking the compromise mantle of Henry Clay. Unionists above all else, these former Whigs looked askance at southern fire-eaters within the Democracy but still feared Republicans as cloaked abolitionists. Some would back John Bell in 1860, but many former conservative Whigs, even those who had moved tepidly into of the major parties, remained only loosely affiliated.⁷

⁶ Adam I.P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics, 1846-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 5.

⁷ Sarah Bischoff Paulus, "America's Long Eulogy for Compromise: Henry Clay and American Politics, 1864-58," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4 (March 2014): 41.

Whatever partisan allegiances had brought them to 1860, conservatives believed in the greatness of America in its current form, and abhorred all those – be they abolitionist or secessionist – who, conservatives alleged, schemed to destroy it under the pretense of perfecting it. When war began, conservatives supported a conflict solely for the purpose of restoring the Union. Believing in principles of moderation and compromise, conservatives often defined themselves in contrast to the perceived extremes of the political spectrum – radical Republicans and Peace Democrats – whom they derided as “extremists,” “fanatics,” “radicals,” or “ultras.” Within these commonalities, differences certainly existed: Republicans proved most able to accept emancipation, Democrats worried most fervently about increased infringements on civil liberties, and Whigs hoped throughout the war for the formation of a new conservative party (or the resurrection of their old one). Adam I. P. Smith’s recent work, *The Stormy Present*, is a brilliant exposition of the temper, priorities, and prejudices of conservatives along with the political significance of conservatism at the center of national politics. This work builds on Smith’s by explaining how centrism allowed both parties to beckon conservatives to their banner.⁸

Democrats

Scholarship on the Democrats has focused overwhelmingly on debating the party’s loyalty and cataloguing the extent of their racism.⁹ Such portrayals make it difficult to comprehend why so many

⁸ Smith, *The Stormy Present*. For a recent study of an archetypal conservative, see Matthew Mason, *Apostle of Union: A Political Biography of Edward Everett* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

⁹ Historian Jerome Mushkat characterized the traditional depiction of Democrats as “obstructionists and racists, who reacted to Republican-inspired policies on the basis of expediency” and who “often flirted with treason.” This view stood largely unchallenged until the 1950s when Frank L. Klement began to defend the fundamental loyalty of the party. Two influential works of the 1970s, by Jean H. Baker and Joel H. Silbey, continued to stress the respectability of Democrats and took seriously their traditions, principles, and policies. Recent studies by Jennifer Weber and Michael Landis have swung the pendulum back. Landis considers the northern Democratic Party of the 1850s to have been unabashedly pro-slavery and pro-southern. Analyzing the war years, Weber’s *Copperheads* argues that anti-war sentiment was widespread, profoundly threatening to the nation, and fostered by influential and numerous Peace Democrat politicians. In Robert M. Sandow’s words, Weber “reasserted the Republican paradigm of Democratic disloyalty.” A recent volume by Mark E. Neely Jr. has compellingly revisited the Democratic Party and will hopefully mark a steady move away from considering Democrats purely in terms of race and loyalty. Jerome Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy, 1861 – 1874* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981), 9; Frank L. Klement, *The Copperheads in the Middle West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998); Joel H.

northerners continued to vote Democratic. The labels War Democrat and Peace Democrat are common to virtually all of the existing literature, but contemporaries only began to use them with real frequency (and accuracy) after 1863. Even still, they remain problematic descriptors. Most Democrats identified themselves with the overarching cause of restoring the Union rather than by the advocacy of war or negotiation as the means of achieving that end. And while the vast majority of Democrats held deeply prejudiced views against African-Americans, more so than Republicans, most white northerners did not consider this relevant to the party's loyalty or as intrinsically an obstacle to voting Democratic. When we move beyond the critiques that Republicans leveled at Democrats, we gain a better sense of why the Democracy endured.

In 1862, when Lincoln's party seemed to be drifting towards radicalism, Horatio Seymour led the Democrats in employing centrist tactics that helped convince many northern conservatives that they offered the best chance of restoring the Union. Seymour outlined a vision of waging the war "in behalf of conservative men." While he assailed radical Republicans for undermining the war effort with their slavery obsession, he offered support to President Lincoln and pledged his party to "re-enforce our armies in the field." Seymour articulated four key components of Democratic ideology: the legitimacy of partisan opposition during wartime; that compromise could be an honorable, traditional, and patriotic course of action; that the nation needed a strict Jacksonian interpretation of the Constitution to protect liberty; and, most importantly, that the restoration of the Union had to be the first responsibility of every Democrat, achieved most likely through an overwhelming military effort

Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860 - 1868* (New York: Norton, 1977); Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Michael Todd Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014); Robert M. Sandow, "Damnable Treason or Party Organs? Democratic Secret Societies in Pennsylvania," in *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions about the Civil War-Era North*, eds. Andrew L. Slap and Michael Thomas Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 42; Mark E. Neely Jr., *Lincoln and the Democrats: The Politics of Opposition in the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017). For an insightful overview of this historiography, see Thomas E. Rodgers, "Copperheads or a Respectable Minority: Current Approaches to the Study of Civil War-Era Democrats," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 109 (June, 2013):114-146.

waged through conventional means. Salmon P. Chase captured how this Democratic message had reached conservatives when he wrote that “The party which now opposes the National Government is not in any just sense the Democratic party and ought not to be so called. It is simply the opposition, in which old Whigs, know-nothings, and Democrats unite to expel the Republicans from power.”¹⁰

Democratic success proved brief as the party failed to contain its extreme elements. A small minority of northern Democrats truly admired the South as epitomizing the ordered, agrarian civilization of the Founders and saw slavery as the most benign means of managing the presence in the United States of unwanted African-Americans. These men questioned the war from the outset. A much larger number of Democrats would sometimes ally with them out of doubt the war could be won or despair at the sacrifices involved. The pro-war stance taken by Seymour left these ultra-Democrats complaining that it was “the utmost nonsense... to cry out for a vigorous prosecution of the war, and yet expect to beat the party that is vigorously prosecuting it.” In the second half of the war, the determination of these extreme Democrats to push their increasingly anti-war agenda drove Democrats off the center ground and consigned the party to electoral defeat.¹¹

Historical assessments of the Democratic Party would also benefit from reexamining those Democrats, like Ohio governors David Tod and John Brough, who backed the Lincoln administration during the war. The following men are just some of the prominent individuals feted by the Union public for their wartime alliance with the Lincoln administration but who supported the Democrats in 1860: David Tod, John Brough, Benjamin F. Butler, Joseph Holt, John Conness, Stephen J. Field, John A. Dix, John Forney, John Cessna, John White Geary, William Sprague, Daniel S. Dickinson, and Andrew Johnson. Historians commonly refer to these men as Republicans even though most of them

¹⁰ William C Harris, “Conservative Unionists and the Presidential Election of 1864,” *Civil War History* 38 (December, 1992), 302.

¹¹ Thomas M. Cook and Thomas W. Knox, eds., *Public Record: Including Speeches, Messages, Proclamations, Official Correspondence, and Other Public Utterances of Horatio Seymour* (New York: I.W. England, 1868), 58 (hereafter cited as Cook and Knox, eds., *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*); James Wall to Samuel Barlow, Box 45, Samuel Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California [repository hereafter cited as HL].

explicitly denied they had switched partisan identity. As Daniel S. Dickinson said on the stump, “it is not Lincoln and the Republicans we are sustaining,” rather “it is the government of our fathers, worth just as much as if it was administered by Andrew Jackson.” These men often referred to themselves as “true Democrats,” and the possibility of acting again with the Democrats in the future remained in their mind. As late as 1864, John White Geary expressed his hope that “the day is not far distant when the true & pure democracy...will come forth unfettered & purified, into eternal youth like a Phoenix from the fire...then and then only will her gallant sons return to the fold.” Some of these men would return to the Democracy, some would become resolute Republicans. During the war, they acted with centrist Union parties and left open the question of their future partisan allegiance.¹²

Republican and Union Parties

The Republican Party was a broad church, but its wartime theology was more conservative than some recent portrayals have suggested.¹³ The party had a diverse following and at the most progressive end of the coalition, radical Republicans and abolitionists - black and white – were the heroes of the age. As Manisha Sinha, James Oakes, and others have shown, abolitionists and their allies had long worked to push their priorities to the fore and contributed immensely to the achievement of

¹² DeAlva Stanwood Alexander, *A Political History of the State of New York* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1906), 26; John White Geary to Mary Church Henderson, 24 October 1864, Geary Family Papers, Collection 2062, Volume 2, Letter Transcripts, 1859-1865, n.d., Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹³ In the first half of the twentieth-century, many historians vilified radical Republicans as dangerous extremists in near open war with Lincoln and the more conservative elements of the party. Eric Foner’s foundational 1970 work offered a needed corrective and began a trend of portraying a diverse but ideologically united organization. Since then, as Mark E. Neely has written, “with the agenda of the Radical Republicans – emancipation, African American soldiers, and confiscation – looking more attractive to modern historians, there has been a tendency to draw the president and the radical wing of his party closer together, and to contrast their ideology more sharply with that of the Democratic party.” This has arguably now gone too far, with the most influential recent work in this vein being James Oakes’ *Freedom National*, which depicts a cohesive Republican juggernaut barreling deliberately towards emancipation from even before they took office, a notion shared by Adam Goodheart. Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Mark E. Neely, “Politics Purified: Religion and the Growth of Antislavery Idealism in Republican Ideology During the Civil War,” in *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans’ First Generation*, eds. Robert F. Engs and Randall M. Miller (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 105–6; James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861–1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013); Adam Goodheart, *1861: The Civil War Awakening* (New York: Knopf, 2011).

emancipation. But these activists' lucid indictments of slavery and race prejudice put them well ahead of most mid-nineteenth-century Americans. Ultimately, to place emancipation (and much else) in legislative concrete, it required majority support from the northern populace. Stump speeches, political pamphlets, and political strategizing all demonstrate that politicians expended great effort to find ways to claim that the actions they took owed little or nothing to the agendas and priorities of radicals. Many radicals understood this. Governor John Andrew's wartime career, in particular, demonstrates his determination to further radical ends, but also his willingness to use conservative means and justifications.¹⁴

The great strength of the Republican movement lay in its flexibility, often taking different ideological and organizational forms in each state. Outside of New England and Congress—where radical Republicans controlled several key committees—the party's driving force often came from moderates or conservatives. Eric Foner argued that the Republican ideology of 1860 “provided the moral consensus which allowed the North, for the first time in history, to mobilize an entire society in modern warfare.” But the northern consensus behind the war crossed party lines and cannot be equated to a Republican Party that secured only 54% of the 1860 northern vote. Still only six years old when the war began, Republicanism remained malleable and this primed some Republicans to accept, and others to advocate for, the transformation of their movement into wartime Union parties.¹⁵

State level Union parties, organizations that culminated in the National Union Party of 1864, were the institutional vehicles that allowed centrism to flourish. Republicans represented the largest subset of the membership of Union parties, but their great success came in incorporating wavering Democrats and unaffiliated conservatives. As Michael F. Holt has written, historians have commonly dismissed the formation of Union parties as “a transparently cosmetic attempt by cynical Republicans to lure gullible Democrats and Unionists.” But state level Union parties began forming in 1861 and

¹⁴ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 10.

their success resulted in only two of the nine governors elected or re-elected during the conflict being at the head of a Republican Party ticket. Expanding the Republican appeal and membership, Union parties were the war's most electorally successful organizations.¹⁶

Union parties sought to redraw partisan lines by harnessing as a political movement the bipartisan support for the Union war effort. Gary W. Gallagher and Elizabeth R. Varon, among other scholars, have reminded us why “Union” served as the most emotive word in the nineteenth-century American lexicon. As this dissertation shows, Unionism came in many shades, but governors appealed to those elements most universally celebrated by the populace of the Civil War North. Governors invoked the founding generation who had inaugurated the fragile experiment that now hung in the balance. Americans had enjoyed unprecedented levels of economic opportunity, social mobility, and political participation in a system of self-government that served as a beacon for democracy in a Western world made dark by the tyrannical monarchies of Europe. Such sentiments, which underpinned support for the war, resounded in the private diaries of soldiers and civilians just as loudly as in the stump speeches of Union politicians. Despite these shared beliefs, the Union population disagreed on much else and the war brought transformations to northern society that would highlight divisions and strain the basis of popular backing for the Union cause.¹⁷

Union governors worked hard to elide differences within their diverse coalitions by emphasizing “military necessity” as the basis to back policies that served patriotism not party. A Democratic newspaper revealed the effectiveness of this strategy when it complained their opponents

¹⁶ Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 338, 330.

¹⁷ For the significance of Union before and during the war, see Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); and Rogan Kersh, *Dreams of a More Perfect Union* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001). Kersh distinguishes between those who argued for a “moral” Union—purged of the sin of slavery—and those who stressed a “sustainable” one. Abolitionists and radical Republicans pioneered arguments for a more moral Union but most northerners, including most governors, stressed a “sustainable” Union that represented, in and of itself, the highest moral cause.

were “mute as mice upon the subject of the Tariff, the question of emancipation and negro equality, the suppression of free speech and the press, arbitrary arrests, &c.” To demonstrate the unimportance of differences of opinion on policy, Union parties elected many loyal non-Republicans to wartime office, a strategy that culminated in 1864 with the consequential decision to replace Hannibal Hamlin with Andrew Johnson as Lincoln’s running mate. These centrist tactics left radical Republicans disgruntled as they watched Union parties downplay measures they wished to celebrate and raise up individuals whom they distrusted. Even so, men like Governor Andrew understood that emancipation represented a radical achievement, however politicians justified it, and that, outside of New England, a pure appeal to Republicanism would jeopardize the electoral coalitions sustaining the war effort. Radicals stayed on board; recognizing that they could welcome the direction of travel if not the speed or the vehicle.¹⁸

As their appeals to patriotism suggest, Union parties took full advantage of the militarization of wartime politics. From Fort Sumter onwards, every politician sought to wrap himself in the flag. Alliance with the troops became a centrist position with the potential to broaden a party’s base. Numerous Union party governors adopted the moniker “the Soldier’s Friend” as they sought to make supporting the Union army a governing mantra and political slogan. In a common tactic, Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania campaigned frequently alongside Democratic soldiers to thunder home the message that voting for his Union Party demonstrated loyalty to the nation rather than any temporary or permanent allegiance to the Republican Party. This approach sought to squeeze the space in which Democrats could loyally oppose Union parties. Soldiers willingly played their part. The troops especially detested “Copperheads” and they published resolutions and mock votes in newspapers to make civilians aware of their electoral preferences. During Ohio’s 1863 gubernatorial contest, soldiers even sent nooses to known Copperheads at home. The sometimes troubling blending of the military

¹⁸ *Lancaster Intelligencer* (PA), August 25, 1863.

and the political realms paid great dividends for Union parties in the form of thousands of Democratic soldiers who voted consistently against their party allegiance throughout the war.¹⁹

Lincoln shared the centrist inclinations of the governors and, together, their deft handling of wartime politics held together a remarkably broad coalition – from Charles Sumner to Andrew Johnson. The president tacked between the wings of his party, carefully calibrating how to generate consensus but, for much of the war, people saw the president as closer to conservatives than radicals. Lincoln’s genuine convictions probably led him to take great care to defend the constitutionality and military necessity of his actions, but these conservative justifications also represented sound politics. While he would face fire from both flanks of his coalition, Lincoln secured reelection at the head of the National Union Party that delivered him over 400,000 more votes than four years earlier.

The accomplishments of centrist Union parties shed light on two longstanding debates about the stability of the party system and the degree to which partisanship aided or undermined the Union cause. For many years, scholars argued for continuity in partisan formation and voting patterns throughout the Civil War and Reconstruction.²⁰ This was only possible by conflating the various

¹⁹ William Lewis Young, “Soldier Voting in Ohio During the Civil War” (M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 1948), 42. The sometimes troubling ways that Union parties and the Lincoln administration mobilized the army for political ends are expanded on in chapter three and have also been addressed by a number of recent scholarly works. For examples, see William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 160-235; Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Union Divided*, 41-47; Timothy J. Orr, “‘A Viler Enemy in Our Rear’: Pennsylvania Soldiers Confront the North’s Antiwar Movement,” in *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Aaron Sheehan Dean (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 171-198.

²⁰ A wave of quantitative “new political history” scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s asserted that the Third Party System of ascendant Republicans versus Democrats began in 1854 and that “realignment was completed in the northern states by 1860.” Some acknowledged that “elections during the war and Reconstruction were marked by considerable fluctuation in partisan support” but still saw this as an unstable structure rather than one still in formation. See Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 17; Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 76; Thomas B. Alexander, “The Dimensions of Voter Partisan Constancy in Presidential Elections from 1840-1860,” in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1982), 70-121. Even Joel H. Silbey’s otherwise excellent study of the

“Union,” “People’s,” and “Opposition” parties with Republicans and Democrats. This would have astonished contemporaries as the range of party labels reflected real uncertainty over which political coalitions would last, what their membership would be, and what principles they would articulate. Analysis by Michael Holt reveals that only 58% of congressional races in 1862 were Republican versus Democrat, falling to 19.6% in 1863, and even further in 1864 when 83% of races now registered as Union versus Democrat.²¹ Even more than statistics, the anecdotal evidence from newspapers, diaries, and letters makes clear that people understood themselves to be in an era of bewildering political uncertainty. The New York *World* captured a common feeling when they wrote that the “sword of war has severed, deep and final, old party lines.” Statistically, most voters kept to their prior party affiliation, but in a competitive electoral landscape, the significant minority who switched made the difference.²²

Governors’ careers also illuminate whether partisan competition provided a safe outlet for dissent or whether it caused politicians to dangerously rile up the populace as they placed political gain above disinterested patriotism. This debate began with Eric L. McKittrick’s famous essay positing that the maintenance of competitive elections in the Union gave them an advantage over the Confederacy. Mark E. Neely Jr. has strongly rejected this notion and recently taken solace that the “nonpartisan realm” managed to stay free of the “bickering habits of politicians” in order to save the nation “*despite* politics.” Neely is right that, at times, politicians harped irresponsibly. But, on the other hand,

Democratic Party claims that “By 1860 the electorate had become locked in” and “voting behavior became entirely predictable.” Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, 157.

²¹ Michael F. Holt, “A Moving Target: President Lincoln Confronts a Two-Party System Still in the Making,” paper delivered to the Annual Symposium of the Abraham Lincoln Association, February 2004, 2. For others who argue for a landscape in flux, see Adam I.P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6; Neely, *The Union Divided*.

²² *New York World*, September 6, 1862. Recent insights in political science concerning the role of emotions in voting affirm why it should be no surprise that the Civil War party system experienced such volatility. Studies on “affective intelligence” have shown that in times of crisis (such as the Civil War), anxiety weakens party attachment and intensifies the scrutiny of candidates, thereby increasing the number of swing voters. See W. Russell Neuman et. al., *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

examining Union governors demonstrates that politicians also took a central role in much of the supposedly apolitical mobilization on the northern home front that Neely praises. Governors worked with bureaucrats and elected officials to devise innovative state welfare systems to provide for soldiers and their families as well as standing at the apex of the vast private benevolence effort. Governors gave speeches at sanitary fairs and helped support and promote numerous institutions, often founded and run by women, that worked to feed, clothe, and care for the soldiers of the Union army. Politicians' denunciations of one another on the stump could be vicious, but they represented genuine differences of opinion as often as cynical politicking. Politics always involves trade-offs and partisanship and patriotism cannot be separated cleanly. On balance, the democratic process helped sustain the Civil War North and reminded citizens that they fought to preserve self-government.²³

Partisanship should also appear less damaging given how both parties adhered to the principle of a peaceful transition of power. When a Democrat, Horatio Seymour, became the governor of the nation's most important state at a critical moment when military fortunes had plummeted, Republicans and Unionists accepted the electorate's judgment. Even during the most vitriolic campaigns, Lincoln's opponents reiterated that change could only come through the lawful means of self-government. Kentucky's Governor Bramlette reminded his audiences that the "evils in legislation" could only be remedied by "the peaceful medium of the ballot-box." As New York's Governor Seymour averred, a clear difference existed between the Union and the Confederacy, since rebels "have not contented

²³ Eric L. McKittrick, "Party Politics and the Union and Confederate War Efforts," in *The American Party Systems: Stages of Political Development*, eds. William Nisbet Chambers and Walter Dean Burnham (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 117-151. All quotations from Neely, *Lincoln and the Democrats*, 10-11. For Neely's longer dismissal of Eric McKittrick's argument that the North benefited from party politics serving as a healthy outlet for dissent, see Neely, *The Union Divided*. These findings also speak to questions over how all-encompassing politics was in the nineteenth century and whether elections hinged on turning out an electorate composed of generally ignorant but highly partisan voters or whether an informed citizenry carefully weighed politicians' rhetoric and policy. There is undoubtedly truth in both interpretations, which need not be incompatible, but my arguments clearly lean toward the latter perspective. For this debate, see the contributions in Glenn C. Altschuler, Jean H. Baker, Norman Basch, Stuart M. Blumin, and Harry L. Watson in "Political Engagement and Disengagement in Antebellum America: A Round Table," *Journal of American History* 84 (Dec.1997), 855-909.

themselves with the ballot, but have chosen the bayonet and the bullet,” and “with the bayonet and the bullet we must meet them.” Seymour laid bare why every competitive election in the Union rebuked secession.²⁴

A Story of the Middle

This narrative moves year-by-year through the conflict, emphasizing the profound contingency and high-stakes of politics in the Civil War North. Chapter one provides political overviews of the six states and, through snapshots of the state level parties during 1860, identifies the roots of the wartime ideological center. Republicans had spent the years since 1856 diversifying their policy priorities and membership to distance themselves from anti-slavery radicalism and appeal to the northern conservatives vital for a presidential victory. Northern Democrats broke unceremoniously from their southern colleagues and from James Buchanan and his followers in the North. Although they differed on much, northern Democrats and Republicans shared a reverence for the Union and for the principles of self-government, leading them to utterly reject the notion that the outcome of a free and fair election could justify secession.

Chapter two looks at how these convictions fueled an overwhelming popular desire for non-partisan support of the war effort. Most northerners judged that disunion and war demonstrated a failing of the political system to contain extremist elements. Now, the populace desired a politics built around the ties that bound them together. Focusing on elections in California and Ohio, I demonstrate how these sentiments produced genuinely new party organizations – drawn from Republicans, Democrats, and unaffiliated conservative voters – that would achieve remarkable electoral results and lay the foundation for the success of centrist, coalition politics throughout the war. The most dramatic success came in California where the Union Party’s fusion of Republicans and Douglas Democrats

²⁴ Speech of Gov. Bramlette, McClellan Ratification meeting at Frankfort, September 19, 1864, Thomas E. Bramlette Official Documents as Governor of Kentucky, 1863-1867, Kentucky Department of Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky, 4, 8; Horatio Seymour, October 22, 1862 in Cook and Knox, eds., *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 84.

transformed Lincoln's 32.3% of the vote in 1860 into 46% for Leland Stanford in 1861 and 59% for Frederick F. Low by 1863. Although they suffered significant defections in 1861, the Democratic Party did not disband, running in elections without meaningfully opposing the administration.

Chapter three moves to New York and Massachusetts to examine the resumption of partisan competition, which resulted in dramatic Democratic gains in the 1862 mid-term elections. Typically interpreted simply as a backlash against emancipation and stalled military progress, I argue that these elections should also be seen as an endorsement of an alternative vision for vigorously waging the war. With the failure of the Peninsula Campaign, radical Republicans pushed through a series of measures that ended the conservative consensus of 1861. These steps seemed to endorse the agenda of radicals and they brought no immediate upturn in military fortunes. Conservative voters flocked to Democrats' advocacy of a renewed war effort but fought only by conventional means. In New York, Horatio Seymour won the governorship and in Massachusetts, radical John Andrew faced a challenge from a newly formed People's Party of Democrats and conservative Republicans. An astute politician in a solidly Republican state, Andrew easily won reelection, but the challenge he faced and the reduced majority he received demonstrated the local manifestation of a national trend.

Chapter four examines gubernatorial contests in Pennsylvania and Kentucky to demonstrate how fortunes reversed in 1863, as the emergence of a minority of vocal peace-advocating Democrats crippled the party's loyalty credentials. Union parties took advantage by learning from their defeats and finding ways to cast the war's revolutionary measures in a conservative light, explaining that they accepted emancipation and other wartime legislation as temporary "military necessities." Pennsylvania's Andrew Curtin had never run as a Republican and engaged in limited but public disputes with the Lincoln administration. Curtin damned Copperheads as traitors and asked voters not to endorse party but simply "Our Country, Right or Wrong." Kentucky revealed the toxicity of peace Democrats even in a border state where a large majority of the voters opposed Lincoln and reviled

emancipation. Thomas Bramlette won an overwhelming victory for Kentucky's Union Party by damning secessionists, radical Republicans, and Peace Democrats alike.

Chapter five offers a new perspective on the presidential election of 1864 by elucidating the ways that the campaign represented the culmination of a centrist politics pioneered by governors across the Union in the preceding three years. With General George Brinton McClellan heading their ticket and questions of reconstruction prominent in voters' minds, Democrats had reasons to be confident. But an armistice plank adopted at a convention held at the nadir of northern morale left the party hamstrung when Union armies seized Atlanta and cleared the Shenandoah Valley. Lincoln could take advantage so effectively because of his own position as the candidate of a National Union Party that emerged as the natural culmination of Union parties at the state level. Lincoln and his expanded party chose a southern Democrat for vice-president and played down emancipation in a campaign overwhelmingly focused on restoration of the Union through military victory.

A short epilogue reminds us that the National Union Party endured. Under the leadership of Abraham Lincoln, it might have permanently replaced the Republican Party. Instead, as the 1866 National Union Convention showed, the movement imploded under the direction of President Andrew Johnson.

With broader constituencies and responsibilities that kept them closer to the pulse of the people, governors catered to the mass of people in the middle of the political spectrum commonly overlooked by historians. The relatively unwavering progressive principles of abolitionists and radicals make them worthy heroes to twenty-first century observers. Copperheads attract scholarly attention as the pantomime villains of the era, uttering unqualified racist and anti-war sentiments. The majority who existed in-between these poles are harder to pin down. Their opinions seem more malleable and they prioritized concepts we struggle to relate to, like Union, above questions of race and slavery. They sound appealing one minute and damnable the next. The extreme wings of northern sentiment

undeniably shaped events but, when it came to trying to secure public assent for their causes, they had to gain the backing of the far larger number of people who congregated in the messy, complicated, fluctuating middle. The political center as it had taken shape during the war years collapsed by 1866 and historians have never given its short life the consideration it merits. This work attempts to understand the beliefs and goals of those inhabiting the broad center of northern politics.

Chapter One

1856-1860: Centrist Roots in Northern Politics

Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party won every northern state in the 1860 presidential election. This was a remarkable achievement and superficially suggested that Lincoln possessed all the support he required in the event of a sectional war. But northern voters in 1860 had not cast ballots in favor of war, to end slavery, or to offer their wholehearted backing for any of the revolutionary changes that lay ahead. Indeed, the day after Lincoln's victory Charles Francis Adams Sr. – a strongly anti-slavery Republican from Massachusetts – wrote in his diary that “the great revolution has actually taken place...the country has once and for all thrown off the domination of the Slaveholders.” Adams captured the Republicans' astonishing achievement and its limitations. A consensus behind ejecting the Slave Power from Washington was very different to a consensus in favor of attacking slavery where it existed. Examining how the Republicans built their 1860 majority across the states reveals the roots of the political center in the Civil War North, but also the profound challenges Lincoln and the governors would face trying to hold that center together during the war years.¹

Acknowledging variation across each individual state, two clear trends stand out in northern politics on the eve of war. In most places, Republican parties had become more inclusive ideologically and organizationally since 1856, tempering their focus and rhetoric on slavery to incorporate former Know-Nothings and Whigs. Conservative additions to their ranks had made the party, overall, more centrist within the full spectrum of northern opinion. Democrats had split unceremoniously. The

¹ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 223.

Douglas wing of the party had undeniably moved toward the northern center, closer to the Republican Party on slavery as well as the tariff and several pieces of free labor legislation.²

This chapter will demonstrate these trends by providing brief political histories and snapshots of the 1860 election in Massachusetts, Ohio, New York, Pennsylvania, California, and Kentucky. The introductions to each state's political culture are essential to grasping the critical role that northern governors would play as formulators of party policy and ideology during the war. Governors' unique task was to look both inward and outward: serving the particular needs of providing for and winning elections in their home constituency, while also contributing to the national requirements of waging war. Documenting governors' pre-war careers and recreating the political milieus from which they emerged contextualizes their personal and public journeys. The late antebellum history of these states reveals that while much stood between Republicans and Democrats in the North, they also shared some vital common principles. After reflecting on each state, it becomes clear that, below the many party differences in 1860, most northerners shared a profound allegiance to the Union, an antipathy to the Slave Power, and a commitment to the democratic process. This was vital common ground later during the Civil War.

The limited convergence that took place in antebellum northern politics developed from convictions and beliefs but also from calculations about where the balance of power lay in northern electoral politics following the 1856 presidential election. Republican candidate John C. Frémont won

² Michael F. Holt has recently pinpointed a different issue, corruption of the Buchanan administration, as central to the Republican campaign in 1860. Republican indictments of Buchanan were certainly ubiquitous in the North and they allowed Republicans to focus on a man who was unrepresentative of the mass of northern Democrats who supported Stephen Douglas. This Republican tactic relied on eliding the space between Buchanan and Douglas. Much to his chagrin, Douglas had never had the opportunity to use or abuse the presidency. On corruption, as on slavery, the tariff, homestead bills, and internal improvements, Republicans set up Buchanan as their foil rather than Douglas to present voters a clearer contrast between their party and the Democracy. Michael F. Holt, *The Election of 1860: "A Campaign Fraught with Consequences"* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017),

eleven of sixteen northern states, losing only California, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey.³ That Frémont came so close has led many historians to attach a sense of inevitability to the Republican victory in 1860. Common accounts maintain that the election “hinged on the states which Frémont had failed to carry – New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois,” and add that, in fact, Republicans needed to only carry Pennsylvania and one of Indiana or Illinois to take the White House. But this math distorts the task that Republicans faced.⁴

Frémont won eleven states because he competed in a three-way race in which Millard Fillmore, the American Party candidate, secured just shy of 400,000 northern votes. The last Whig president Fillmore’s support came from conservative former Whigs and Know-Nothings and helped him receive 33% of the vote in California, 24% in New Jersey, 21% in New York, 18% in Pennsylvania, 16% in Illinois, 10% in Indiana, 10% in Iowa, and 7% in Ohio. These states made up 124 of the 181 electoral votes in the North and if Fillmore’s conservative support went uniformly to the Democrats in 1860, the Republicans would lose every one of those states, even if they maintained their 1856 share of the vote. These facts ensured that securing the support of northern conservatives constituted the critical task for both parties during the four years between 1856 and 1860.⁵

The priorities of these Fillmore voters would help shape the direction of both parties in the late antebellum years. Although the American Party emerged as the formalization of the Know-Nothing

³ Adam I.P. Smith has recently put forth this idea of convergence in relation to popular sovereignty as a means to realize a northern anti-slavery common to both parties. Adam I.P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics, 1846-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 100-134. Michael Holt has also talked about how some Republicans flirted with popular sovereignty as a means to ensure freedom in the very late 1850s. See Holt, *The Election of 1860*, 25.

⁴Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 216. For another influential example of explanations citing only the need to add Pennsylvania and either Indiana or Illinois, see James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 216.

⁵ These figures obviously do not account for new voters. Elements of the Republican campaign not dealt with here, but tackled ably by other historians, helped Republicans to appeal to many young and new voters. This did not negate the importance of the conservative constituency. For the role of young people in the Republican campaign, see Jon Grinspan, “‘Young Men for War’: The Wide Awakes and Lincoln’s 1860 Presidential Campaign,” *The Journal of American History* 96 (September 2009): 357-378.

movement, by 1860, as Tyler Anbinder argues, the American voters who backed Fillmore had “become synonymous with conservatism, not nativism.”⁶ Anbinder identifies three priorities, the order of which varied from state to state: nativism; the tariff; and, most importantly, a mild anti-slavery. These priorities complemented each other in the minds of northern conservatives. A Pennsylvania congressman’s call in 1858 for “protection for everything American against everything foreign” demonstrated how politicians blended nativism and protection. On the question of slavery, Stephen E. Maizlish and William E. Gienapp have shown how nativism and anti-slavery similarly allied since American Party voters believed that the Pope and the Slave Power both required hierarchical despotisms that posed a “threat to republican government.”⁷ Even so, the anti-slavery of Fillmore voters was mild, imbued with prejudice, and rejected all extreme opinions on race and slavery as threatening to law, order, and the constitution. Most American Party voters wanted no interference with or extension of the peculiar institution and, above all, they believed that protecting the national Union dwarfed any questions relating to slavery.

In the years immediately after their 1856 defeat, Republicans worked hard to bring former Fillmore voters into their party and in 1860 nominated a candidate with conservative appeal. While there is no doubt Lincoln objected to slavery morally as well as economically, he used his famous Cooper Union speech in February of 1860 to moderate his reputation. Lincoln vowed that Republicans shared the beliefs of the Founders and bore no desire to interfere with slavery in the states where it had constitutional sanction. Historians have differed on where Lincoln really stood within the party, but most contemporary observers looked at his birth in Kentucky, his upbringing in the West, and his

⁶ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know-Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 266, 264.

⁷ Stephen E. Maizlish, “The Meaning of Nativism and the Crisis of the Union: The Know-Nothing Movement in the Antebellum North,” in Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma, eds., *Essays on Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860* (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1982), 173. Maizlish rightly critiques Eric Foner’s claims that Republican ideology naturally rejected nativism; William E. Gienapp, “Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority,” *Journal of American History* 72 (December 1985): 552.

Whig past and felt sure he was no radical. California Republican Cornelius Cole considered Lincoln “a little more conservative, and less obnoxious to the prejudices of the people on the slavery question than Mr. Seward.” In the Mid-West, Lincoln’s former Whig colleague, R.W. Thompson, felt assured that his old friend would run a “Conservative and national administration.” Even leading New York Democrat Samuel L. M. Barlow wrote to the proslavery senator James Bayard Jr. informing him of his confidence that, if elected, Lincoln “will be conservative.” Regardless of exactly where Lincoln stood, his nomination was designed to shore up crucial conservative constituencies.⁸

On the Democratic side, Stephen A. Douglas’ dramatic break with James Buchanan and his southern allies in 1858 moved him toward the center of northern opinion and raise the possibility of competing with Republicans for the conservative middle. Douglas had distanced himself from the perceived grasp of the Slave Power and from a tainted and loathed president. But it was still a challenge to appeal to northern voters tired of a southern-dominated Democracy. Long ridiculed for his burning presidential ambitions, Douglas is shown in the *Vanity Fair* cartoon in Figure 1 struggling to keep control of all the snakes (parties and factions) he now sought to embrace. While it mocked the Little Giant, the depiction still acknowledged his attempts to appeal across party lines and reflected the reality that Douglas helped shift the policy stances of northern Democrats closer to unaffiliated voters. While Lincoln swept the electoral college, many of his margins within the North were small and

⁸ For a brief discussion of varying interpretations of Lincoln, see Michael S. Green, *Lincoln and the Election of 1860* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2011), ix, x and for further discussion of his choice in 1860 and whether he was seen internally and externally as a radical, see Foner, *Free Soil*, 214 and Holt, *The Election of 1860*, 92-93; Cornelius Cole, *Memoirs of Cornelius Cole: Ex-Senator of the United States from California* (New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1908), 140; Richard W. Thompson to Abraham Lincoln, June 12, 1860, Lincoln Papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed online at www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/ [hereafter cited as Lincoln Papers]; Bayard to Barlow, October 12, 1860, Folder 12, Box 31, James Bayard letters, HL. For discussion of Lincoln’s Cooper Union speech, see Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 333-334. Lincoln also benefited from being seen as less obnoxious to former Americans than Seward because he had not taken as public a stance in opposition to Know-Nothingism.

Republicans dropped eight seats in the House of Representatives from 1858. Politics in the northern states remained competitive.

Surveying the states shows that Lincoln's victories rested on a conservative articulation of the Republican Party's message and ambitions that suited the antebellum years but presented profound challenges to wartime governance. The policy mandate provided to Republicans in 1860 bore only minimal resemblance to the policies that the exigencies of war would force Lincoln to embrace. And soon enough, the president would find himself overseeing four border states where he had received precious few votes. To understand the full spectrum of Union politics from which wartime coalitions had to be built, the states are arranged here along a continuum from the most solidly Republican – Massachusetts – to the least – Kentucky – where Republicanism had no foothold, but Unionism would nonetheless tie the state to Lincoln's war effort. After reflecting on each of these states, it will become clear why Republicans would struggle to transform their pre-war ascendancy into a wartime coalition.



Figure 1: "Our Political Snake-Charmer," *Vanity Fair*, February 11, 1860.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts was one of the most urban and industrialized states with the highest population density. Boston was by far the biggest city and a major international port, ranking fifth nationally with a population of 177,840, but much smaller cities like Lowell, New Bedford, Lawrence and Worcester still housed important manufacturing and industry. The state lay behind only New York for banking and insurance, led the nation in cotton and wool manufactures, and ranked in the top five states in

heavy industries such as ship building, iron founding, steam engines, and printing. A population of 1.23 million drove this economy, of which 21% were foreign-born, as high as 36% in Boston. The Irish constituted the largest contingent, making up 185,434 out of the 260,114 persons born outside of the United States. Just under 10,000 African-Americans lived in the state, making up less than 1% of the total population. While commentators caricatured the Bay State politically as a hotbed of radical Republicanism and abolitionism by the eve of war, conservative Whigs had dominated until the 1850s.⁹

Massachusetts never backed a Democratic candidate for president before the Civil War. The Whig Party held a vice grip on the state's politics through such luminaries as Robert C. Winthrop, Rufus Choate, Abbot Lawrence, and Daniel Webster. While many conservative Whig leaders held mildly anti-slavery views, they placed little weight on the issue, many benefited financially from slavery through ownership or investment in Massachusetts' thriving textile mills, and they consistently proved willing to placate the South rather than endanger the Union. Tensions grew between these conservative "Cotton Whigs" and their younger, more anti-slavery "Conscience Whig" colleagues, men like Charles Francis Adams Sr., Henry Wilson, and Charles Sumner. This friction exploded with the nomination for president in 1848 of the military hero and slave-owning southerner, Zachary Taylor. Conscience Whigs broke away to unite with anti-slavery Democrats to create a national Free Soil Party ticket, nominating Martin Van Buren for president and Charles Francis Adams as his running mate. Outrage at the Compromise of 1850 and Daniel Webster's prominent defense of it permanently severed Conscience Whigs from the party in Massachusetts and solidified the Free Soil fusion. Webster derided the inflexibility of radicals who "deal with morals as with mathematics," but his own state increasingly leaned towards men like Sumner who damned the 1850 Compromise as an unholy

⁹ Richard F. Miller, ed., *States at War, Volume 1: A Reference Guide for Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont in the Civil War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2013), 244-251.

alliance between “the Lords of the Lash and the Lords of the Loom.” In a major coup that appalled conservatives, the Free Soil alliance managed to wrest control of the state legislature and send the firebrand Sumner to fill Webster’s vacated Senate seat in 1851.¹⁰

The contours of Massachusetts politics shifted again when Know-Nothings swept to power in 1854. Know-Nothingism found dramatic success and while it elevated conservatives such as Henry J. Gardner to the governorship, the movement also included more anti-slavery figures like Free-Soiler Henry Wilson and former Democrat Nathaniel P. Banks. The Know-Nothings gained support from new voters agitated by immigration and opportunists among the Cotton Whigs and Free-Soilers. The Know-Nothing legislature made some anti-immigrant noise, but also passed a personal liberty law and attempted to remove a judge who ordered the return of a fugitive slave. By 1856, the Republican Party was rapidly gaining strength but could not afford to alienate the Know-Nothings and instead cut a deal. To secure Know-Nothing support for John Frémont rather than American Party candidate Millard Fillmore in the presidential race, Republicans agreed to re-elect American Henry Gardner as governor. Both won comfortably, although Gardner ran 15,000 votes behind Frémont. In 1857, Republicans felt strong enough to stand alone and elected as governor Nathaniel P. Banks, a conservative Republican only recently joined from the Know-Nothings, in a three-way race ahead of the incumbent Gardner and Democrat Erasmus D. Beach.¹¹

While Banks’s election placed the state in Republican Party control, it brought only moderate satisfaction to the strong anti-slavery men who wanted a purer organization. Banks remained governor until 1860 and oversaw a period of conservative Republican success. Banks’ former American Party colleagues complained that Republicans now abandoned their cry of “no more slave states” and begun

¹⁰ Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 25; Thomas H. O’Connor, *Lords of the Loom: The Cotton Whigs and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner & Sons, 1968), 81, 58-92.

¹¹ O’Connor, *Lords of the Loom*, 118-121; Edith Ellen Ware, *Political Opinion in Massachusetts During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916), 15-22; Maizlish, “The Meaning of Nativism,” 181-2.

“stealing all our American doctrines.” In 1858, Banks urged an amendment to the Massachusetts constitution that forced immigrants to undergo a two year wait after they received citizenship before they could vote in the Commonwealth. Banks later backtracked somewhat, but the measure passed the legislature twice before gaining public approval in a very low-turnout referendum. Widely attacked across the North, the pro-immigration plank in the 1860 Republican national platform aimed to deliberately rebuke Massachusetts. As well as pandering to Americans, Banks angered radicals by vetoing a bill removing the word “white” from the state’s militia laws.¹²

Rivalling Banks’s faction for the soul of the Republican movement was the powerful organization of radical Republicans known as the Bird Club. Beginning around 1850, leading anti-slavery figures began taking weekly meals at the house of Francis William “Frank” Bird. Appalled at the pandering to nativism of fellow Republicans, Bird had bemoaned that “when one has learned to discriminate between a native and a foreigner, it becomes easy to discriminate between a white man and a [N]egro.” Charles Sumner was the most notable member of the Bird Club and epitomized the group’s desire to ensure the Republican Party served as an uncompromised vehicle concentrated solely on opposition to slavery and the Slave Power. Inviting conservatives and nativists into the party sanctum could only damage the righteousness of their cause. When Banks announced his intention not to run again in 1860, the Bird Club moved quickly to secure the governorship for one of their own, John A. Andrew.¹³

Andrew served as governor throughout the war, winning reelection every year from 1860 through 1864. Born in 1818 in Windham, Massachusetts, Andrew lost his mother at age fourteen. He received a classical education at a private academy before attending Bowdoin College where his involvement with the Anti-Slavery Society began a lifelong investment in reform causes. Admitted to

¹² O’Connor, *Lords of the Loom*, 128; Henry Greenleaf Pearson, *The Life of John A. Andrew, Governor of Massachusetts, 1861-1865*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1904), 117.

¹³ Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 47; David Herbert Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1960), 304.

the bar in 1840, Andrew quickly garnered a reputation for representing those in greatest need, from women in divorce cases to fugitive slaves. Andrew served on the Boston Vigilance Committees of 1846 and 1850 that helped protect escaped slaves and moved many to safe harbor in Canada or England. A conscience Whig and then Free Soiler, Andrew was a founding member of the Bird Club. Dismayed by the alliance with Know-Nothings, Andrew stayed aloof from the Republican organization in 1855 and 1856, but his reputation burgeoned when serving in the state legislature in the late 1850s. A gifted orator, Andrew led the anti-slavery response to Democrat Caleb Cushing's attacks on the state's personal liberty laws and his defense of the *Dred Scott* decision. Tall but stout, bespectacled, with large blond curls and a voice described as "high and penetrating," Andrew did not conform to the contemporary image of the statesman. Common to his time, Andrew did not value brevity or concision in his letters or speeches and employed a style his biographer kindly deemed "exhaustive." But his audiences responded to a magnetism borne of Andrew's zeal and unwavering confidence in the anti-slavery cause. While he never defended the violence John Brown hoped to unleash, Andrew willingly courted controversy by helping secure legal aid for Brown and asserting on the stump that in his beliefs rather than his actions, "John Brown himself is right." In states of the lower North, Andrew's involvement with Brown would have disqualified him from office, but in Massachusetts it drew as many admirers as enemies.¹⁴

While Sumner and Andrew had taken control of the Republican Party in Massachusetts by 1860, they knew that, within and especially outside the Bay state, many of their colleagues paled in comparison to their radicalism. Sumner despaired at Republican efforts to play down antislavery to win over Whigs and Know-Nothings. Sumner cared little for the other issues of 1860 – corruption, the tariff, internal improvements – and declared that half the Republican Party required "conversion to first

¹⁴ Pearson, *John A. Andrew*, 1: ix, 47, 58-59, 63-64, 73, 101; Dean Grodzins, "'Constitution or No Constitution, Law or No Law': The Boston Vigilance Committees, 1841-1861," in Matthew Mason, Katheryn P. Viens, and Conrad Edick Wright, eds., *Massachusetts and The Civil War: The Commonwealth and National Disunion* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015), 58, 67.

principles.” Sumner attempted to do this through a 35,000 word speech on the “Barbarism of Slavery,” delivered on the floor of the Senate in June 1860. Sumner complained bitterly about the “cold shoulderism, heartlessness, dirty-water, and paving stones” with which Republicans greeted his oration. Even party newspapers in Massachusetts like the *Boston Advertiser* and *Springfield Republican* criticized Sumner for having provided fodder for Democrats to attack Republicans as extremists. Conservative Republicans worried John Andrew might mimic Sumner and lose thousands of votes in comparison to the more conservative Lincoln. In fact, Andrew used campaign speeches to deny any intention to assail slavery where it existed and secured election as governor with only a thousand less votes than Lincoln.¹⁵

Despite his history of activism, Andrew’s belief in the political process meant that he had no qualms about taking the party line on slavery in 1860. Andrew stood apart from Boston’s abolitionists because he believed the constitution to be an anti-slavery document. He possessed confidence that self-government would allow an anti-slavery majority to emerge through the political process rather than through revolution. This helped Andrew to serve the party even while trying to steer it to more righteous ground. Although he had hoped for William H. Seward and knew little of Lincoln, Andrew fired up Massachusetts Republicans in 1860 with a promise that to Abraham Lincoln he would “trust my country’s cause...while the wind blows and the water runs.” Public endorsement mattered since behind closed doors some radicals worried that Lincoln might perform “some disgracefully servile and pro-slavery acts.” Abolitionists’ response to the Republican Party in 1860 made clear the distance between them and Andrew. William Lloyd Garrison saw the Republican Party as far preferable to the Democrats but still used his Fourth of July speech in 1860 to complain that “the Republican Party no more intends to meddle with slavery south of Mason and Dixon’s line...than it intends to seek,

¹⁵ Donald, *Charles Sumner*, 293, 301, 304.

directly, the overthrow of the British monarchy.” To a man committed to the idea of “meddling with slavery everywhere,” the Republican Party fell well short of his expectations.¹⁶

Regardless of how radical or conservative a position they took, Republicans felt no danger of defeat by Democrats in the 1860 election. The Democratic Party had some formidable figures and found support particularly in Boston which contained the largest proportion of the state’s foreign-born. The party’s most notable leaders were Caleb Cushing and Benjamin F. Butler, both of whom had a long history of defending southern interests and allied with Buchanan before backing John C. Breckinridge in 1860. These Breckinridge Democrats held more sway in Massachusetts partly because many of the anti-slavery and free soil components never returned to the Democracy after 1848 as elements of them did in other states. Even so, the majority of the state party defied Cushing and Butler to back Douglas rather than Breckinridge. Nonetheless, such was the weakness of the Democracy that the Little Giant still received only 20% of the ballots, swamping Breckinridge’s 3.6%.

In Massachusetts, the Fillmore vote failed to transfer to Lincoln and instead embraced John Bell who received 13% of the vote compared to his average of only 2.3% in the North. Unable to accommodate themselves to Republican radicalism or their old Democratic foes – not a viable alternative in Massachusetts anyway – prominent old Whigs like Robert Winthrop, Rufus Choate, Amos A. Lawrence, and George S. Hillard all supported the Constitutional Union Party, particularly when one of their own, Edward Everett, had a place on the ticket. Dale Baum has estimated that Lincoln received 57% of the 1855 Know-Nothing vote, but these conservatives had moved into the Republican column early. For those conservatives who had stayed aloof, Republicans in Massachusetts did little to bring them on board in 1860. As Paul Kleppner concluded in his quantitative based work *The Third Electoral System*, only in parts of New England had partisan allegiances stabilized into a new system before the war. The more entrenched and electorally secure nature of Massachusetts

¹⁶ Ware, *Political Opinion*, 27; Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 49; *The Liberator*, July 20, 1860.

Republicanism had allowed radicals to control the state party organization. Ideological conviction drove men like Sumner and Andrew to deter conservatives from their party, but they also knew they could succeed without them. Such a tactic would have been unthinkable in New York, Pennsylvania, or Ohio, where Republican control depended on broad coalitions of support.¹⁷

Ohio

Steady migration westward had seen Ohio rise to third in the Union for population by 1860. Cincinnati was the most populous city, ranking seventh in the nation, but Cleveland, Dayton, and Columbus all figured among the country's fifty biggest cities. Even so, these cities ranked well below the likes of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, with 82% of Ohioans still living in rural settlements.¹⁸ The state's foreign-born residents made up 14% of the 2.4 million Ohioans. Typical of the Mid-West and the reverse of the East Coast, Germans made up 51% of the state's immigrant population with the Irish second at 23%. Although correctly seen as an agricultural powerhouse, the Buckeye state contained significant industry and manufacturing supported by a mining sector that extracted more iron and coal than anywhere but Pennsylvania. Though it boasted far less of a finance and banking sector than powerful east coast states, Ohio could feed the nation. Second in the value of its farms, the state ranked in the top five for almost all related outputs, from livestock to cereal grains.¹⁹

The state's politics and culture owed much to the state's geography and historical settlement patterns. Ohio's position bordering Virginia, Kentucky, and Canada ensured that it played a major role

¹⁷ Dale Baum estimates that Bell received $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Fillmore vote in Massachusetts in 1860. Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 49-55; Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 53; Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War*, 293, 301, 304.

¹⁸ Kevin Kern and Gregory Wilson, *Ohio: A History of the Buckeye State* (New York: Blackwell, 2014), 82.

¹⁹ Richard F. Miller, ed., *States at War: Volume 5: A Reference Guide for Ohio in the Civil War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2015), 50-60; 1860 census, accessed at www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860.

in the underground railroad and helped generate strong views on race and slavery. Black codes restricted the rights and immigration of African-Americans, but several bills also inflicted heavy punishments for aiding the kidnapping of fugitives. But Ohioans' based their disdain for slavecatchers in defense of state rights as often as concern for the welfare of African-Americans. Cincinnati saw race riots throughout the antebellum era and contributed to the general perception of southern Ohio as a place of profound racial prejudice. Some elements of the population actively sympathized with or supported the South and its institutions and for others, anti-slavery and virulent racism went hand-in-hand. Many Ohioans wished to end the Slave Power's control of the national government, but they had little desire to interfere with slavery in the South.²⁰

Two particular regions, the Western Reserve in the Northeast of the state and the Ohio Company purchase in the Southeast, had been owned and settled originally by New Englanders whose legacies continued to shape the politics of both locales. These areas had long provided robust support for abolitionism and anti-slavery politics from the Free Soil movement to Republicanism. The Western Reserve, represented in Congress for twenty years by radicals like Joshua R. Giddings, functioned as the hub for radical Republicanism in the state. Along with Giddings, transplanted New Englanders Salmon P. Chase and Benjamin F. Wade provided Ohio with some of the most powerful and prominent anti-slavery political voices in the nation. While lacking some of the renown and zeal of Giddings, Chase, and Wade, Ohio's first wartime governor, William Dennison also aligned with the radical element of the Republican Party. The west and central parts of the state tended to be more conservative, but had not aligned consistently to one party. Conservative Republicans in 1860 had a

²⁰ George H. Porter, *Ohio Politics During the Civil War Period* (New York: Columbia University, Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), 12-22; For Ohio opinions on the Slave Power and slavery, see Peter Luebke, "Shattering the Slave Power: Northern Soldiers Interpret Their Civil War," PhD Dissertation, (University of Virginia, 2014), 77-132; Christopher Philips, *The Rivers Ran Backwards: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 44-114. For the consequences of black laws and fugitive slave cases in the antebellum years, see Christine Dee, ed., *Ohio's War: The Civil War in Documents* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 6-30.

strong base in former bastions of Whiggism, particularly an area stretching from central counties like Franklin and Fairfield, down into the southwestern counties of Warren and Clinton. Many Virginians and Kentuckians had settled in this part of the state, including the families of two of the most prominent Whigs turned conservative Republicans, Thomas Ewing Sr. and Thomas Corwin.²¹

Democrats competed across much of the state, especially in regions with high German and Irish populations. By 1860, Ohio's Germans had begun to move into the Republican column, but many still voted Democratic and the Irish represented a reliable voting bloc. Cities like Cincinnati and Cleveland, 46% and 45% foreign-born respectively, had not been uniformly Democratic, but both elected Democratic mayors on the eve of war. Like their Republican foes, the Ohio Democracy would splinter into two clear wings. In men like Clement L. Vallandigham, George E. Pugh, George H. Pendleton, and Samuel Medary, they had some of the most southern sympathizing Democrats in the North, all of whom eventually would become leading Peace Democrats. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the Ohio Democracy backed Douglas and shunned Breckinridge in 1860. Both of Ohio's wartime Union Party governors, David Tod and John Brough, would emerge from the strong Douglas wing of the Democratic Party. While neither had held office in the immediate pre-war years, both remained Democrats and David Tod served as Chair of the Baltimore Democratic National Convention that nominated Stephen Douglas for president. Samuel S. Cox was another influential Douglas backer who would remain in the party during the war and try to restrain his Peace Democrat colleagues.²²

Republicans, under the leadership of Salmon P. Chase, gained success early in Ohio when found ways to garner Know-Nothing support without having to make too many nativist concessions. Unlike in many states where they competed against one another, Know-Nothings in Ohio immediately allied with fledgling Republicans and all anti-slavery, anti-Nebraska forces in a movement that won

²¹ Porter, *Ohio Politics*, 16-18; Kenneth J. Heineman, *Civil War Dynasty: The Ewing Family of Ohio* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 6-12.

²² Miller, ed., *States at War: Volume 5*, 53-90.

astounding majorities in the 1854 elections in Ohio. Know-Nothings contributed vital numbers to the fusion, but never managed to add nativist concerns to the anti-slavery message. When Chase first secured election as governor in 1855 as a Republican, the platform made no policy concessions but ran eight Know-Nothings below Chase on the ticket. Once elected, Chase – a former Democrat hostile to Know-Nothingism in principle – vetoed a registry law pushed by nativists but signed a church property law that discriminated only against Catholics and hence risked little complaint from German protestants who voted Republican. When up for re-election in 1857, Chase dropped his Know-Nothing lieutenant governor and nearly lost, partly due the existence of a separate American Party candidate. Even so, Republicans kept accruing conservative support thanks to the influence of prominent converts. With Thomas Corwin, Lewis D. Campbell, and later Thomas Ewing Sr., the Ohio Republicans by 1860 boasted some of the leading conservative figures who had been outside the party in 1856. Corwin had served as governor of Ohio and in President Fillmore’s cabinet before becoming a Republican congressman in 1858. Ewing had been a senator from Ohio and served in the cabinets of three Whig presidents before emerging from the political wilderness to back Lincoln in 1860. The Ewings also had close ties to another influential conservative family, the Shermans. William Tecumseh Sherman would become a Union general while his brother, John Sherman, was a Republican congressman, initially seen as a moderate but increasingly in the conservative camp as an influential wartime senator.²³

A strained relationship existed between conservatives and radicals, but each knew they needed the other. Former Know-Nothings like Campbell complained about insufficient recognition of their agenda – pronouncing himself “resolved out of that party” by the 1860 immigration plank – while

²³ William E. Gienapp, “Salmon P. Chase, Nativism, and the Formation of the Republican Party in Ohio,” *Ohio History* 93 (1984): 5-39; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 257-261; Victor B. Howard, “The 1856 Election in Ohio: Moral Issues in Politics,” *Ohio History* 80 (1971): 24-44; Eugene H. Roseboom, *The Civil War Era: 1850-1873: A History of the State of Ohio, Volume IV* (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1944), 277-339.

many chafed at the slavery radicalism of Giddings and Chase. Ewing complained that “ten negroes will commit more petty thefts than one thousand white men,” and expressed his conviction that “we cannot permit them to come into Ohio.” When stumping for Lincoln in 1860, he attacked elements of the Republican platform and stated that he belonged to “no existing party.” He would back Lincoln because he had been trained in a “highly conservative party,” had been nominated by the “conservative interest,” and, as president, would “show himself the president of the nation, not of a section or party.” By endorsing Lincoln while praising John Bell and sounding exactly like a Constitutional Union speaker, Ewing provided the perfect conservative endorsement. Men like Wade and Chase unsurprisingly resented conservatives like Ewing in the party, but local legislators reminded them that in certain regions “we cannot succeed under the influence of the radical sentiment.” Although conservatives formed an invaluable block within the party, radicals could take heart that they controlled the state party organization.²⁴

The election of William Dennison in 1859 demonstrated the ascendancy of radicals but also the limits of radicalism. A lawyer and businessman, Dennison served as the president of the Columbia & Xenia railroad. Dennison had opposed the Mexican War, spoke out against Ohio’s black codes, and been a founder of the state Republican Party. His inaugural in January 1860 called for Congress to explicitly prohibit slavery in the territories and damned the unconstitutional fugitive slave law. Dennison backed this position up by infuriating Ohio’s southern neighbors by refusing fugitive slave extradition requests from Kentucky and Virginia early in his term of office. Dennison, like many other Republicans pre-war, used state sovereignty – state rights – arguments to defend the South’s right to maintain slavery, attack the “federalism” of those who wanted to protect slavery in the territories, and assert the North’s right not to be complicit in slavery by returning fugitives. But Governor Dennison’s inaugural also addressed the fears of Ohioans who would support no action likely to result in black

²⁴ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 267; Heineman, *Civil War Dynasty*, 107; J A Barratt to Benjamin Wade, February 25, 1861, B. F. Wade Papers, 1832-1886, Library of Congress [hereafter Wade Papers].

immigration into the state. To do this, Dennison outlined an elaborate scheme of voluntary emigration for “blacks of the free states” and “manumitted slaves” to live in homesteads in a congenial climate. Dennison proposed that Congress purchase land in Central or South America where a “dependency” of free black workers could demonstrate the superiority of free labor and spread American economic and political values while preventing civil war. As one historian has put it, Dennison was “radical enough to suit the radicals but not enough to offend the conservatives.”²⁵

When it came to the 1860 election, Salmon P. Chase looked a strong candidate for the presidency. A Liberty Party leader before becoming Free Soil Senator in the first half of the 1850s and governor for the second half, nobody in the nation could better Chase’s experience and anti-slavery record. But his radicalism weakened him, as did a movement to nominate another Ohio radical, Benjamin Wade. Conservatives like Corwin opportunistically supported Wade and helped ensure Chase’s candidacy got off to a stumbling start from which it never recovered. A feud ensued between Chase and Wade that created a lasting fault line, more personal than ideological, among Ohio radicals.

Republicans adopted similar moderation in the 1860 campaign in Ohio as in other states. John Brown’s raid received broad condemnation. That winter, a young congressman from Ohio’s western reserve, Harrison Gray Otis Blake, introduced a congressional resolution whose poor wording could be interpreted as supporting abolition everywhere, not just the territories. Mainstream Republicans fumed and Democrats celebrated, forcing it to a symbolic vote. Republicans distanced themselves and many avoided voting for it even after Blake clarified the resolution as only a restatement of existing party principles. The Homestead Bill might have been a significant issue except that Ohio’s Democratic congressional representatives had voted uniformly for the bill. Historian Eugene H. Roseboom has

²⁵ Miller, *States at War*: Volume 5, 83; Michael E. Woods, “Northern Republicans, States’ Rights, and the Coming of the Civil War,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 7 (June 2017): 242-268; Porter, *Ohio Politics*, 31-32; Dennison Inaugural, January 9, 1860, in *Messages and Reports to the General Assembly and Governor of the State of Ohio: For the Year 1859, Part II* (Columbus: State Printer, 1860), 179-180; Roseboom, *The Civil War Era*, 327, 350.

argued that Republicans succeeded in Ohio thanks to the “addition of a conservative element, attracted by the conservative character of the presidential candidate and the tariff feature of the platform.”

Democrats highlighted the Massachusetts Republican Party’s nativist two-year amendment in the hope of appealing to Ohio Germans, but the national party plank and efforts from prominent German-Americans like Carl C. Schurz helped prevent defections from the Republicans.²⁶

Ohio, like Pennsylvania and Indiana, held its state elections in October. When Republicans triumphed in these, many considered the presidency settled and sure enough Lincoln won comfortably in November, securing 51% of the vote with a majority of 35,000 over Douglas. Ohio’s Democrats had stood firmly behind Douglas although a small contingent of Buchanan and Breckinridge supporters broke away to hold their own convention and nominate separate candidates in some districts. A Constitutional Union Party formed in the state but gained little traction - Bell receiving only 2.8% of the vote, marginally ahead of Breckinridge’s 2.6%. During the secession crisis, conservative Republicans joined Democrats and Bell supporters in urging compromise with the South, briefly threatening to split apart the Republican coalition and redraw partisan lines. But as detailed in the next chapter, war further shifted the political sands and led a vital contingent of fiercely Unionist Douglas Democrats to join Republicans in a Union Party supporting the Lincoln administration.²⁷

New York

New York stood unrivaled as the most important state in the Union politically and economically. The most populous state, New York’s thirty-five electoral votes put it eight ahead of its nearest rival, Pennsylvania. New York dwarfed second placed Massachusetts in the size and value of

²⁶ Mark J. Stegmaier, “An Ohio Republican Stirs up the House: The Blake Resolution of 1860 and the Politics of the Sectional Crisis in Congress,” *Ohio History* 116 (2009): 62-87; Roseboom, *The Civil War Era*, 371, 277-372.

²⁷ Eric J. Cardinal, “The Democratic Party of Ohio and the Civil War: An Analysis of a Wartime Political Minority,” PhD Dissertation, Kent State University (1981), 55, 65-69; Porter, *Ohio Politics*, 72; Daniel W. Crofts, *Lincoln and the Politics of Slavery: The Other Thirteenth Amendment and the Struggle to Save the Union* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

its banking sector and nowhere came close to matching New York City's printing industry, which helped to project the state's economic and political power. Clippings from newspapers like the *Times*, *Herald*, and *Tribune* were reprinted daily in other publications all across the Union and their respective editors – Henry J. Raymond, James Gordon Bennett, and Horace Greeley – were famous and powerful figures who shaped public debate. When the war came, no state contributed more men, money, or materiel. Politically, the Empire State contained leaders representing all possible shades of opinion, from the most pro-South Democrats to leading abolitionists. Overall, commentators usually viewed New York as somewhat conservative, more akin to neighboring New Jersey and Pennsylvania than to New England. In 1856, New York cast its lot with Frémont, but Fillmore secured over twenty-percent of the vote. In 1859 state elections, the American Party showed that it still held the balance of power and, while Republicans felt confident going into 1860, few certainties existed in the historically Democratic Empire State.²⁸

The Republican Party in New York contended with a personal and political division among their supporters that began in 1854 and only widened after 1860. Horace Greeley had originally been a close ally of Thurlow Weed in the New York Whig Party. But after Greeley broke with his former partner in 1854 over the failure to receive a Republican nomination, the two became the poles around which the party organized. Weed occupied the more conservative end of the spectrum against Greeley's somewhat erratic radicalism. The two sniped constantly through the pages of Weed's *Albany Evening Journal* and Greeley's *New York Tribune*. Weed generally held greater power, largely thanks to the stature of his allies. Weed's alter-ego was William Henry Seward, the most influential Republican in the state, who famously said "Weed is Seward, and Seward is Weed, each approves

²⁸ Sidney David Brummer, *Political History of New York State during the Period of the Civil War* (New York: Columbia University, Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), 71. Americans ran a state ticket in 1859 that endorsed half Republican candidates and half Democrats. The Republicans received much larger majorities but every candidate on the American ticket won election; Richard F. Miller, *States at War, Volume 2: A Reference Guide for New York in the Civil War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2014), 50-55.

what the other says or does.” Henry Raymond, editor of the *New York Times*, and Edwin D. Morgan, New York governor and chairman of the Republican National Committee, completed Weed’s inner circle. Greeley’s closest allies included William Cullen Bryant, editor of the *New York Evening Post*, New York City politician and later mayor, George Opdyke, and the influential lawyer and politician, David Dudley Field. Although Greeley and his cohort voiced greater zeal and attached greater priority to indicting slavery and undermining the Slave Power, both wings had sound anti-slavery credentials. Other factors contributed to the divide. All Weed’s forces had been former Whigs while, apart from Greeley himself, all of his key followers had been Free Soil Democrats. Weed’s forces centered around the state capital at Albany while Greeley represented Republican power in New York City.²⁹

Temperamentally, Weed, Raymond, Seward, and Morgan all inclined to pragmatism and constantly sought to further anti-slavery incrementally without risk of endangering the Union. Weed enjoyed playing the political game and kept close ties to leading Democrats as well as Republicans. His willingness to compromise helped to earn him a reputation for corruption and unprincipled deal-making. Greeley and Bryant believed Weed’s brand of politics sullied their party when it should have been the paragon of purity against the dazzling financial misdeeds and moral bankruptcy of the Buchanan administration. These generalizations did not always hold. Greeley, particularly, is hard to pin down. At times, he sounded every inch the abolitionist and, at others, he entertained the most conservative of positions within the Republican fold. Nonetheless, these characterizations mirror how contemporaries understood the divide within the Republican Party. In 1860, Greeley secured his first significant triumph over Weed when he helped defeat Seward’s nomination for the presidency. Indicative of the fact that intra-party antagonisms could sometimes be contained, Weed and Seward quickly moved past their huge disappointment and worked collaboratively for a Lincoln victory. When Greeley next foiled Weed’s choice for a party nominee in 1862, the fallout was far more damaging.

²⁹ Brummer, *History of New York State*, 18. This general narrative draws on Brummer, as well as Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *Thurlow Weed: Wizard of the Lobby* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1947), 189-254.

The Democratic side of New York politics can be told through the history of Horatio Seymour who, by the time of his 1862 election as governor of the nation's most important state, already had a long political career behind him. The son of a prosperous merchant, Seymour grew up in Utica, New York, the city which served as his home and political base throughout his life. Seymour was admitted to the New York bar in 1832, but law never came close to politics, or even business, in Seymour's priorities. At twenty-three, in 1833, Seymour became secretary and political apprentice to New York's Democratic governor, William L. Marcy. After a few years managing the family business following his father's suicide, Seymour entered the New York State assembly in 1841 where he served while simultaneously holding the office of mayor of Utica. Within the byzantine politics of New York, Seymour stood first with the more conservative Hunker Democrats rather than the anti-slavery Barnburners who defected in 1848 to back former president Martin Van Buren's Free Soil Party. Seymour then stood with the "soft-shell" Democrats who welcomed the Free Soil renegades back into the party after the Compromise of 1850. Seymour would continue to take centrist positions within the Democratic Party and persistently attempted to prevent schisms both within the New York Democracy and between northern and southern Democrats nationally. Seymour served one term as governor from 1853-1855 and emerged as a possible presidential candidate in 1856.³⁰

Seymour's northern leaning, but moderate policy positions helped supporters envisage him as a national candidate. On slavery, Seymour endorsed popular sovereignty and supported Douglas twice for president. In 1856 he declared that in the North, slavery was "repugnant to our sentiments," but he mostly avoided such stark rhetoric and ardently defended the rights of southern states to self-government. Summing up his speeches in these years, Seymour biographer Stewart Mitchell judged

³⁰ Stewart Mitchell, *Horatio Seymour of New York* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1938), 1-168. For discussion of this general era of New York politics, see Charles W. McCurdy, *The Anti-Rent Era in New York Law and Politics, 1839-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), Mitchell, *Horatio Seymour*; James A. Frost, Harold C. Syrett, Harry J. Carman and David M. Ellis, *A History of New York State*, rev. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967); DeAlva Stanwood Alexander, *A Political History of the State of New York* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1906).

that Seymour espoused the hope that “abolitionists and slave-holders would not destroy the whole country with their mutual suspicion and hatred.”³¹ The governor chided both sections but berated the North more because, Seymour argued, history was clearly on their side. Since the founding, slavery had retreated while freedom advanced under Democratic rule and a willingness to embrace sectional compromise. Seymour decried the Republicans a “Meddling Party” that put the Union in jeopardy with their slavery obsession. The Democrats, a “Let Alone party,” had been responsible for the Union’s growth and would ensure that it continued to thrive to the benefit of both sections. Seymour, like many Hunker Democrats, joined his Whig and Republican opponents in supporting internal improvements to railroads and canal. Seymour had a lifelong business partnership and friendship with New York Republican Hiram Barney with whom he invested in the Fox and Wisconsin Improvement Company aiming to ease river transport between the Mississippi and the Great Lakes. The New York Central Railroad – probably the most powerful lobby and lucrative investment in the state – also brought together bosses from both parties such as Democrat Dean Richmond and Republican Thurlow Weed.³²

The other great divide within New York Democratic politics existed between the city of New York and the rest of the state. Seymour was part of the up-state Albany Regency, headed unofficially by Dean Richmond and forming the most powerful Democratic faction based around the legislature at Albany. For most of the 1850s, Tammany Hall dominated within New York City and competed against the Regency for influence in the statewide Democratic machine. When Fernando Wood lost control of Tammany in 1859, he and his newspaperman brother Benjamin set up the rival Mozart Hall, gaining

³¹ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 18; Mitchell, *Seymour*, 207.

³² Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 13-16, 23-31; Yontal Eyal has talked about how many Hunker Democrats had a “Whiggish economic outlook.” Yonatan Eyal, *The Young America Moment and the Transformation of the Democratic Party, 1828-61* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 186. Although Seymour is not identified as part of “Young America” by Eyal, he was closely aligned with figures such as August Belmont who were, and he definitely shared elements of their economic agenda. For the Seymour-Barney relationship, see Seymour correspondence in the Hiram Barney Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; for the role of the New York Central Railroad in the state’s politics, see Brummer, *History of New York State*, 21-24.

support from New York's foreign-born communities and helping Fernando Wood to become mayor in 1859. Some level of corruption existed everywhere in New York politics, but it oozed out of every pore of city hall. While the Regency lent towards Douglas and a more northern type of politics, Tammany and especially Mozart Hall tended to identify more strongly with the South. As mayor of New York, Fernando Wood backed Breckinridge in 1860 and suggested during the secession crisis that New York might become an independent city-state.³³

As Democrats considered their presidential ticket in 1860, Horatio Seymour had advocates. Seymour claimed that he had no interest in the nomination, writing to a friend in June that he would "rather go to the Poor House than the White House." Even so, several scholars have suggested that the Breckinridge camp in 1860 intended, once they had persuaded Douglas he could not win, to offer him a deal whereby he and Breckinridge "would withdraw and the party would come together behind a different candidate, probably Horatio Seymour of New York, who had remained outside the sectional debates." The plan, however concrete, failed.³⁴

While Seymour did not emerge as a presidential candidate, he did help broker a fusion ticket of Douglas, Breckinridge, and Bell supporters in New York. Most New York Democrats supported Douglas and Seymour encouraged all patriotic men to back him and acknowledge the "right of the people of every State and Territory to govern themselves." But the governor was pragmatic and knew Democrats needed both unity and converts. Seymour was good friends with Washington Hunt, an old Whig who was now a prominent supporter of John Bell, and together they brought Democrats and Constitutional Union supporters into alliance. The Republicans still proved too strong, but Seymour's actions displayed his centrist instincts by his willingness to compromise internally and to reach beyond

³³ Brummer, *History of New York State*, 24-28 Jerome Mushkat, *Fernando Wood: A Political Biography* (Kent, OH: The Kent State University Press, 1990), 98-115.

³⁴ Horatio Seymour to Hiram Barney, June 21, 1860, Box 26, Folder 23, Hiram Barney Papers, HL; A. James Fuller, "A Forlorn Hope: Interpreting the Breckinridge Campaign as a Matter of Honor," in A. James Fuller, ed., *The Election of 1860 Reconsidered* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2013), 80-81.

the limits of his party. During the secession crisis, Seymour would join with conservative Republicans to advocate for compromise measures to prevent war.³⁵

Seymour's alliance with Bell men only brought limited success with conservatives because Republicans had also been competing for this constituency. Former president and New Yorker Millard Fillmore did not make his choice publicly known in 1860, but historians have estimated that between a third and a half of his followers voted for Lincoln. James Osborne Putnam, an American Party candidate for New York secretary of state in 1857, wrote to Lincoln in September to express his belief that the Republican candidate would receive the votes of 75,000 "conservative men" who "in 1856 were supporters of Mr. Fillmore." Putnam felt confident because Lincoln had helped lift the Republicans "high and dry out of the abolition ruts" and made it a "very strong conservative force." William Seward had been notoriously anti-nativist, but his colleagues in the Republican state legislature had passed a Registry Law in 1859 requiring voter registration in advance of election day for residents of New York City. The bill contained enough loopholes to severely limit its discriminatory effect, but no one doubted the symbolic nod toward former Know-Nothings.³⁶

Seward had also taken steps to moderate his anti-slavery reputation. In early 1860, with an eye on the presidential nomination, Seward gave a speech in the Senate where he wedded anti-slavery, racism, and Unionism. Seward described the genius of the free labor system that guaranteed "the equality of white men." The Founders had supported the restriction of slavery's growth and who could believe that by doing so "Washington, Jefferson, and Henry" desired to "sink you down to the level of the African." Seward condemned John Brown and praised the Unionism of all northerners who were "friends and brethren of the South." As the cartoon in Figure 2 shows, Seward now offered voters a

³⁵ *New York Herald*, August 15, 1860. For discussion of the negotiations over fusion in New York see Mitchell, *Seymour*, 215-220. For the intra-party rifts among New York Democrats which preceded this 1860 fusion, see Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy, 1861 – 1874*, 15 – 23.

³⁶ James O. Putnam to Abraham Lincoln, September 25, 1860, Lincoln Papers; Holt estimates a third, Anbinder a half. Holt, *The Election of 1860*, 177; Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 270, 256.

milder brew than two years earlier in his “irrepressible conflict” speech, which a supportive newspaper assured readers had now been rendered a “mere philosophical generalization,” by Seward’s “conservative and national” speech. The racial conservatism of many Republican voters was also revealed by a ballot measure that voters overwhelmingly rejected on the same day they endorsed Lincoln. While 53.7% of the electorate backed Lincoln, 63.6% of them simultaneously voted against a measure removing impediments to African-American suffrage. Lincoln received 362,646 votes and 197,889 supported the suffrage amendment. These numbers represented some improvement from the 72% who had rejected the same measure in 1846, but it still showed that voting Republican did not equate to desiring greater rights for African-Americans.³⁷

³⁷ *New York Times*, March 10, 1860; *Vanity Fair*, March 10, 1860; Phyllis F. Field, *The Politics of Race in New York: The Struggle for Black Suffrage in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 126-127, 61.



THE SENATORIAL TAPSTER.

CUSTOMER.—I NOTICE YOU DRAW YOUR ALE VERY MILD NOW, WILLIAM. *W. H. Seward*
LANDLORD SEWARD.—YEA, THIS IS A NEW TAP, WHOM I DREW'D MYSELF LAST WEDNESDAY; MY CUSTOMERS THOUGHT THE ROCHESTER ALE
WAS RATHER TOO STRONG. *(Speech - 1859)*
W. H. Seward

Figure 2: "The Senatorial Tapster," Vanity Fair, March 10, 1860

Pennsylvania

In 1860, Pennsylvania was second only to New York in population and economic strength. Philadelphia was the second biggest city in the nation and one of ten cities in the state with a population over 10,000 people in 1860. Philadelphia also contained the greatest concentration of the state's 430,505 (14.81%) foreign-born residents, of which 47% were Irish and 32% German, and served as the hub for the African-American community that comprised just under 2% of the population. Less of a banking or insurance hub than New York or Massachusetts, Pennsylvania compensated with an industrial sector that led the nation, by far, in raw material extraction. No state came close to mining as much coal or iron ore, both of which helped fuel powerful railroad, canal, and ship industries. These industries would be vital in wartime, as would the state's impressive agricultural output. Although well behind the Empire State, Pennsylvania still had twenty-eight daily political newspapers with the most influential published in Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh. Politically, the state had always been competitive but with a Democratic lean that helped native son James Buchanan score a resounding victory in 1856 when he secured 50% of the vote compared to Frémont's 32% and Fillmore's 18%. But in 1860, Lincoln won the Keystone state with 56%. To understand this dramatic reversal, we need to sketch the hard work of fashioning an anti-Democratic majority in the "most conservative... of the Middle States."³⁸

Pennsylvania's Whig party had elected the governor as late as 1854 and many in this powerful voting bloc helped the Know-Nothing movement sweep the state elections in 1855. By 1856, Republicans had become the largest anti-Democratic force but still lagged the Democrats. An attempted merger between Fillmore's Americans and Republicans failed in 1857 when Republicans insisted on David Wilmot – an anti-slavery, anti-tariff, former Democrat – as the gubernatorial

³⁸ All information from Richard F. Miller, ed., *States at War: Volume 3: A Reference Guide for Pennsylvania in the Civil War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2014), 49-53, 86-87; quotation from *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 8, 1860.

nominee. The decision to ignore Know-Nothing concerns ensured a separate American Party ticket and a comfortable victory for Democrat William F. Packer. At this point, conservatives within the Republican movement convinced the party to abandon their name and form a new state-wide organization, the People's Party, which would incorporate the American contingent and appeal to other unaffiliated former Whigs. The new People's coalition elected Alexander Henry the mayor of Philadelphia – a distinctly conservative city – in 1858. While Republicans constituted the majority of members, the People's Party looked and sounded different, helping them to sweep the mid-term elections of 1858 where they downplayed questions of slavery to focus on the tariff. This new party endured and in 1860 placed Abraham Lincoln at the head of a People's ticket, alongside another former Whig, Andrew Gregg Curtin, as gubernatorial nominee.³⁹

Andrew Curtin came from prosperous and prominent stock. His grandfather served as a Pennsylvania Senator and his father enjoyed a successful career as an iron manufacturer. Trained as a lawyer at Dickinson College, Curtin was admitted to the bar in 1839. While practicing, he spoke widely for Whig candidates throughout the 1840s and early 1850s and began to earn a reputation as an orator and rising political star. As one admiring contemporary described him, Curtin stood “Several inches above six feet in height, broad shoulders...smooth shaven face, black hair, perfect teeth, blue eyes, large, well-shaped head...unusual grace and dignity of manner, he was the distinguished individual in every assemblage in which he appeared.” By the time of the Civil War, Curtin's distinctly fragile health dulled the luster of his physical presence, but he seems to have retained what many contemporaries described as a “personal magnetism,” that helped crowds to believe they personally knew and liked their representative, “Andy Curtin.” When the Pennsylvania Whigs collapsed, Curtin, a Presbyterian with old Irish roots, competed unsuccessfully for the 1855 Senate nomination from the

³⁹ For more information on Pennsylvania Politics in these years, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 262-266; Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969), 220-263.

state's Know-Nothing controlled legislature. Curtin's dalliance with nativism may have helped him once the Know-Nothings became subsumed under his leadership in the People's Party.⁴⁰

The 1855 contest also initiated a life-long feud with the Machiavellian former Democrat, Simon Cameron. At some point during the maneuvering for the nomination, the two clashed, possibly over a drunken insinuation that Curtin had fathered an illegitimate child. While they would soon become the two most influential figures in the People's Party, Curtin and Cameron remained estranged personally and politically. The split quickly became ideological as Cameron aligned with the more radical elements within the People's Party coalition and Curtin the more conservative.⁴¹

Unsurprisingly for a state of its size, Pennsylvania possessed a diverse political spectrum. At the far left stood a small but determined constituency of white and free black immediatists led by the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and strongest in Philadelphia where the influential African-American newspaper the *Christian Recorder* published.⁴² Next stood prominent radical Republicans like Thaddeus Stevens, as well as many more equally committed moderate Republicans. These voters tended to have firm anti-slavery views and to have joined the Republican Party early. Concentrated in the western and northern counties, they formed the basis of the Frémont vote in 1856, providing majorities in all of the counties from Washington up to Erie and along the northern border to the Susquehanna. The industrial city of Pittsburgh served as the hub of this type of committed and radical Republicanism. When speaking there in 1860, Curtin's remarks caused "pandemonium" because they

⁴⁰ William H. Egle, *The Life and Times of Andrew Gregg Curtin* (Philadelphia: Thompson Publishing Company, 1896), 374.

⁴¹ Curtin's close associate, Alexander McClure, suggests only a drunken insult. Cameron's biographer suggests the paternity story. Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Winston, 1905) 1:387; Erwin Stanley Bradley, *Simon Cameron, Lincoln's Secretary of War: A Political Biography* (Philadelphia, 1966), 102. The perception of Cameron as a radical was significantly enhanced after Lincoln recalled his report as secretary of war in December 1861, recommending the arming of slaves. See Erwin Stanley Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism: A Study of Pennsylvania and Presidential Politics, 1860-1872* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1966), 150, 186.

⁴² For the history of abolitionism in Philadelphia, see Richard Newman and James Mueller, eds. *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

“did not come up to the standard of our anti-slavery thought.” Pittsburgh’s strong Republican identity also resulted from the party’s strong attachments to the state’s railroad industries and the iron and steel manufacture that supported it. These areas proffered large majorities to the People’s and Union parties even though some radicals resented abandoning their party label and continued to refer to themselves as Republicans.⁴³

The groups to which Curtin consistently tailored his message consisted of Pennsylvania’s political center, made up of conservative Republicans, former Whigs, Know-Nothings, and Constitutional Unionists. Many of these voters had deemed the Republican Party too radical in 1856 and had helped secure 18% for Millard Fillmore. As a member of the People’s Party explained to President Lincoln in January 1861, the “[People’s] Party is not composed of Republicans alone, nor even in great part...I am not a Republican, but an Old Line Whig, with strong American proclivities.” Appealing to these voters meant playing down slavery in favor of the tariff and preservation of the Union. The People’s Party approach allowed Curtin and Lincoln to win a majority of the counties that had placed Frémont third behind Fillmore in 1856, included Curtin’s home county of Center and Philadelphia, which had given Frémont only 10% and 11% respectively. Philadelphia represented a particular coup for the People’s Party and was acknowledged as a hub for Curtin and his allies. These victories stretched the party’s strength beyond the Republican base into the state’s middle and southeastern counties.⁴⁴

The Democratic Party’s heartland lay in regions along the southern and eastern borders and especially in the anthracite mining counties in the northeastern part of the state. The mining regions tended to have high numbers of laborers, including many Irish and foreign-born Americans who voted overwhelmingly Democratic. As a simple but suggestive indication of how class and ethnicity factored

⁴³ Egle, *Andrew Gregg Curtin*, 446.

⁴⁴ R.P. King to Abraham Lincoln, January 18, 1861, Lincoln Papers; John W. Forney to Abraham Lincoln, January 13, 1861, Lincoln Papers.

into political allegiance, Democrats lost four of the five counties with the highest real and personal property values and won all but one of the bottom five. Four of the seven counties with the highest foreign born populations supported the Democrats, as did six of the ten counties with the highest number of catholic churches.⁴⁵

In the gubernatorial and presidential canvasses in Pennsylvania in 1860, Republicans won by being more conservative than four years earlier. The People's Party backed Lincoln but put distance between themselves and radicals within the Republican Party. At their February convention in Harrisburg, the People's Party opposed firmly "the extension of slavery" but also promised to defend the constitutional rights of their southern "brethren," and damned "fanaticism...in the form of Northern abolitionism or Southern slavery propagandism." Reflecting the nativists in their ranks, they adopted a resolution protesting the "influx of foreign criminals." The People's Party referred to themselves as an "affiliate" of the Republican Party and endorsed Curtin by proclaiming his "devotion to the Protection of American Industry...and his earnest fidelity to the interests of the labor of white men." Curtin, apparently unwilling to vote for Frémont in 1856 and known to be opposed to the "radicalism of the Republican Party," made the perfect centrist candidate.⁴⁶

Pennsylvania's People's Party delegates wielded influence at the Republican National Convention, even as they incurred hostility for their unwillingness to run as Republicans. When Pennsylvanian David Wilmot suggested that southern delegates not be granted voting rights, a Texas delegate, Mr. M.T.C Chandler, quickly retorted, to cheers from the audience, that those from the

⁴⁵ Pennsylvania's political geography and information of the breakdown by county of ethnicity, wealth, industry, and religiosity is all based on analysis of the 1860 federal census in comparison with election data taken from tables in Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 355, Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism*, 424-429, and Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1776-1860: The Official Results by State and County* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003). Analysis also draws on William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 541, and Holt, *Forging a Majority*; Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 235-323.

⁴⁶ *Lehigh Register* (Allentown, PA), February 29, 1860; *Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg, PA), May 28, 1860.

Keystone state should “Organize yourselves and train under the Republican banner before you accuse us in Texas of not having a Republican organization.” Despite their unwillingness to embrace the party label, Pennsylvania’s delegates held huge power thanks to the state’s twenty-seven electoral votes. Curtin and his allies believed that William Seward’s past record was too anti-slavery and pro-immigrant for success in Pennsylvania and helped to ensure Lincoln’s nomination instead, as well as the inclusion of a tariff plank in the national platform.⁴⁷

Two issues dominated the 1860 campaign in Pennsylvania: the tariff and James Buchanan. Buchanan loomed over his home state. The hugely unpopular president represented an easy target for Republicans, and Democrats struggled to defend or distance themselves from Buchanan’s record. As Figure 3 shows, Buchanan was commonly seen to have dimmed the light of democracy (the ideal and the party). But while most Democrats probably backed Douglas, Buchanan and his chief ally, Senator William Bigler, exerted enough control to ensure that, officially, Pennsylvania’s Democracy endorsed neither Douglas nor Breckinridge. This position was necessary to allow a Democratic fusion behind gubernatorial candidate Henry D. Foster, but it probably hurt as much as it helped. In trying to avoid offending either wing of the party, Foster found himself sometimes tongue tied on the stump. Other Democrats made no attempts to respect a largely chimerical party unity. Douglas’ chief lieutenant, John W. Forney, spent the campaign calling for a separate Douglas ticket and the Little Giant himself brought his speaking tour to the Keystone state and lambasted Buchanan and Breckinridge. Nonetheless, the tariff overshadowed even Buchanan.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Proceedings of the Republican National Convention: Held at Chicago, May 16, 17, and 18, 1860* ([Albany: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1860]), 49-65; McClure, *Old Time Notes*, 1:399-415; Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 241-2.

⁴⁸ Pflug, “Pennsylvania Politics 1854-1860,” 104-127.



Figure 3: "Good Night," *Vanity Fair*, March 17, 1860.

Focusing on the tariff hurt the Democrats and held the People's Party coalition together. The panic of 1857 had crippled Pennsylvania's iron and railroad industries and helped generate almost universal support for a higher protective tariff. Curtin's campaign manager, Alexander K. McClure, informed Lincoln that the tariff would be the most important issue everywhere but the northern counties where anti-slavery dominated. This suited Curtin who did not wish to express opinions on slavery that might expose fissures within the People's Party. As Philadelphian Francis Blackburn explained, "the Party in Pennsylvania are thoroughly AntiAbolitionist and it is with difficulty we can keep them solid with the Republican Party." Blackburn stated incorrectly that the entire party was anti-

abolition, but his opinion reflected a significant element. Curtin, a devoted Whig and disciple of Henry Clay, spoke earnestly of his long and well-known commitment to the protection of industry, leaving men like Thaddeus Stevens to give speeches in anti-slavery strongholds. Curtin's Democratic opponent, Henry Foster, proclaimed his earnest support for a high tariff but had to contend with the reality that Democrats in Congress, including Douglas, had blocked the Morrill Tariff.⁴⁹

Curtin's generally conservative approach helped refute Democratic attempts to tar the People's Party as radical Republican disunionists. Avoiding slavery, Curtin lauded his party's "platform of principles eminently conservative." When speaking of the South he expressed his warmth for Pennsylvania's southern neighbors and looked forward to a national future where all regions thrived in concert. Frequently invoking Philadelphia's role in the Revolution, Curtin chained his party and state to the unimpeachable cause of Union. Nationalist rhetoric, robust condemnation of John Brown's raid, and expressions of amity to the South helped convince conservative voters that the People's Party was not sowing sectional discord.⁵⁰

Preceding Lincoln's campaign by a month, Curtin's victory, by a margin of over 30,000 votes, was a vital precursor to gaining the White House and demonstrated the effectiveness of a conservative, centrist message. Alexander McClure believed that Curtin had received "the bulk of the Bell vote," and *The New York Herald* even claimed that the People's Party triumphed because "the vote of the Douglas democracy of Pennsylvania, to a great extent, was cast directly for Curtin." Both exaggerated but did not fabricate the importance of winning over a segment of Democrats and conservative Bell supporters. *The New York Times* explained to its readers that "the slavery question has much less to do with this canvass...Indeed...we have serious doubts whether it is not an element of weakness rather

⁴⁹ Francis Blackburn to Abraham Lincoln, November 24, 1860, and Alexander K. McClure to Abraham Lincoln, June 16, 1860, both Lincoln Papers; analysis of the tariff issue drew on Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 243, 275-280; Foner, *Free Soil*, 173-176.

⁵⁰ *Huntingdon Globe* (Huntingdon, PA), September 26, 1860; *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph* (Harrisburg), October 6, 1860; *Philadelphia Press*, October 5, 1860; *Lehigh Register* (Allentown, PA), August 1, 1860.

than strength.” While Republicans formed the majority, the People’s Party secured critical swing voters thanks to the diversity of its policy priorities and membership.⁵¹

California

Democrats dominated California politics throughout the 1850s. The Whig Party had never succeeded in winning significant office in a state where the majority of white settlers who made their way to the West Coast arrived imbued with ideas of manifest destiny. The only brief interruption to Democratic control came in the mid-1850s when Know-Nothingism found fertile ground due to the state’s large immigrant population, including close to 30,000 Chinese. The American Party elected the governor in 1855 and controlled the state legislature but, as elsewhere, the movement soon collapsed. Unlike other areas, however, the Democrats benefited and until 1860, only Democrats won state-wide office. This success could not paper over a deep chasm between southern and northern wings of the party.

Southern leaning Democrats, led by Mississippi slave owner William M. Gwin and often known as the Chivalry, had spent the 1850s competing against those allied to Stephen Douglas’ northern wing, led by transplanted New Yorker, David C. Broderick. Gwin’s faction enjoyed the upper hand in the first half of the 1850s when they even managed to enact a state Fugitive Slave Law.⁵² In the later 1850s, Broderick began gaining control of the state party organization and the two men served together as California’s senators until their rivalry resulted in Broderick’s death in 1859.⁵³ The Gwin supporting Chief Justice of California, David S. Terry, killed Broderick, a sitting US Senator, in a duel

⁵¹ *New York Herald*, Oct. 20, 1860; *New York Times*, October 12, 1860.

⁵² This legislation deemed any slave that arrived in California before statehood to be a fugitive and gave masters one year to claim and remove their slaves from California.

⁵³ Within California, commentators frequently referred to Douglas Democrats as “Broderick Democrats” or “northern Democrats.” After Broderick’s death, they often became known as “Conness Democrats” after John Conness, took over Broderick’s mantle. Buchanan Democrats were also known as the “Chivalry,” the “Chivs,” “southern Democrats,” or, in 1860, “Breckinridge Democrats.”

outside San Francisco in 1859. Democrat Broderick supposedly said as he lay fatally wounded, “I die because I was opposed to a corrupt administration and the extension of slavery.”⁵⁴

For Republicans to find a foothold in this Democratic landscape, they had adopted distinctly conservative positions on issues of slavery and race. During the 1856 presidential race, one of the Republican Party founders, Cornelius Cole, suggested to the national party chair that they might enjoy more success if they renamed themselves the “Free Democracy” or “may we not be called White Democracy, fastening upon our opponents the prefix ‘Black,’ which has done us so much harm.” Cole personally held strong anti-slavery opinions, but he reflected the general temper of a Republicanism that denounced abolitionist “fanatics...whom the Republican Party recognizes only as the barnacles that cleave to the keel of the noble ship.”⁵⁵ In 1857, Republicans chose Edward Stanley, a North Carolina native and still a slaveholder as their first gubernatorial candidate.⁵⁶ Two years later, Leland Stanford first ran for governor pledging to lead a conservative party that would always “prefer the white man to the negro as an inhabitant of our country.” Republicans in 1860 would decry attempts to extend slavery to the territories but continued to couch this in an allegiance to the state’s white population and a firm commitment to protect slavery where it existed. The San Francisco *Evening Bulletin* would welcome Lincoln’s nomination as the choice of a man “never considered remarkable for ultra political opinions,” and who could be relied upon to choose a cabinet of “sound and

⁵⁴ Robert J. Chandler, “Fighting Words: Censoring Civil War California Journalism,” *The Californians* (May/June, 1990): 48. For more detail on the shape of California’s politics in the 1850s, see Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom’s Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 15-79; John F. Burns and Richard J. Orsi, eds., *Taming the Elephant: Politics, Government, and Law in Pioneer California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 96-126; Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 43-83; Leonard L. Richards, *The California Gold Rush and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2007); Royce D. Delmatier, Clarence F. McIntosh, and Earl G. Waters, *The Rumble of California Politics, 1848-1970* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970), 1-40.

⁵⁵ Gerald Stanley, “Racism and the Early Republican Party: The 1856 Presidential Election in California,” *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (May, 1974): 186, 184.

⁵⁶ Cole, *Memoirs of Cornelius Cole*, 130, also Glenna Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War: Thomas Starr King, the Republican Party, and the Birth of Modern California* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 64-67.

conservative men.” Although individuals differed on particular policies and in the degree of anti-slavery sentiment, no noticeable divide existed within California’s Republicans. All agreed that, whatever their private beliefs, the public face of the party had to be a conservative one on questions of race and slavery.⁵⁷

Despite his heavy defeat in 1859, Leland Stanford had been an important figure in the early years of California’s Republican Party and would be the first Republican to win state-wide office as governor in 1861. Born in New York in 1824, Stanford passed the bar in the Empire State in 1848, married in 1850, and left for California in 1852. After initially running a general store with his brother, by 1856 Stanford was in Sacramento with a flourishing mercantile business that primed him to become one of the “Big Four” investors in the Central Pacific Railroad. That same year, Stanford, a Whig in his earliest political life, helped organize the first Republican Party convention in Sacramento. In 1860, Stanford would be a key Republican speaker and, although it constituted a gross conflict of interest according to modern standards, Stanford’s railroad presidency made him the embodiment of perhaps the most salient desire in California politics. All parties supported a transcontinental railroad as a first priority. During the 1850s, travel of people or news to California took many weeks, involving long journeys by steamship or overland, the latter being especially arduous and dangerous. California remained remarkably isolated even though the Gold Rush had made it an important node in national and international markets.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Norman E. Tutorow, *Leland Stanford: Man of Many Careers* (Menlo Park, CA: Pacific Coast Publishers, 1971), 30; Gerald E. Stanley, “Civil War Politics in California,” *Southern California Quarterly* 64 (Summer 1982): 116-118; William E. Bigglestone, “Lincoln and the Northern Californian Press, 1860-1865,” Master’s Thesis, Stanford University (1951), 24. The historian Glenna Matthews has written that “even in its Civil War era heyday, beginning with Lincoln’s victory in the state in 1860, California’s Republican Party was cautious and conservative.” Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War*, 64.

⁵⁸ Tutorow, *Leland Stanford*, 1-45; George T. Clark, *Leland Stanford: War Governor of California, Railroad Builder and Founder of Stanford University* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931), 113-140; Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), 113-117.

California's geographical position ensured that, in 1860, Republicans and both wings of the Democratic Party offered overwhelming backing for a transcontinental railroad, an overland mail route, a transcontinental telegraph, a Homestead Act, and a robust military presence within the state to aid the white population in their conflicts with Native Americans.⁵⁹ The strength of the desire for these projects made them, in one sense, the biggest political issue in California. A railroad convention in September 1859 proclaimed that "a free people will not long endure a Government which refuses to afford them that protection for which Governments were instituted." At their 1860 state convention, California's Breckinridge Democrats only nodded to slavery in resolutions that declared their "watchwords" to be "Pacific Railroad, Daily Overland Mail, Mail Steamerships to China and Japan, and the acquisition of all the territory we can honourably acquire." As much as voters cared deeply about communication and transportation improvements, the unanimity of support lessened these issues' significance electorally.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, Republicans still attacked the failure of successive Democratic administrations to do more to tie California to the nation. During the 1850s, Washington had helped finance the cost of steamships, stagecoaches, and telegraphs, as well as surveying, exploring, and distributing land. A series of forts, docks, and lighthouses further enhanced a federal presence that had several hundred employees, 120 in the San Francisco Customs House alone. But this still left much to be desired. When Postmaster General Joseph Holt realized that overland mail cost the government \$4.14 per person on the West coast against 41 cents for the rest of the country, he cut back services and declared that "until a railroad shall have been constructed across the continent, the conveyance of the Pacific mail overland must be regarded as wholly impracticable." Californians fumed at Holt's rationale when they provided

⁵⁹ While Republicans would show themselves the lesser of two evils, their existed, sadly, political uniformity in the belief that "savages" possessed no political or legal rights that white Californians were bound to respect. These issues are dealt with in more detail in chapter two.

⁶⁰ Joseph Ellison, *California and the Nation, 1850-1869: A Study of the Relations of a Frontier Community with the Federal Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1927), 172; *Sacramento Daily Union*, 13 September 1860.

the nation 50 million in gold bullion each year. California yearned for better connections to the rest of the nation, but the extent of federal subsidies still supported enough patronage abuse for Republicans to lambast Democratic officeholders.⁶¹

Little divided Republicans and Douglas Democrats on slavery, but Breckinridge Democrats offered a clear contrast. The southern Democrats adopted resolutions endorsing Breckinridge's candidacy and platform, effectively endorsing Dred Scott and a call for a federal slave code in the territories. While the northern Democrats went beyond Republicans in calling for the annexation of Cuba and in offering condemnation of evasions of the Fugitive Slave Act, they both attacked the Buchanan administration and decried the Dred Scott decision. They also stood surprisingly close on the pivotal question of how to resolve the question of slavery in the federal territories. The Douglas Democrats, with John Conness now their leader in California, fully backed popular sovereignty as a guarantor of free territories. In 1859 and 1860, Republicans adopted resolutions that allowed for either congressional prohibition or popular sovereignty as a means to ensure freedom in the territories. Leading Republican orator, Senator Edward D. Baker of Oregon, spoke at a major campaign rally in California and shared his conviction that events in Kansas had shown popular sovereignty, properly applied, to be a safe vehicle to ensure freedom and proclaimed himself a "Popular Sovereignty Republican." Baker told Douglas supporters not to waste their vote on a man who could never win and instead to join with Republicans who, he promised, would "stand by your doctrine of Popular Sovereignty as an engine for freedom." These pleas had been steadily working for Republicans as they gained strength in the late 1850s by winning support in what had been Broderick (Douglas) strongholds in San Francisco and Sacramento.⁶²

⁶¹ Ellison, *California and the Nation*, 164; Robert J. Chandler, "An Uncertain Influence: The Role of the Federal Government in California, 1846-1880," in John F. Burns and Richard J. Orsi, eds., *Taming the Elephant: Politics, Government, and Law in Pioneer California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 224-258.

⁶² Winfield J. Davis, *History of Political Conventions in California, 1849-1892* (Sacramento: California State Library, 1893), 100-178; Speech of Edward D. Baker at Republican Mass Meeting in San Francisco, October 26, 1860, in *California Speeches*, Vol. 10, (collated by California State Library, Sacramento).

Republicans and Douglas Democrats made it clear that, while they opposed each other, a far greater divide existed between them and the Breckinridge organization who put the Union in danger. While trying to convert Douglas men, Edward Baker said that while he would not claim that “all who vote for Breckinridge are disunionists,” he had no doubt that “every disunionist is a Breckinridger.” Defending a vote for Douglas, Democrats hailed popular sovereignty and damned ballots cast for Breckinridge as “for the secession ticket,” suitable only for those wished to break up the party and the nation. The ubiquity of such attacks on the Breckinridge ticket from Republicans and Democrats confirmed that while a few prominent Californians touted ideas of a Pacific Republic in the event of Civil War, the vast majority felt entirely wedded to the Union.⁶³

Lincoln unexpectedly won California despite receiving only 32% of the popular vote. Lincoln’s modest share was nonetheless impressive given that Frémont had secured only 19% in the Golden State in 1856 and Leland Stanford, the Republican gubernatorial nominee in 1859, received a paltry 10%. Lincoln squeaked home thanks to the Democratic schism, with Douglas gaining 31.7%, Breckinridge 28.4%, and Bell 7.6%. The geographical breakdown of the votes showed clear patterns. Breckinridge had some support everywhere, but the greatest concentration came in rural areas in northern frontier counties and particularly in southern California where the Chivalry had long dominated. The sparsely populated southern counties had a higher proportion of settlers from southern states and felt economically, culturally, and politically cut off from much of the rest of the state. In September 1859, a bill had even passed the legislature approving the creation of the “territory of Colorado” out of five southern California counties, a measure resoundingly approved by local referendum and signed by the governor. Heightening sectional controversy ensured that Congress ignored California’s plea for dismemberment. Los Angeles, at just over four thousand people, represented the urban hub of the region and gave reliable majorities to southern Democrats. During the

⁶³ *Sacramento Daily Union*, October 26 and November 3, 1860.

war, this part of the state would be repeatedly assailed, with some justification, as a hot-bed of Confederate sympathizers.⁶⁴

Lincoln and Douglas dominated in the most populous middle band of counties that stretched West to East from San Francisco past Sacramento. Douglas narrowly held Sacramento, but Lincoln owed his overall victory to a decisive win in San Francisco. By 1860, San Francisco ranked as the fifteenth biggest city in the Union and it made up well over 10% of California's electorate. Major cities always had upper and middle class elements favorable to Republicans' reformist impulses and business friendly policies. But to have large anti-slavery majorities in cities with sizeable foreign born – especially Irish – populations was unusual in antebellum America. David Broderick, the former New York politician who had run Democratic politics in San Francisco in the machine style he had learned from Tammany, was an Irish Catholic. When Broderick led the anti-slavery breakaway within the party, he took his Irish constituents with him and his martyrdom helped glue them to his anti-slavery cause. With anti-slavery politics established in these cities, they became riper ground for Republican conversions.⁶⁵

Despite Lincoln's victory, California remained a Democratic state. The state legislature contained only nineteen Republicans, compared to thirty-eight Douglas Democrats, and twenty-two Breckinridge Democrats. Before the election, Republicans had the support of only eight newspapers, compared to forty-four backing the northern Democrats, thirty the southern Democrats, and eleven

⁶⁴ H. Brett Melendy, *The Governors of California: Peter H. Burnett to Edmund G. Brown* (Georgetown, CA: Talisman Press, 1965), 80-110; John W. Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 25-43.

⁶⁵ Robert Denning and J. Henry Rogers, "A Fragile Machine: California Senator John Conness," *California History* 85, No. 4 (2008): 26-73; Ethington, *The Public City*, 182-183; Analysis of the county by county election returns from Michael J. Dubin, *United States Presidential Elections, 1788-1860: The Official Results by County and State* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002). The analysis of San Francisco is a simplification of a complicated reality. After the astonishing military takeover of the city by a Vigilance Committee in 1856 (much larger than an earlier one in 1851), San Francisco was ruled internally by a People's Party formed when the Vigilance Committee disbanded. This fascinating movement drew from northern Democrats and Republicans but Republicans steadily gained the upperhand. See Ethington, *The Public City*, 86-169.

happy with either Lincoln or Douglas. John G. Downey, elected in 1859 as a Lecompton Democrat, but a Douglas supporter in 1860, occupied the governorship. Such a distribution of power superficially looked ominous for Lincoln at the outbreak of war. But Republicans and northern Democrats shared a common Unionism and anti-slavery that would help them to fuse during the war years.⁶⁶

Kentucky

Kentucky's politics bore minimal resemblance to the northern states they would soon find themselves fighting alongside. Examining late antebellum politics and the 1860 presidential election in the Bluegrass state tells us little about the make-up or ideology of the Republican Party or of most northern Democrats. But it tells us a great deal about what kept Kentucky in the Union despite these differences and the nature of the challenge Lincoln would face in keeping the border states within the Union tent. Moreover, during the war, the Border States figured prominently in the imagination of both Republicans and Democrats. As northerners fought a bloody war to put the Union back together, they had to imagine that ground could be found on which national parties could again be constructed. The northern press and public would consistently lionize border state Unionists like William Gannaway "Parson" Brownlow, Robert J. Breckinridge, and Andrew Johnson for exactly this reason.

Addressing the question of why Kentucky rejected secession, one line of thinking has been that Kentuckians chose economic ties with the North over social and cultural ties with the South. As historians like Patrick A. Lewis and Christopher Phillips have suggested, this misrepresents the state's economy and its culture; Kentucky had deep ties to North and South and, arguably, shared a more particular regional western identity as a state on the "middle border."⁶⁷ As a percentage of the total population, the number of slaves in Kentucky peaked in 1830 at 24% and had dropped slowly but steadily to just under 20% in 1860. The state ranked ninth in its number of slaves, but second in its

⁶⁶ Chandler, "Fighting Words," 48.

⁶⁷ Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backwards*; Patrick A. Lewis, *For Slavery and Union: Benjamin Buckner and Kentucky Loyalties in the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky), 59-60.

number of slaveholders. With many small slaveholdings and high rates of slave hiring, slavery pervaded throughout Kentucky society. The Bluegrass region contained the largest proportion of slaveholding. But few slaves produced cotton, with tobacco (ranking second in the nation) and hemp (first in the nation) being the largest sectors of production.⁶⁸

Despite the predominance of slave based agriculture, the state's economics, demographics, and to some extent politics, also connected Kentucky to the North. Focused around the state's largest city, Louisville, Kentucky had a growing manufacturing industry that ranked twelfth in the Union, helping to draw in northern finance that provided vital credit for businessmen in the Bluegrass. Louisville housed the largest proportion of the five percent of foreign-born residents in Kentucky which helped the city and state look less southern in its demography. Louisville was also 10% African-American, composed of five thousand enslaved people and two thousand free blacks. Louisville's free African-American population was forced to reside in separate enclaves but worked, mostly in unskilled labor positions, all across the city. Some found better paid employment working as barbers or on steamboats and formed a small class of propertied African-Americans. Two extremely successful barbers, Washington Spradling Jr., and Shelton Morris, built significant wealth and used it to help purchase freedom for some African-Americans and helped others through the Underground Railroad on which Louisville was an important hub. Escapees often went through neighboring Cincinnati, which had close ties to Louisville. Decades of white migration across the Ohio river had left Kentuckians familiarly intertwined with their northern neighbors. Indiana hosted 68,000 residents born in Kentucky, Illinois had 60,000, and Ohio, 15,000. Less numerous but still significant, 14,000 native Ohioans lived in the Bluegrass state alongside 7,000 from Indiana and 3,000 from Illinois. Northern influences and the political dominance of the Whigs saw Kentucky remain supportive of a range of policies and

⁶⁸ Data compiled from Berry Craig, *Kentucky Confederates: Secession, Civil War, and the Jackson Purchase* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2014), 24 and Kenneth H. Williams and James Russell Harris, "Kentucky in 1860: A Statistical Overview," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 103 (Autumn 2005): 743-764.

institutions – internal improvements, banks, a high tariff, common schools – that much of the Democratic-dominated South had abandoned as sectional policies designed to undermine slavery.⁶⁹

The state's Whig past, embodied by its most famous statesman, Henry Clay, continued to shape politics on the eve of war. As Patrick Lewis has written, although the Whig Party had died, "its ghosts...continued to haunt electoral politics." First, the American Party won the governorship in 1855, and then, although Buchanan had become the first Democrat since Andrew Jackson to carry the state, a new anti-democratic party simply called "the Opposition," formed in 1858 and secured half the congressional seats. Two leading figures in the "Opposition," John J. Crittenden, the powerful congressman who had taken on Clay's mantle of Whig moderation and compromise, and George D. Prentice, the influential editor of the *Louisville Journal*, both hoped that an arrangement could be reached with Republicans on the basis of agreement on the tariff, internal improvements, and opposition to the African Slave Trade.⁷⁰

The Opposition Party entertained notions of a national alliance with Republicans not because they agreed with them on slavery, but because they believed the issue to be settled. All knew that Kansas would only enter the Union as a free state and no other territories existed where slavery was viable. When Prentice's *Journal* issued the call for the Opposition convention in 1858, it praised the "adoption in many portions of the country by Republicans of more conservative views" and considered the "modification of Republican Party managers an intention to bury the negro question, and allow some legislation for the benefit of the white race." Lincoln worried that conservative Republicans might entertain an alliance and warned against accommodations to "the southern opposition element"

⁶⁹ E. Merton Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 13-14; J. Blaine Hudson, "Upon This Rock' – The Free African American Community of Antebellum Louisville, Kentucky," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 109 (Summer/Autumn, 2011): 295-326.

⁷⁰ Lewis, *For Slavery and Union*, 58.

which would “gain nothing in the South, and lose everything in the North.” Lincoln did not need to worry long.⁷¹

Kentucky’s 1859 election and John Brown’s raid brought slavery back to center stage and ended any possibility of unity with Republicans.⁷² In the 1859 gubernatorial contest, the Opposition tried to outdo the Democrats in defending slavery. Showing how mixed up party politics was at this stage, Joshua Fry Bell, the Opposition candidate for governor, pledged support for federal intervention to protect slavery in the territories, effectively proposing a federal slave code. The southern rights Democrat, Beriah Magoffin, agreed that congress possessed the authority to legislate in the territories but argued against taking precipitous action. Magoffin hoped to calm sectional tensions and maintained that slaveholders, in light of the Dred Scott decision, need only appeal to federal courts to uphold the sanctity of their property. Only if this failed, might Congress need to intervene. Bell interpreted this policy of congressional non-intervention as “Douglasism” and proof of the Democrats’ unreliability on slavery. John Brown’s raid had made both parties in Kentucky more determined to present themselves as defenders of the peculiar institution.⁷³

The pro-slavery consensus in Kentucky ruled out an accord with Republicans, but it did not equate to a desire for disunion. In 1860, John Bell won the state with 45% of the vote compared to 36% for native Kentuckian Breckinridge and 17.5% for Douglas. The Bell and Douglas forces both focused their ire on Breckinridge as a disunionist. They maintained that slavery rested safe within the Union and the only threat to the institution came from the reckless extremists within the Breckinridge camp who openly sought an excuse to dissolve the Union. Bell’s victories in seventeen of the twenty

⁷¹ Daniel W. Crofts, “The Southern Opposition and the Crisis of the Union,” in Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel Sheldon, eds., *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Political History* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 99; *Journal* piece reprinted in *Lexington Observer & Reporter*, October 27, 1858.

⁷² Eventually, as detailed in chapter 4, Kentucky’s old Whig conservatives would eventually find common ground with northern Democrats.

⁷³ Robert Gobel, “‘Misunderstood and Misrepresented’: Beriah Magoffin and the 1859 Kentucky Gubernatorial Election,” *Ohio Valley History* 16 (Winter, 2016): 41-59.

counties with the highest rates of slaveholding demonstrate the effectiveness of this argument. Some of Breckinridge's strongest support came in the Jackson Purchase region in the far South-West of the state and the eastern border counties, areas with strong southern cultural loyalties but few planters. Slaveholding rates were low in the East and, while they had grown in the Jackson Purchase, they never compared to the Bluegrass. While this showed that Kentuckians decision not to embrace Breckinridge came from a pro-slavery Unionism, their Unionism comprised of much more than just pro-slavery.⁷⁴

Henry Clay's long dominance had helped instill a political culture that combined moderate pro-slavery positions, fierce Unionism, and a reverence for compromise bolstered by sensitivity to the state's vulnerable geographical position between the sections. Ideas of slavery as a "necessary evil," once found throughout the South, survived in Kentucky where citizens "venerated the yeoman republic and a slaveholder's democracy." Lingering ambivalence over slavery helped generate support for gradual abolition and colonization. Henry Clay, who had presided over the first meeting of the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1816, encouraged his colleagues to adopt a scheme for gradual abolition as late as the 1849 constitutional convention. Kentucky-born Abraham Lincoln, who idolized Clay, hoped similarly for gradual emancipation coupled with colonization. Both idealized a plan for freedom that, in Clay's words, was "slow in its operation, cautious and gradual, so as to occasion no convulsion, nor any rash or sudden disturbance, in the existing habits of society." Even so, by the end of Clay's life, proslavery ideas had taken firmer hold in Kentucky. Clay's blueprint for gradual emancipation in 1849, supported by other anti-slavery figures like James Speed and Cassius Clay, was resoundingly rejected. The state Constitutional Convention only strengthened the place of slavery within Kentucky's legal and political structure.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Jasper Berry Shannon, *Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948: A Compilation of Election Statistics and an Analysis of Political Behavior* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1950); James E. Copeland, "Where were the Kentucky Unionists and Secessionists," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 71 (October 1973), 344-363; Berry Craig, *Kentucky Confederates*.

⁷⁵ Aaron Astor, "The Crouching Lion's Fate: Slave Politics and Conservative Unionism in Kentucky," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 110 (Summer/Autumn, 2012): 303; Harold D. Tallant, *Evil*

Kentuckians wedded increasing pro-slavery sentiment with a deep reverence for the Founding generation and for the economic opportunities and political freedoms they ensured. A strong faith in the belief that all states and sections benefited from the Union helped Kentuckians believe that an active federal government posed no threat to the strict social and racial order headed by white, male slaveholders. Kentuckians saw no erosion in the federal system sufficient to jeopardize their right to own property in slaves. As Gary R. Matthews has written, “trust in the democratic process,” was “an important component of the state’s Unionism.” The sectional compromises established in the constitution still functioned within a system of self-government that Kentuckians held sacrosanct. When their southern sisters abandoned the Union after a fair election, many Kentuckians deemed it an unconscionable rejection of a sacred principle.⁷⁶

Awareness of the fact that any sectional conflict would likely engulf this militarily critical border state also contributed to what Aaron Astor has called Kentucky’s “conservative Unionism” that valued “stability, pragmatism, compromise, and tradition.” When much of the South misrepresented the North’s reaction to John Brown, the *Frankfort Commonwealth* took heart that the northern press of both parties had expressed “the most unqualified condemnation of the wicked and insane projects of Brown,” and even affirmed that “thousands of true men in the North,” would have taken up arms to defend slaveholders had Brown succeeded in igniting a larger uprising. Long after the Deep South left

Necessity: Slavery and Political Culture in Antebellum Kentucky (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 2; for ideas about colonization and slavery in Kentucky, see James Ramage and Andrea Watkins, *Kentucky Rising: Democracy, Slavery, and Culture from Early Republic to Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 260-279. For the convention, see Arthur Rolston, “A Tale of Two States: Producerism and Constitutional Reform in Antebellum Kentucky and Ohio,” *Ohio Valley History* 5 (Summer, 2005): 46-49.

⁷⁶ Gary R. Matthews, “Beleaguered Loyalists, Kentucky Unionism,” in Kent T. Dollar, Larry H. Whiteaker and W. Calvin Dickinson, eds., *Sister States, Enemy States: the Civil War in Kentucky and Tennessee* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 9; Gary R. Matthews, *More American than Southern: Kentucky, Slavery, and the War for American Ideology, 1828-1861* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 259.

the Union, many Kentuckians desperately hoped that their statesmen, with John Crittenden taking the lead, could find a compromise to prevent disunion.⁷⁷

Raised in this culture of conservative Unionism was Thomas E. Bramlette, the only one of Kentucky's three Civil War governors to be elected during the conflict. Before the war, Thomas Bramlette enjoyed a moderately successful career in the law and as a Whig politician. Born in 1817 in Clinton County, along the southern border with Tennessee, Bramlette was admitted to the bar in 1837, the same year he married his first wife, Sallie Travis, with whom he had two children. His father had served in the Kentucky Senate and House and, in 1841, Bramlette began his political career as a Whig in the General Assembly. In 1853, Bramlette lost surprisingly when running for congress in Kentucky's reliably Whig fourth district. In the aftermath, supportive newspapers sought explanations and discovered reports circulated by Democratic opponents in the last days of the campaign, claiming that Bramlette was a Baptist preacher who advocated the Maine Liquor Law prohibiting alcohol except for medicinal or manufacturing purposes. The *Kentucky Tribune* denied these accusations but admitted Bramlette to be a Baptist, though not a preacher, and a Son of Temperance, though opposed to legal action to prohibit alcohol. After the demise of the Whigs, Bramlette was elected a circuit judge on an American Party ticket in 1856, from which position he backed Kentucky's "Opposition" Party in the late 1850s and supported John Bell in 1860. Bramlette's fierce Unionism meant that, when war broke out, he had little time for Kentucky's policy of neutrality and immediately began raising the 3rd Kentucky Infantry unit that he would later command. This military experience in the Union army would kick-start his later political career.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Astor, "The Crouching Lion's Fate," 296, 307.

⁷⁸*Kentucky Tribune* (Danville, KY), June 24, 1853 and August 12, 1853; *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), August 16, 1853; *Vicksburg Daily Whig* (Vicksburg, MS), August 21, 1856.

Conclusion

In 1856, Democrats had, as Elizabeth R. Varon has written, successfully “bludgeoned the Republicans with the charge that they were abolitionists in disguise.” By 1860, Republicans had worked hard to refute this accusation. The formation of the Constitutional Union Party presented a rival home for conservative northern voters, but it came too late and offered too little. Whereas Fillmore had gained 13.3% in the North, Bell achieved only 2.3%. As the analysis in this chapter shows, Republicans had successfully incorporated many conservatives into their movement by 1858. Extreme southern Democrats had helped Republicans to soften their radical reputation by showing where the true disunionists resided.⁷⁹

Stephen Douglas may have won only one state in 1860, but his dramatic break from Buchanan and most of his southern colleagues revealed the basis on which a northern political center could stand. Although concealed under partisan differences, Douglas’ and the Democrats across the northern states had run campaigns that highlighted shared northern principles that would later help centrists generate a degree of consensus behind the war effort and which fueled the creation of bipartisan Union party coalitions.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Varon, *Disunion!*, 10. Bell’s figure would be higher if his share of the anti-Republican fusions achieved in Pennsylvania and New York could be quantified. Nonetheless, it would still have remained far below Fillmore’s in these states and overall.

⁸⁰ It should be obvious that seeing a degree of conservative consensus within the North does not imply that accommodation with the South was possible. As scholars like Lacy Ford have shown, many parts of the South, especially the Deep South, had hardened into a belief in slavery as a positive good that should be envisaged as a permanent basis of the southern economy and southern society. Recent work on visions of Confederate empire only confirm and extend this argument. Even the mildest non-extension positions in the North could not be reconciled with these elements of southern opinion. Republicans hoped, and many southerners feared, that a more conservative Republican organization could gain a foothold in the Border States from which to further undermine the political power of slaveholders in the nation. Even though Republicans had no plans and no desire to touch slavery where it existed, both sections knew that restriction of slavery’s expansion would be sufficient for demographics and industrialization to steadily increase the political and economic power of the North. For those slaveholders who dreamed of a robust, permanent, and expanding slaveholding nation, secession was a terrible misjudgment but it was not premised on a misreading of the ultimate incompatibility of their visions for the future with those of northerners committed to free labor. Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Adrian Brettelle, “The Fortunes of War: Confederate Expansionist Ambitions During the American Civil War,” (PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2014).

As much as Douglas and most Democrats denied they resembled Republicans, their advocacy of popular sovereignty revealed two areas of agreement with Republicans in relation to slavery. While non-extension and popular sovereignty were very different policies, they shared a commitment to the idea that “the people” should decide slavery’s fate and a revulsion at the excesses of the Slave Power. The Republican leaning conservative Sidney George Fisher captured this exact point in 1858 when he wrote regarding Buchanan’s actions over Kansas that “Not one in a thousand of the people cares much whether [Kansas] be a slave state or a free state! But millions do care whether slavery is to be forced upon it against the wishes of the people.”⁸¹ The idea of the Slave Power – that a southern slaveholding oligarchy used their vast political and economic power to control the institutions of government and thereby subvert republicanism and the will of the northern majority – held great traction by 1860. Buchanan’s actions on the Dred Scott decision and Kansas had made the Slave Power palpable and most northern Democrats had turned away from Buchanan as a result. As Peter Luebke has written, belief in the Slave Power conspiracy now “transcended partisan political lines.” Douglas Democrats across the North frequently invoked Andrew Jackson when imagining themselves the heirs of a true “democracy” under a leader willing to stand up to overbearing southern demands rather than be a groveling satrap to slaveholders.⁸²

Linked to their aversion to the Slave Power, the belief of most northern Democrats’ in the superiority of free labor made for a very mild anti-slavery position. Sufficient numbers of northern Democrats had lent congressional support to Republicans to pass legislation on internal improvements, homesteads, and agricultural colleges, all of which only failed to become law because of James Buchanan’s vetoes. While designed primarily to benefit urban industries, advocacy of the tariff similarly favored a northern protectionism over southerners demands for cotton-benefiting free trade.

⁸¹ Quoted in the *North American*, February 24, 1858, and used in Oliver L. Pflug, “Pennsylvania Politics 1854-1860,” Masters Thesis, University of Montana (2002).

⁸² Foner, *Free Soil*, 223, 222; Luebke, “Shattering the Slave Power,” 19.

When Republicans campaigned vigorously on the tariff in states like Pennsylvania, they frequently found northern Democrats echoing their position. The ubiquitous northern faith in the superiority of their society led Whig Millard Fillmore to say that “we of the North are all anti-Slavery in sentiment,” and Democrat Horatio Seymour to assert that “the people of the North are uniformly opposed to slavery.”⁸³

Such utterances make clear that this minimal level of “anti-slavery” encompassed very different policies and views on race and, by no means, equated Republicans and Democrats. While racism pervaded both parties, the level of prejudice within the Democratic Party outstripped that of Republicans. Sadly, few northerners wished to end slavery in the South and risk an exodus of freed blacks to the North. But Democrats supported much nastier restrictions on free blacks already in the North, had few problems with executing the fugitive slave law before the war, and cared little for the fate of African-Americans below the Mason-Dixon line. Most Republicans did not think that emancipation, other than by the states, was legally possible or desirable, but they generally sought to improve conditions for free blacks in the North and some dabbled with ideas of colonization in the hope of finding a scheme that could chip away at the institution of slavery in the South. This still made Lincoln and the Republican Party the most progressive option for the time. Common ground on slavery implied little about views on race, a reality that would undergird the partisan acrimony over the Emancipation Proclamation and its possible consequences.⁸⁴

⁸³ For calculations of support by partisan affiliation for congressional legislation in the 36th Congress, see See Richard Franklin Bense, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 70-72; Robert J. Rayback, *Millard Fillmore: Biography of a President* (Buffalo, NY: Buffalo Historical Society, 1959), 419; Thomas M. Cook and Thomas W. Knox, eds., *Public Record: Including Speeches, Messages, Proclamations, Official Correspondence, and Other Public Utterances of Horatio Seymour* (New York: I. W. England, 1868), 18 [hereafter, Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*].

⁸⁴ Michael Landis has recently argued that “most Northern Democrats were dough faces” right up to the eve of war. Landis notes that “Douglas dissidents were virtually ‘excommunicated’ from the party” and hence only considers Buchanan and his followers when talking about the northern Democratic Party. This position is problematic when the vast majority of northern Democrats voted for Douglas in 1860, arguably making them the “regular” Democrats. Few southerners would have agreed with Landis’ assertion that Douglas was as

The most significant and firm agreement between Democrats and Republicans in the North only truly became apparent with secession, but the 1860 campaign had augured consensus on Union and democracy. The increasing view of the South as a section ready to abandon the notion of self-government by majority rule drew universal ire. As one fervent Kentuckian opponent of Lincoln wrote on the eve of the 1860 election, “I have great hopes of beating Lincoln...but of one thing I am certain: if he should be elected, it will be right.”⁸⁵ When a crowd in Virginia asked Douglas if he would advise using force against a southern state attempting to secede, the Little Giant infuriated the gathering with a resounding “Yes!” Douglas added that any president should treat secession as Jackson dealt with South Carolina and that he hoped people would pose this same question to Breckinridge. Republicans accepted the implausibility of categorizing the Little Giant as a southern lackey placing slavery above union. In a speech on the floor of the senate, William Seward professed that “I know the Democracy of the North...I do not know a possible disunionist among them all.” Northerners in both parties perceived that if disunion loomed, it would be southern fire-eaters who would inaugurate it. With a heightened southern threat, internal partisan conflict in the North lost some of its edge. Rather than proclaim each other disunionists, as they had previously, Democrats and Republicans asserted that only their victory would prevent the real disunionists – the Slave Power – from being able to tear the nation apart. To defeat the Confederacy, the Civil War North would have to build on such principles that could bind them together.⁸⁶

reliably pro-slavery as Breckinridge in 1860. Michael Todd Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014), 4, 205, 207, 237.

⁸⁵ H J Bodley to Wm L. Bodley, November 2, 1860, Folder 65, Correspondence, Bodley Family Papers, 1773-1939, Filson Historical Society.

⁸⁶ See Holt, *The Election of 1860*, 152; [William H. Seward] *The State of the Country: Speech of William H. Seward, in the United States Senate, February 29, 1860* (N.p., [1860]), accessed through HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://babel.hathitrust.org>.

Lincoln's victory represented an astonishing triumph for a party only six years old. Yet he and his colleagues knew the challenges ahead, even before secession. Lincoln faced the daunting task of governing a nation where a minority, only 39.8% of the electorate, had chosen him to be their president. If the Republican Party was to establish itself, long-term, as a party able to win the presidency, it would need to continue to expand its support. The onset of war diminished thoughts of expanding into the South, but even within the North, Lincoln had only received 54% of the votes. And Douglas' break with Buchanan and most of his southern colleagues made the Democrats a viable party in the North post-secession by placing some distance between them and the rebels. When the war came, the slave states of Maryland, Kentucky, Delaware, and Missouri remained loyal, increasing the pool of Democratic voters and toughening Lincoln's task. The president had secured 48.6% of the ballots cast in the states that would form the wartime Union.⁸⁷

To sustain war on an unprecedented scale, Lincoln and his party would need backing from more than 48.6% of the Union population. The overwhelming Republican majorities in New England made the task all the more difficult elsewhere. As Paul Kleppner has written, this left Republicans at the start of the Civil War in a "precarious position," where party builders faced the task "not of retaining normal majority support, but of developing it." They had to do this while waging a long and bloody war. People might not have to agree on every policy of the administration, but they would have to support candidates at the ballot box who would maintain the fundamental acts required to fuel the war effort. How Union politicians achieved this remarkable feat is the story of the rest of this dissertation.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Calculations based on figures in Holt, *The Election of 1860*, 194-195. By comparison, Breckinridge received 51% of the vote in states that would form the Confederacy, an indication of just how well Bell performed even in the Deep South.

⁸⁸ Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System*, 79.

Chapter Two

1861: A Conservative Consensus

The Evans family of Brown County, Ohio, had always been Democrats. Their home, situated on the southern border with Kentucky, would be one of only seventeen (out of 88) counties to vote Democratic throughout the war. But Andrew Evans and his son Sam, who fought in the 70th Ohio Infantry, abandoned their party early in the war and never went back. By 1864, Sam Evans had even become an officer in the 59th United States Colored Troops (USCT) and voted to reelect President Abraham Lincoln.

In September 1864, his cousin, Jane Evans, wrote to Sam commenting on his political transformation. After losing her father to the war, Jane wanted peace. Where Sam welcomed another draft, Jane asked what would happen when there was “no one left to support the mamas and children?” Jane worried too about emancipation, stating that she “would not mind freeing the negroes if they could be sent off and not come back,” but she knew that would be impossible. Most of all, Jane could not understand voting for a man who had “bin the cause of as many lives lost as he has.” Jane reminded Sam of how, four years earlier, he had called a Republican acquaintance a “Negroamus” and pledged that he would never vote for Old Abe. Jane could not fathom how Sam and his father had traveled so far from their partisan roots.¹

Historians have long known that many Democrats, especially soldiers, voted against their party at points during the war. As Jonathan W. White has recently argued, scholars have too often depicted this as the result of a swift and decisive conversion to Republicanism. Looking at the overwhelming majority of soldiers who voted to reelect Lincoln in 1864, White has shown that many conceived of

¹ Robert F. Engs and Corey M. Brooks, eds., *Their Patriotic Duty: The Civil War Letters of the Evans Family of Brown County, Ohio* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), introduction and 287-9.

their vote primarily as *against* a Democratic Party perceived to be anti-war. Others voiced preferences for Lincoln as their commander-in-chief and father figure rather than the Republican Party head. Some felt they had little choice when voting publicly within an army deeply hostile to Democrats. Another major factor is that soldiers did not actually support a Republican ticket, voting instead for a National Union Party in 1864. Moreover, this national Union Party had been preceded by numerous state-level Union Parties, like the one formed in Ohio in 1861.²

Historians have greatly underappreciated the role that ideologically centrist Union Parties played in helping non-Republicans, such as the Evans', to support the administration throughout the war. Indeed, the Evans family are illustrative of many Democrats at home and in the army. In Ohio, the Evans' voted against the Democratic Party in two gubernatorial elections and a presidential election. But, in doing so, they never had to vote Republican, and took delight in supporting two Democrats for governor and another as Lincoln's Vice-President. Appalled at the Democratic nomination in 1863 of Clement L. Vallandigham – the leading anti-war figure in the nation – the Evans' rejoiced in the choice of an “old Hickory Democrat” John Brough as the Union Party candidate. With a soldier, Charles Anderson, as Brough's running mate for lieutenant governor, Andrew Evans vowed to elect the “ablest men that have ever been offered in the State of Ohio.” Consistently, Ohio's Union Party offered candidates and platforms that permitted non-Republicans like Andrew and Sam Evans to settle easily into a new political home.³

Overviews of wartime politics tend either to omit Union parties entirely or to mention them only with regards to Lincoln's decision to run at the head of a National Union Party in 1864. As Michael F. Holt has written, “most historians, echoing contemporary Democrats, have regarded this action as a transparently cosmetic attempt by cynical Republicans to lure gullible Democrats and

² Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

³ Engs & Brooks, eds., *Their Patriotic Duty*, 132, 162.

Unionists into supporting Republican candidates and Republican policies.” More recently, Melinda Lawson, has dismissed the movement as a “political strategy, a tactic employed when useful and abandoned when less so.” Such characterizations rarely grapple with the reality that Union parties took shape almost as soon as the war began, and that they emerged all across the northern states, not simply as a fleeting strategy in 1864. In a few states, Democrats predominated in Union parties, but mostly, as in California and Ohio discussed here, these movements absorbed all Republicans (though to the great chagrin of some) and a significant but varying number of Democrats and former Whig conservatives. Such Union Parties represented honest attempts to forge more inclusive political movements, premised on the most widespread and deeply held desire within the nation: to preserve the Union.⁴

Understanding the circumstances under which these parties formed in 1861 is critical to grasping their character and lasting appeal. After the profound uncertainty of the secession crisis, war brought a type of relief but little clarity. The popular response to the firing on Fort Sumter demonstrated that a large proportion of northern Democrats supported a war to put down the rebellion and restore the Union. Mass meetings across the nation exhibited bipartisan civilian backing for a war for Union and Democrats rushed to enlist alongside Republicans. The Union defeat at the Battle of Bull Run on July 21 made it clear that a substantial war lay ahead. To win, the Lincoln administration would need to retain backing from non-Republicans, as well as keeping the border states of Maryland, Kentucky, Missouri, and Delaware within the Union. These requirements helped unite politicians and the nation behind the Crittenden-Johnson Resolution that passed Congress almost unanimously only four days after Bull Run. The Resolution articulated a conservative war fought from no desire for “conquest or subjugation, or purpose of overthrowing or interfering with the rights or established

⁴ Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 338; Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: Forging a New American Nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 80.

institutions of those States” and affirmed that the war would end as soon as all states had been restored to the Union with their full rights intact.

The desire for the nation’s politics to stand on centrist, common ground also reflected the common feeling, however unmerited, that party politics bore much blame for the outbreak of war. Many Americans felt that parties had failed to bridge the nation’s divides, allowing extreme partisans to exaggerate sectional differences and fracture consensus throughout the nation. As William Tecumseh Sherman wrote to his brother, Ohio politician John Sherman, “politicians,” regardless of party, had “succeeded in destroying the government.” The cartoon from January 1861 in Figure 1 – from *Vanity Fair*, a conservative political journal based in New York – depicts abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison shaking hands with southern fire-eater and South Carolina congressman, Laurence M. Keitt under the caption “Like meets Like.” The image captures the conviction that politics had failed to restrain extremists in both sections who had finally achieved their joint goal of destroying the Union. This sentiment helped propel the formation of Union parties as institutional mechanisms to deliver a less divisive politics. Republicans formed the majority, but the influx of Democrats and other conservatives into these anti-partisan parties resulted in power moving toward the center during the war.⁵

At this stage, Lincoln walked in lockstep with the conservative agenda encapsulated in the Crittenden-Johnson resolution and took a series of actions that repeatedly angered radical Republicans and reassured conservatives. As Daniel W. Crofts has recently argued, Lincoln had worked hard to position himself as a “Northern centrist” and, in 1861, he showed few signs of shifting his footing. Part of the logic underpinning his positions was the continued hope that a majority of the people within the Confederacy still held a deep allegiance to the Union. Lincoln and many northerners hoped that a

⁵ Rachel Sherman Thorndike, ed., *The Sherman Letters: Correspondence Between General Sherman and Senator Sherman from 1837 to 1891* ([1894] reprint; New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 89; Adam I.P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

Unionist majority had been intimidated, deceived, led astray, or temporarily lost hold of their senses. Lincoln feared further alienating these dormant loyalists by striking at slavery.⁶

When northerners voiced their continued hope in southern Unionism, it rested not necessarily on a misapprehension of the present but a belief that allegiances could shift in the future. A great deal of the political and policy behavior of 1861 intended to demonstrate to the southern masses the fallacy of the claim made by secessionists that the North, and particularly the Republican Party, had been converted to abolitionism. If the Administration could combine a show of military might with restraint toward slavery and a demonstrable commitment to ending a rebellion simply in order to restore self-government to loyal southerners, then surely the Confederacy would crumble from within. Since a majority in the North truly did see slavery as a secondary concern to saving the Union, this plan found popular endorsement.

The events of 1861 make little sense if we imagine the North attempting to chart a course to emancipation, as some recent scholarly work has implied. Adam Goodheart's book, *1861*, argues that "Men and women at the time, on both sides of the conflict, did understand it as a war against slavery, even before it began." James Oakes' *Freedom National* imagines a Republican Party united in its desire to attack slavery and possessing a clear plan from the outset to implement their goal. The evidence in this chapter suggests that the perspective of Californian Cornelius Cole, an abolitionist and founder of the Republican Party in his state, to be more typical. Cole wrote in his memoirs that secession had shocked him. As he saw it, "the really conservative attitude" of the Republican Party in having no policy to impair slavery where it existed made any uprising highly unlikely. Cole claimed to have not expected war and "least of all" to have imagined that he "would ever be called upon to give

⁶ Daniel W. Crofts, *Lincoln and the Politics of Slavery: The Other Thirteenth Amendment and the Struggle to Save the Union* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 71.

my vote...for the entire and lasting destruction of slavery in America.” Cole might have wished this, but he never anticipated it.⁷

Cole spoke to the truth that people possessed few certainties in 1861. Democrats and Republicans in California and Ohio questioned whether secession would or should lead to war, and then they wondered as to how long the conflict would last and where it would lead. These contingencies fueled their desire to build alliances and coalitions that evinced the overwhelming purpose of the North in fighting the conflict and that placed them on as united and firm a footing to face the vagaries of war.

This chapter traces developments in Ohio and California to understand the formation, development, and significance of state level Union parties. In both these states, Union coalitions of Douglas Democrats and Republicans took shape that would dominate politics for the duration of the conflict, winning larger majorities than Republicans had managed on their own in 1860 or before. As well as unpacking the electoral dynamics of these states in 1861, this chapter follows these Union Parties into the war, exploring how they adapted and how they governed through 1863.

Analyzing governance matters because voters assessed results as well as rhetoric. Part of the test for more inclusive Union Parties lay in attempting to govern and speak to the broad middle even when wartime exigencies tended to push policies toward the extremes. Charting the realities of war on these two very different home fronts reminds us how the Civil War constituted both a nationally comparable experience and how people lived it as a state specific phenomenon. While questions of mobilization, war policy, and defense against Confederate invasion dominated Ohio’s interactions with the federal government, problems with Indian communities and a desire for better transport and communication links still figured prominently in California’s wartime relationship with Washington.

⁷ Adam Goodheart, *1861: The Civil War Awakening* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 19; James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013); Cornelius Cole, *Memoirs of Cornelius Cole: Ex-Senator of the United States from California* (New York: McLoughlin Brothers, 1908), 140-141.

Ohioans undeniably suffered during the war on a vastly different scale to people living on the West coast. Feeling the highs and lows of the war more acutely, they experienced a more tempestuous electoral politics. The two states demonstrate how a shared wartime Unionism strained and stretched under very different circumstances.



Figure 1: Vanity Fair, January 26, 1861.

The Secession Crisis

Secession vindicated and rebuked the arguments that *both* Republicans and Democrats had made during the 1860 canvass. For Republicans, the decision to abandon the Union after a fair election confirmed their indictment of John C. Breckinridge's candidacy and tainted northern Democrats who had spent years defending and cooperating with their southern colleagues. But northern Democrats could also chastise Republicans for their repeated claims that southern threats of secession were all bark and no bite. Both parties had long dangled disunion as an electoral weapon, now they had to face the reality.⁸

The Ohio Republican Party found itself in jeopardy as the question of how far to conciliate the South threatened to tear apart the functional alliance, described in the previous chapter, between radicals like Salmon P. Chase, Benjamin F. Wade, and Joshua R. Giddings and conservatives like Thomas Corwin, Thomas Ewing, and John Sherman. In radical strongholds like the old Connecticut Western Reserve, Republicans and abolitionists balked at plans to make concessions enticing secessionists back into the Union. A few countenanced peaceful disunion, but most argued that the Slave Power would only back down in the face of a resolute response that should not involve jettisoning the principles on which they had just won a national victory.⁹

Conservatives within the Republican coalition immediately endorsed attempts at compromise. Two Ohio conservatives wrote to president-elect Lincoln in January and February 1861 urging him to recognize the strength of conservatism in their state. These men claimed that Republican ascendancy depended on old Whigs like themselves who had made the party "as conservative as it ought to be, and national." In their view, "all moderate men" would welcome the repeal across the North of

⁸ See Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), for the long history of this tactic within partisan politics.

⁹ The lack of clarity among radicals was not aided by the continued split Wade and Chase factions who had fallen out the previous year over the presidential ambitions of their respective leaders. See Hans Trefousse, *Benjamin Franklin Wade: Radical Republican from Ohio* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1963), and Frederick J. Blue, *Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1987), for their feud.

“unconstitutional personal liberty bills” and “the restoration of the Missouri Compromise.” The latter of these suggestions would explicitly contravene the Republican platform of 1860 that pledged to prevent slavery extending into the territories.¹⁰

This divide within Republicanism became more ominous when conservatives allied with a united Democratic Party behind peace plans such as the Crittenden Compromise, which included the effective restoration of the Missouri line. One southern Ohio Republican worried that radicals’ strong stance against compromise risked “the organization of a new Union Party, composed of the Douglas Democracy, the Bell men, and the great mass of the old Whigs in the West.” Such fears grew when Democrats joined with former Bell men to advocate compromise on joint “Union” tickets that secured majorities in the spring municipal elections in Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Toledo. As Christopher Phillips has written, secession seemed to be “weakening Republican support in the middle border’s free states.” Although it had been a fraught relationship, many Ohioans had very close ties and fond affection for their Kentuckian and Virginian neighbors. Few wished to rush to war before all efforts to prevent it had been exhausted.¹¹

Analysis by Eric J. Cardinal of the Ohio legislature that met in January 1861 demonstrates how many conservative Republicans voted with Democrats during the secession winter. The chamber composed 57 Republicans and 47 Democrats, but the minority regularly succeeded in passing resolutions and legislation to appease the South. Enough Republicans defected to pass a law banning interracial marriage in Ohio and then in March, twenty-four of the forty-six Republicans voted to support the calling of a national convention of all the states. Benjamin Wade led radicals in deriding

¹⁰ Richard P.L. Baber to Abraham Lincoln, February 2, 1861, William M. Wilson to Abraham Lincoln, January 19, 1861, Lincoln Papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed online at www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/ [hereafter cited as Lincoln Papers].

¹¹ George Henry Porter, *Ohio Politics During the Civil War Period* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1911), 72; Eric J. Cardinal, “The Democratic Party of Ohio and the Civil War: An Analysis of a Wartime Political Minority” (PhD diss., Kent State University, 1981), 55; Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 108.

the “fossil Whigs” within the Republican Party who supported unsavory and unwise attempts at conciliation. While Wade may have more astutely judged the temper of the secessionists, he ran ahead of most Ohioans.¹²

William Dennison Jr., the Republican governor elected in 1859, bore the responsibility of charting the state through these uncertain waters. Dennison stood somewhere in the middle of the Republican ideological spectrum. As historian Eugene H. Roseboom wrote, Dennison proved “radical enough to suit the radicals but not enough to offend the conservatives.” Initially, Dennison declared himself open to attempts at compromise. On December 21, 1860, he attended a meeting arranged by Thurlow Weed with other governors in New York. Weed and his ally, New York governor Edwin D. Morgan, urged conciliation and in his January inaugural, Dennison joined other governors in promoting the repeal of any personal liberty laws that contravened the South’s constitutional guarantees. In January, Dennison reluctantly reversed his past course in agreeing to the rendition of a fugitive slave, Lucy Bagby. He also recommended that his state participate in the peace conference being organized by Virginia and sent seven representatives who covered the spectrum of Ohio Republicanism, from Salmon P. Chase to Thomas Ewing.

The Peace Conference proposals ended up mirroring those already suggested by Kentucky’s John J. Crittenden in December, centered around the extension of the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific Coast. The Ohio delegation, against the angry dissent of Chase and one other radical, had ended up endorsing every compromise suggested. Nonetheless, these proposals again failed to secure a majority in Congress. Republicans feared the possible results of a public referendum on compromise measures and so the only significant conciliatory step came with the passage of the original thirteenth amendment. Drafted by Ohio’s conservative Republican Thomas Corwin, this would, ironically, have prevented Congress from ever being able to act against slavery where it existed. Secretary of State

¹² Cardinal, “The Democratic Party of Ohio,” 65-69; Kenneth J. Heineman, *Civil War Dynasty: The Ewing Family of Ohio* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 106.

William H. Seward pushed the measure and Lincoln accepted it. The Republican Party strained over how to respond to secession. Hardliners worried that Lincoln might listen to the views of men like Seward and Thurlow Weed who urged further conciliation. Lincoln drew a clear line and was unwilling to contravene the Republican Party platform. While the proposed thirteenth amendment was dramatic in its implications, Lincoln could support it without abandoning the policies on which he secured election. Regardless, it proved an insufficient step to reverse the hardening of sectional postures.¹³

Opinion in Ohio had ebbed and flowed, but, by April 10, Dennison wrote to Lincoln expressing his belief that Ohio's Republicans and Democrats would now stand united in "punishing Southern treason." Dennison believed that the "Ohio Democracy would support you in maintaining the unity of the Govt. by the most vigorous means." While some Democrats may have been moving towards acknowledging the need for force, others remained unconvinced. As late as April 1, Cincinnati elected George Hatch as mayor, a Democrat believed to be in favor of further compromise. It would take the bombardment of Sumter to truly bring the parties into unison behind a military approach. On the day the firing started, April 12, leading Democrat David Tod wrote to Lincoln pledging that he and his 200,000 Ohio Democratic colleagues would "uphold him in crushing out treason and rebellion."¹⁴

All across the North, commentators wondered at the outbreak of Union sentiment that produced mass bipartisan marches and parades. On April 15, the day after Sumter, the *New York Times* editor, Henry J. Raymond, marveled that "Party lines have shriveled...one intense, inspiring sentiment of patriotism has fused all other passions...the North is now a unit." Even more pleasing for the

¹³ Eugene H. Roseboom, *The Civil War Era: 1850-1873: A History of the State of Ohio, Volume IV* (Columbus: Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society, 1944), 350, 356-60; Richard F. Miller, ed., *States at War, Volume 5: A Reference Guide for Ohio in the Civil War* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 2015), 99; Robert Gray Gunderson, *Old Gentlemen's Convention: The Washington Peace Conference of 1861* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961), 86-91; Crofts, *Lincoln and the Politics of Slavery*.

¹⁴ Miller, *States at War*, 104-5.

Administration, if logistically overwhelming, men of all partisan allegiance volunteered for military service in immense numbers.¹⁵

In Ohio, Dennison issued proclamations calling for all to rise “above party names and party bias” to protect free institutions and bring hope to the “overawed and oppressed in rebellious districts” and to the “loyal thousands in the Border States.” By imagining a war to protect southern unionists, not to eradicate slavery, Dennison fostered unity with Democrats. The Ohio Senate, on April 17, approved the Corwin constitutional amendment forever prohibiting interference with slavery where it existed. The outbreak of war rendered this amendment unlikely to ever take effect but approving it again helped send a message about the purpose of the war. Approving the amendment also reflected the widespread hope that they might be embarking on a short war, where an outmatched Confederacy could see the error of their actions and return to the Union’s folds knowing they could retain their property in slaves.

¹⁵ Brooks D. Simpson, Stephen W. Sears, and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, eds., *The Civil War: The First Year Told by Those Who Lived It* (New York: Library of America, 2011), 275.

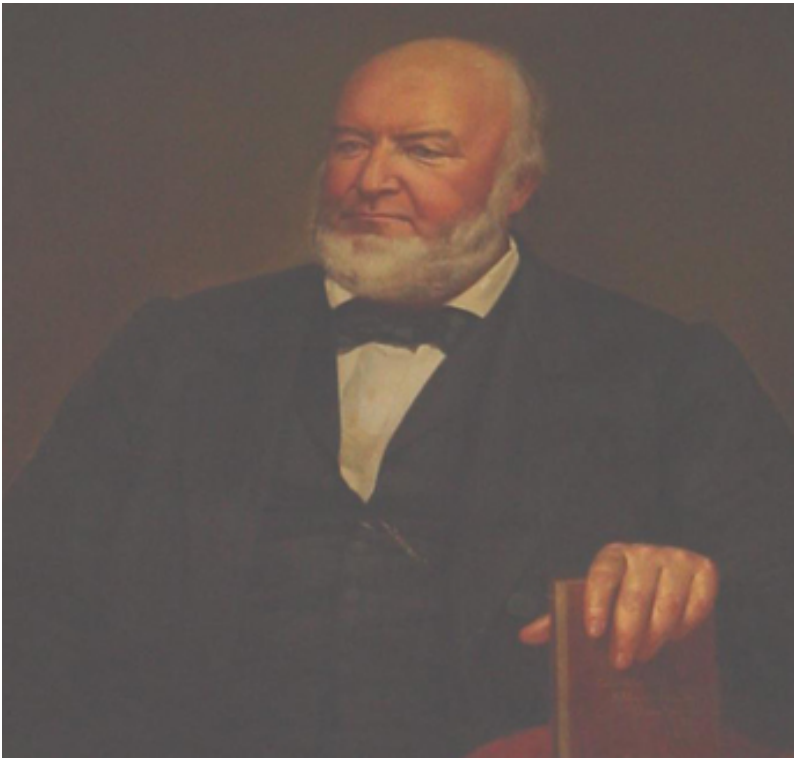


Figure 2: Governor John Brough



Figure 3: Governor David Tod

Ohio

Despite the near unanimous war spirit behind him, the first few months of the war damaged the public's view of Governor Dennison. In most states, mobilization initially brought chaos. Governors desperately sought to accept all those who volunteered but battled with Washington over the limited number of troops requested. The administration may have underestimated the number of men required, but, they also recognized their initial inability to outfit and train hundreds of thousands of men. Nonetheless, state authorities bore the brunt of frustration from men who offered their services, only to spend weeks and months in limbo waiting to see if the War Department would need them.

Dennison's attempts to quickly shift his state onto a war footing drew criticism from his own state lawmakers and from Washington. The Ohio legislature had immediately removed limits on borrowing to meet the exigencies of the crisis. The governor went to work liberally appointing and funding officials and agents to equip, arm, and maintain troops. But by late April, they asked the governor to provide copies of all contracts agreed, passed an act requiring subsistence contracts to go to the lowest bidder, and on May 1, passed a resolution demanding the removal of the quartermaster general and commissary general. By the end of August, Ohio had borrowed \$3 million to cover war related expenditures, helping to precipitate a major currency shortage that the treasury secretary from Ohio, Salmon P. Chase, would not help ease until late in the year. Newspapers widely reported these difficulties stemming incompetence and corruption within the state administration.

While some state agents undoubtedly lined their pockets, this probably failed to merit the criticism levelled at Dennison. Most governors inherited shambolic or non-existent militia systems and empty arsenals. Particularly given Ohio's vulnerable southern border with Kentucky and Virginia, Dennison felt he had to act quickly, especially as the federal government seemed stuck in mud. At the same time as recruits' ardor dwindled as they waited for federal arms and uniforms, the War Department simultaneously ordered governors to prevent their state agents from purchasing the needed supplies. Dennison received such an order only a few weeks after he had been forced to issue a

proclamation asking Ohioans for “donations of woolen shirts, drawers, socks, gloves and blankets” because the federal government had failed to supply them. Ohioans responded with over 6,000 blankets, 10,000 pairs of socks, nearly 3,000 shirts and over 2,000 pairs of drawers (hopefully the state and federal government made up the discrepancies between socks and drawers). Historians have sensibly taken a sympathetic view of these months, judging the governor a “dedicated and innovative” administrator who did “an excellent job in putting Ohio on a war footing,” given the circumstances.¹⁶

Despite frustrations over mobilization, the state retained a shared purpose to support the war that fueled attempts to institutionalize bipartisanship. Democrats had almost unanimously, though with varying degrees of zeal, lined up behind the Administration’s decision to use force to put down the rebellion. Pressure built for Republicans and Democrats to come together under the Union banner. Elements within both parties made overtures but initially held separate counsels. When the Democratic convention met in summer 1861, they rejected unity and adopted a platform far more critical of the administration than most northern Democrats would support. Hugh Jewett, accepting their nomination for governor, felt the need to repudiate portions of the platform. A portion of appalled Democrats now doubled their efforts to create a Union movement through which they could wholeheartedly support the war. Spurred on by the defeat at Bull Run, a majority of Republicans decided to participate in the Union movement, which took institutional form at a convention in Columbus in early September.

The make-up of the Union convention doomed Dennison’s chances for renomination. Probably more significant than excess and inefficiency, Democrats deemed Dennison to have been more partisan than patriotic in his handling of patronage. Always fearing tyranny and centralization, they also criticized the governor’s temporary seizure of control over the state’s telegraph wires, railroad lines, and shipping companies. Dennison felt these actions necessary to secure the state militarily, but Democrats saw the thin end of an autocratic wedge. Although Republicans formed the majority at the

¹⁶ Miller, *States at War*, 113, 129-137; Noel Fisher, “Groping Towards Victory: Ohio’s Administration of the Civil War,” *Ohio History* 105 (Winter/Spring 1996): 25; Roseboom, *The Civil War Era*, 388.

Union Party convention, radicals found themselves outnumbered. The attempts by Benjamin Wade and his associates to secure endorsements of Dennison failed in the face of opposition from Union Democrats and conservative Republicans.¹⁷

Instead of Dennison, the Union Party chose the Douglas Democrat, David Tod. Tod, a lawyer from Youngstown, on the edge of the Western Reserve, had a long career in business and Democratic politics. Admitted the bar in 1827, Tod was considered an excellent jury lawyer with a “deep-toned, musical voice,” a “magnanimous and genial” temperament,” and a “commanding appearance.” Finding prosperity in developing the state’s coal, iron, and later railroad industries, he had also served in the Ohio Senate before becoming Minister to Brazil under President James K. Polk. Witnessing first-hand the appalling conditions of slaves who arrived in Brazil from the Middle Passage, Tod had no doubt about the barbarity of the slave trade. But this did not prevent him from supporting the Kansas-Nebraska Act, campaigning for Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan, and later serving as Chairman of the Baltimore Convention that nominated Stephen A. Douglas for president in 1860. During the secession winter, Tod remained a Democrat and supported attempts at compromise. Just a few months later, he became the Union Party gubernatorial candidate. His running-mate for Lieutenant Governor, Benjamin Stanton, was a Republican and the lower offices on the ticket were split evenly between the parties. As a platform, they simply adopted the Crittenden-Johnson resolution articulating a conservative war waged for “no purpose of conquest or subjugation” and denying any intention to interfere with slavery.¹⁸

Tod’s acceptance letter and inaugural address reiterated the centrist position that the Union Party took within the partisan spectrum. Tod described his candidacy as functioning to unite the entire

¹⁷ Kevin F. Kern and Gregory S. Wilson, *Ohio: A History of the Buckeye State* (New York: Wiley Blackwell, 2014) 224; Porter, *Ohio Politics*, 74-80; Miller, *States at War*, 84, 109.

¹⁸ Miller, *States at War*, 85; Tod’s experiences in Brazil are discussed in Adam I.P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics, 1846-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 105-106.

state behind a “war for Union *for the sake of Union,*” and avowed his confidence in Lincoln’s determination not to interfere with the South’s domestic institutions. Tod looked forward to military success that would preserve the Union and “demonstrate to the world that man is fit for self-government.” As well as saving global democracy, it would rescue the “masses of the South who still love the Union.” Tod, like all Democrats and many Republicans, constantly framed the war in terms of rescuing those southerners who were “misguided,” “deluded,” and “deceived” but who could, through a “firm and generous policy,” be “returned to reason.” Only a tiny minority within the North would object to such sentiments.¹⁹

Hugh J. Jewett and the Democratic opposition demonstrated both the coalescing of opinions and the grounds on which Democrats continued to diverge. Jewett had two sons serving in the Union army. In his acceptance of the Democratic nomination, he stated that “under no circumstances would I submit to a dissolution of the Union,” and that to Confederates “I have no terms to offer, other than an unconditional submission by them to the Union.” He extensively quoted Tod to demonstrate their agreement on the extent of southern Unionism. But he differed in his prescription of what measures would “undeceive” misled southerners. Jewett claimed that military action and offers of peace had to go hand-in-hand, saying that “with every peace offering, there should be alternatives of war or submission.” If the Union continued to voice terms of reunion after each military victory, southern loyalists would rise up and defeat the Confederacy from within. The official Democratic platform mirrored the Union Party by including the Crittenden Resolution but also attacked the mishandling of the war effort and even called for a national constitutional convention. Many Democratic newspapers hewed closer to public sentiment. The *McArthur Democrat* stood for a “vigorous prosecution of the war” and the *Cincinnati Enquirer* agreed that “all the people” were united behind “the vigorous prosecution of the war and the perpetuity of the Union.” The *Enquirer* claimed that no real division

¹⁹ *The Jeffersonian Democrat* (Chardon, OH), September 13, 1861; *Inaugural Address of the Governor of Ohio* (Columbus: Richard Nevins, Ohio State Printer, 1862) 4.

existed within the North but supported the maintenance of the Democratic Party because history had taught the need for an opposition party “to watch the rulers” and protect “republican government and personal freedom.”²⁰

The Union Party of the time poured scorn on Democratic professions of loyalty, but good reasons existed for newspapers like the *Cincinnati Enquirer* to support the Union cause in 1861. Assessing the political landscape, the *Enquirer* assured those “opposed to Abolition” that the present Administration was “fighting to restore the Union, not to set free the negro” and would take all measures possible to prevent servile insurrection. Their rhetoric made clear that Democrats saw all the indicators of a conservative war they could support, even if it also suggested their continued backing would be contingent on maintenance of the current course. By 1863, the *Enquirer* joined some Democrats in opposing the war, but this remains tenuous ground on which to dismiss their expressions of Unionism at this stage.²¹

Even if Democrats failed to justify the accusations of treason that the Union Party hurled at them, little doubt existed over the outcome of the 1861 contest. Relatively few speeches and rallies took place, reflecting the widespread desire to quiet partisan politics. Newspapers commented on the heartening sight of Democrats and Republicans cooperating to nominate joint tickets all across the state. This unprecedented phenomenon was “a sight worth seeing” that demonstrated “how strongly the hearts of the people are bound together, for the Union.” Other supportive newspapers celebrated the beginning of an “era of good feeling” in Ohio politics where the people would know “no party but the party of the Union – no politics save the preservation of the Republic and enforcement of the laws.”²²

²⁰ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 1, 1861, October 6, 1861, October 12, 1861; *McArthur Democrat* (McArthur, OH), September 26, 1861 and October 3, 1861; For convention, see *Cleveland Daily Leader*, August 9, 1861.

²¹ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 1, 1861 and October 2, 1861.

²² *Gallipolis Journal*, October 3, 1861 and *Jeffersonian Democrat*, September 27, 1861; *Summit County Beacon* (Akron) and *Toledo Herald*, quoted in *Tiffin Tribune* (Tiffin, OH), September 27, 1861.

When election day arrived, Ohio's voters handed Tod and the Union Party a comprehensive victory. In 1859, Dennison became Republican governor with a majority of 13,000 votes. Lincoln had secured a 20,000 majority over his combined opponents in 1860. Tod won by 55,000 votes, 57.7% of the ballots cast. On top of this, the Union Party secured seventy-three of the ninety-seven seats in the Ohio House, twenty-nine of them former Democrats and forty-four previously Republicans. Jewett had put up a stronger showing than many expected, a point Democratic newspapers emphasized, but a good number of Democrats had clearly also followed Tod into the Union Party.

Given the centrality of Union parties in shaping wartime politics, it is valuable to dissect Ohio's in the year of its inception. When we consider appraisals of the Union Party from all across the political spectrum, we can make judgments about the organization's ideology, composition, and durability. Among Republicans, at least two interpretations of the Union Party existed. Most radicals opposed the movement from the outset, rejecting a conservative course within Ohio just as they opposed Lincoln taking the same approach nationally. In October, Benjamin Wade wrote to his wife that "Old Abe is a fool" and many radical constituents wrote to Wade sharing their frustrations about national and state affairs. Lincoln's offers of compensated, gradual emancipation prompted complaints that the president had "sold out" the country to the "conservative, Union Men of the Border States." After the revoking of John C. Frémont's emancipation proclamation, another writer begged Wade to stand up to the president's "quasi-secession policy." Considering matters in Ohio, constituents complained bitterly about the "pretended friends" in the Union Party who could do more damage than "real enemies."²³

²³ Benjamin Wade to Caroline Wade, October 25, 1861; unknown to Wade, November 5, 1861, unknown to Wade, November 20, 1861, C.S. Whittlesey to Benjamin Wade, December 11, 1861; J. H. Jordan to Benjamin Wade, December 23, 1861, Silas Potts to Benjamin Wade, January 5, 1862; Stephen D. Wolfe to Benjamin Wade, January 6, 1862, all from Benjamin F. Wade Papers, General Correspondence 1832-1886, Library of Congress, microfilm edition, [hereafter cited Benjamin Wade Papers].

These radicals recognized that acquiescing in the Union coalition bore considerable costs. In their minds, slavery had caused the war and only after its eradication could they imagine a lasting reunion. Radicals had to make this case to save the nation but passing power into conservative hands made radicals like Wade vulnerable. As soon as the new Union Party legislature met in 1862, they attempted to prevent Wade's renomination to the Senate. Like-minded Ohioans fumed that their hero might fall victim to designs to make "the union perfect between democrats and republicans." Future president James A. Garfield summed up the radical perspective when he argued that the coalition with Democrats could bring "only disaster."²⁴

More conservative Republicans, like John Sherman, lent stronger backing to the Union Party movement. From their perspective, it offered a chance to wrest ideological and organizational control of the Republican Party away from the radicals. They hoped to recalibrate their party along more national and conservative lines but largely within the same Republican edifice. They also believed that downplaying questions of slavery would bring electoral rewards and practical benefits for the war effort. As Sherman bluntly put it, Ohio Democrats would "fight for the flag and country, but they hate niggers."²⁵ Sherman considered Democrats essential to the war effort and had no problem adjusting to preferences also shared by many Republicans. If there is truth in the claim that Republicans created wartime Union parties to serve partisan ends, it only applied to conservative Republicans.

Some stronger conservatives grasped at an opportunity to jettison the Republican structure entirely. Old Whigs like Thomas Ewing, who chaired the Union Party convention, had only gingerly adopted Republicanism just in time to back Lincoln in 1860. While Ewing eventually tolerated emancipation, he always opposed political and social equality for blacks. As in other states, prominent old Whigs had spent years longing and planning to resurrect their old organization. They now sensed a propitious moment and hoped that this new partisan formation was built to last. When Ewing opened

²⁴ Cardinal, "The Democratic Party of Ohio," 81.

²⁵ Heineman, *Civil War Dynasty*, 210.

the Union Party convention, he expressed the hope that both “Democrats and Republicans” would “balance their accounts and begin anew.” As these different views make clear, the Republican Party stood divided, and the formation of a Union Party did not constitute a fleeting partisan ploy adopted by the wartime Republican Party.²⁶

Democrats held a similarly broad range of opinions on the Union Party. Governor Tod mirrored his fellow Democratic converts in imagining the party as non-partisan. On the campaign trail, the former lifelong Democrat promised that if elected, he would never forget that he “derived the power from no party, and hence am honor bound to no party.” Like others who left the Democracy with the outbreak of war, he avoided predictions about the future political landscape. Many of them continued to refer to themselves as Democrats throughout the war but explained that they had put their partisan allegiance on ice, uncertain of where they would stand once peace returned. While the Confederacy threatened the Union’s existence, these men claimed to vote or stand for office in accordance with their patriotism. Men like Tod often tried to avoid comment on policies seen as part of the Republican agenda, such as emancipation and confiscation. As the war progressed, they followed a formula that many Republicans also came to adopt: explaining all actions – from emancipation to conscription to military arrests – in terms of their necessity for the war effort.²⁷

Some Democrats probably did embrace Union parties to gain political offices that otherwise seemed remote. In 1860, Stephen Douglas had secured only thirty percent of the vote and just one state. With their southern colleagues departed, Douglas Democrats faced a choice between Republicans in power or plastering over divides with the North’s Breckinridge Democrats. As the previous chapter showed, many Douglas Democrats held strong anti-slavery views and had already shifted closer to their Republican opponents. Those who did cross the aisle often found themselves elevated to prominence. Unionists of all stripes venerated men like John A. Dix, Edwin M. Stanton,

²⁶ See Heineman, *Civil War Dynasty*, 167, 129.

²⁷ *Findlay Jeffersonian*, October 4, 1861.

Henry W. Halleck, Daniel S. Dickinson, Andrew Johnson, William G. “Parson” Brownlow, Edward Bates, and Edward Everett, as non-Republicans who set aside their partisan preferences to serve the nation. Nonetheless, it would be overly cynical to attribute their actions purely to self-interest. Moreover, whatever personal motives drove them, the presence of Democrats changed the reality and perception of the organizations they joined.

The centrist nature of the Union Party found verification in the hostility of those Democrats who maintained their own party organization. These Democrats often adopted rhetoric similar to that used by radical Republicans. Just as some Republicans feared the dilution of pure Republican principles, so Democrats warned against the abandonment of true Democracy.²⁸ Radical Republicans assured themselves that the Union hybrid possessed parts “too heterogeneous to be else than discordant.” Democratic newspapers expressed the same hope that such “antagonistical elements... can not long hold together in unity.” In the meantime, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* urged their readers to take solace in the fact that the “Republican Party has openly disbanded and thrown overboard their Chicago platform, and nominated in Ohio for all the principal offices men heretofore Democrats, and Republicans openly favorable to liberal compromises in the last Congress.” If radicals regained ascendancy, Democrats would stand ready to act.²⁹

In 1861, there seemed as good a chance as not that the formation of Union parties heralded the dawn of a new party political landscape. Since the secession of South Carolina, or even the split in the Democratic Party, politics had been in profound flux. Historian Adam I.P. Smith has offered the best treatment of the use of no-party rhetoric across the northern states, stressing how the denial of

²⁸ Terms like “true” and “pure” are found repeatedly in political rhetoric of this era. Confusingly, they could appear on both sides of the argument. When used by Republicans, they nearly always referred to radicals who objected to Union politics. On the Democratic side, both those who crossed the aisle and those who stayed in opposition claimed these terms. Union Democrats argued that true Democrats would never risk disunion by harping on partisan issues when the nation’s fate lay in the balance. Regular Democrats claimed that only by hewing to true Democratic principles could the Union be saved from fanaticism and endless war and strife.

²⁹ *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 12, 1861, Cardinal, “The Democratic Party of Ohio,” 111; *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 6, 1861.

partisanship proved a particularly effective partisan tool for Republicans by delegitimizing all political opposition. Smith's analysis is rich and nuanced, but his discussion of the Republican Party's "Union Party strategy," nonetheless lends an air of significant Republican calculation to the type of politics that broke out in 1861. This chapter places greater emphasis on a process saturated with contingency. The radical wings of the Republican and Democratic parties feared the consequences of this new development. Moderate and conservative Republicans joined with Democratic defectors in seeing an opportunity for partisan realignment. But few possessed any certainty about whether these coalitions would last. In the meantime, the adoption of non-partisan rhetoric made sense for these centrist alliances because it genuinely matched the ideological preferences of the primary movers. Taking a centrist position that could appeal to the greatest number of northerners offered the best chance to remove party politics as a source of instability for the North, allowing the administration to focus on the military effort.³⁰

1861-1863: Tod and the Union Party in Office

For Tod, an anti-bank Jacksonian who stressed economy in government, a wartime administration would present challenges. In his inaugural address, the governor laid out his attempt to liberally fund the war effort while limiting the burden on Ohio's citizens. Tod asked the legislature to cut the salaries of all state, county, and township officers by 25 percent and to reduce state government expenditures by 33 percent on all expenses except funds allocated to the poor. This meant limiting funds for things like roads, bridges, and schools. But with "rigid economy and prudent self-denial," Tod felt the state could bear the burden without excessive negative consequences. Despite, or in light of, his railroad interests, Tod suggested better means for taxing railroad companies and reluctantly he encouraged Ohio's banking industry to accept, for now, the government's financial system based on paper money. Still, Ohio's state taxes rose from 3.5 million in 1860 to 4.7 million by 1863. The greater

³⁰ Smith, *No Party Now*, 7, and 25-49.

local and county taxes stayed at similar levels, taking the overall tax rise from 10.3 million to 11.5 million. As Tod pointed out in his annual report, many areas of Ohio's economy prospered during the war and the valuation of taxable wealth rose from 888 million to 936 million in the same period. Overall, annual government reports show that Ohio managed to maintain a balanced budget throughout the war years.³¹

Tod focused his energies on administering the government to best enable Ohio to play its part in the national war effort and catering to the state's soldiers would figure prominently. One of Tod's first actions involved securing transport vouchers for sick and disabled soldiers. He appointed numerous state agents to tend to the needs of Buckeye troops and set up a system, similar to one used in Massachusetts, which allowed men to allocate a portion of their salary to be collected each month by their family at home. This allotment system paid out \$656,000 in its first year of operations and by 1864, it channeled just under a million dollars into the hands of soldier's dependents on the home front.³²

Advocating for the state's troops and the state's defense brought periodic sparring with the War Department over the same issues that had vexed Governor Dennison. In one typical example, Tod wired Secretary of War Stanton that he had 20,000 men in camp in Cincinnati without uniforms or blankets, urging the federal government to order them purchased "for my gallant boys." If Tod found out who was at fault for the delay, he promised to "whip the fellow if he was as strong as Sampson." Such interactions commonly found their way into Ohio newspapers, serving as evidence of Tod's love for the troops. When Confederate forces threatened Cincinnati in September 1862, Tod asked armed

³¹ [David Tod] *Inaugural Address of the Governor of Ohio, January 13, 1862* (Columbus: Richard Nevins, State Printer, 1862), 5-6; *Message and Reports to the General Assembly and Governor of the State of Ohio for the Year 1863, Part 1* (Columbus: Richard Nevins, State Printer, 1864), 52-53; *Message and Reports to the General Assembly and Governor of the State of Ohio for the Year 1861, Part 2* (Columbus: Richard Nevins, State Printer, 1862), 15-16.

³² Miller, *States at War*, 54; *Message and Reports to the General Assembly and Governor of the State of Ohio for the Year 1863, Part 1* (Columbus: Richard Nevins, State Printer, 1864), 316.

men to make their way to the city and instructed railroad companies to transport them for free. The call drew civilians from sixty-five counties totaling 15,766 men who immediately secured their affectionate place in Ohio history, known as the “squirrel hunters.” Few saw service as the Confederate forces were easily repelled, but Tod and the Ohio legislature still issued proclamations heralding their bravery and sacrifice.³³

In 1862, the possibility of conscription loomed as the military scale of the war increased, energizing Tod to improve the state’s recruitment system. Forcing men into service would likely yield poorer quality recruits, civilian anger, and, quite possibly, political backlash. Tod pushed private and state bodies to increase bounties and divided the state up into eleven recruiting districts, with individual quotas assigned to each county military committee. The state would eventually pay \$23 million in bounties during the war and the localizing of quotas greatly improved recruitment. Supplementing these, Tod organized a host of war meetings in 1862 to promote enlistment, recruiting Democrats such as his 1861 opponent, Hugh Jewett, to speak. Arranging Democrats as key speakers reiterated the bipartisan nature of Tod’s tenure.³⁴

Some Republicans saw Tod’s determination to avoid the draft as giving tacit understanding, if not approval, to those inclined to avoid forced service. In 1863, Ohio soldier and future Republican president, Rutherford B. Hayes, wrote candidly to Charles Anderson, Ohio’s new Lieutenant governor, that “Governor Seymour and Governor Tod have done more to oppose the Draft than any other men in the country,” and hoped that Governor Brough would be less squeamish about enforcement. But Hayes’ allegiance to the radical wing of the Republicans may have overly colored his assessment. While Tod had his run-ins with Stanton, he maintained a generally good overall relationship with the

³³ *Message and Reports to the General Assembly and Governor of the State of Ohio for the Year 1862, Part 1* (Columbus: Richard Nevins, State Printer, 1863), 77.

³⁴ Miller, *States at War*, 54-60; Roseboom, *The Civil War Era*, 396; Emilius O. Randall and Daniel J. Ryan, *History of Ohio: The Rise and Progress of an American State* (New York: The Century History Company, 1912), 184.

Administration. Lincoln became particularly fond of and impressed by Tod. Disappointed that Ohio dispensed with the governor's services in 1863, Lincoln showed his appreciation by offering Tod the position of secretary of the treasury in 1864. Only Tod's decision to decline the post on health grounds saw William Pitt Fessenden appointed as Chase's successor.³⁵

While Tod attempted to govern in a non-partisan manner, the changing circumstances of the war in 1862 made this difficult. The Union Party served as the institutional embodiment of the political center but, as one historian recently wrote, questions existed over "how long the center could hold" in a state containing some of "the most vociferous Republican radicals and strident anti-war Democrats."³⁶ In 1861, Ohio's Union Party aligned perfectly with the stated goals and policies of the national administration. But as 1862 wore on, a chasm opened up. Congressional radicals passed legislation ending slavery in the District of Columbia and the federal territories, as well as strengthening the Union army as an emancipatory force through the sweeping Second Confiscation Act. Benjamin Wade's congressional committee on the Conduct of the War also increased its efforts to purge conservative, often Democratic, generals from the army. These steps revived partisanship as Democrats attacked the abandonment of the consensus of 1861. The shriller pitch of Democratic criticism led Union authorities to make a limited number of high-profile arrests.

Despite his Democratic roots, Governor Tod acted zealously against public rhetoric considered to be disloyal or discouraging enlistments. In the summer of 1862, Tod urged or approved of the arrests of a number of Democratic journalists as well as former Democratic congressman, Edson B. Olds, who spent six months at Fort Lafayette. Democratic spokesmen like Samuel S. Cox relentlessly condemned the crushing of press freedoms and individual liberties. The number of arrests remained limited, the Ohio legislature reported eleven in 1862, but they set a precedent. As scholars like William

³⁵ Rutherford B. Hayes to Charles Anderson, November 6, 1863, Box 20, Richard Clough Anderson Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California [repository cited hereafter as HL].

³⁶ Heineman, *Civil War Dynasty*, 135.

A. Blair have pointed out, for every official act, numerous informal instances of intimidation or actual violence took place as Union citizens took the suppression of treason into their own hands. Samuel Medary's *Crisis*, admittedly as good a candidate for treasonous journalism as could be found, had its offices destroyed in March 1863 by soldiers from Camp Chase.³⁷

The widespread willingness to stretch the traditional, or at least constitutional, definition of treason figured prominently in administration politics throughout the war. The *Ashtabula Weekly Telegraph*, in the radical Republican Western Reserve, reported their view in September 1861 that "every man who is not a hearty supporter of the government, at this crisis, is dangerous to his country" and that it represented "sound morality and patriotism to make every traitor under that definition, whether in form of a man, woman, newspaper or pamphlet, feel the restraining power of government."³⁸ Such opinions contradicted a national political culture forged in the defense of individual liberties against perceived monarchical despotism. Within the particular context of Ohio, it grated against the state's own historical memory.

By the Civil War, Ohioans possessed many years of exposure to arguments about civil liberties. The writ of habeas corpus had been explicitly included in both the Northwest Ordinance and Ohio's first state constitution. Radicals and abolitionists had spent the 1850s harnessing the right of habeas corpus in defense of fugitive slaves spirited out of the state without due legal process. An element of hypocrisy attached to radicals' willingness to lay aside such protections to those arrested by the military during the Civil War. Equally, there was plenty of hypocrisy to go around. In the late 1850s, many Democrats dismissed arguments in favor of fugitive slaves. At that stage, they preferred to see

³⁷ See William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Robert S. Harper, "The Ohio Press in the Civil War," *Civil War History* 3 (September, 1957): 225-235.

³⁸ *Ashtabula Weekly Telegraph*, September 28, 1861.

extremists who flagrantly disobeyed the law of the land. Republicans understandably cried foul when Democrats asserted the sanctity of individual freedoms during the war.³⁹

While neither party could boast consistency on the issue, the familiarity of Ohioans with debates over civil liberties may have helped give purchase to Democratic critiques during Tod's administration. Tod claimed that only "necessity, stern necessity" made arrests tolerable when they undermined liberties "still highly prized by all." Nonetheless, the governor claimed that those protesting in a time of war would complain of the neighbor who broke into their house during a fire in order to save their child. In a poor choice of words, Tod claimed that he "cheerfully approved" the arrests.⁴⁰

Military arrests helped produce electoral disaster for the administration in the 1862 congressional elections. In Ohio, Democrats elected fourteen of nineteen congressmen. Race certainly played a factor. Prejudice could be fierce in the Mid-West and Democrats played on popular fears about emancipation. July 1862 saw a race riot break out in Cincinnati and over 18,000 Ohioans signed petitions calling for bans on blacks entering the state. But as much as we might see such race-baiting as evidence of disloyalty, at this stage most Americans saw questions of race as distinct from supporting a war to restore the Union. As long as Democrats remained pro-war, then anti-emancipation positions could be part of a successful electoral appeal.

The Ohio Union Party maintained its centrist footing on most issues in 1862, leaving them noticeably discordant with the national administration and congressional Republicans. Ohio's Union Party held together and again adopted the Crittenden-Johnson Resolution as their platform, even though Congress had repealed it several months previous. Joshua Giddings' radical *Ashtabula Sentinel* had urged a Republican breakaway but finding minimal support, the *Sentinel* satisfied itself by

³⁹ See Christine Dee, ed., *Ohio's War: The Civil War in Documents* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006); Roseboom, *The Civil War Era*, 315; Miller, *States at War*, 54-64.

⁴⁰ [David Tod,] *Message of the Governor of Ohio to the Fifty-Fifth General Assembly, at the Adjourned Session, Commencing January 5, 1863* (Columbus: Richard Nevins, State Printer, 1863).

denouncing the Union Party for representing the “continued suspension of the Republican Party or Republicanism.” Union Party politicians struggled to maintain credibility in their centrist positions when their Washington colleagues had moved on to radical ground. This gap between the policies and rhetoric espoused at the state and national level may have helped precipitate disaster at the polls in 1862 when Democrats won fourteen of Ohio’s nineteen seats in the House of Representatives. But Ohio’s Union Party held to centrist justifications and goals even as they had to make their peace with previously rejected radical policies.⁴¹

Democrats could not maintain their 1862 momentum and, by lurching toward their extreme elements, Democrats helped precipitate a dramatic resurrection in Union Party fortunes. The first half of 1863 saw Union morale plummet as the Fredericksburg debacle of December 1862 was eventually followed by Robert E. Lee’s great victory at Chancellorsville at the start of May. This prompted the rise of a minority of Democrats to declare the war a failure and advocate peace negotiations. Ohio’s Clement L. Vallandigham offered an extreme articulation of these positions. Other Democrats expressed a willingness to negotiate while fighting continued or during a temporary armistice. But Vallandigham suggested an immediate end to the conflict and that, after perhaps three years of separation, the sections might unite again. This went well beyond what most Ohioans could tolerate. Vallandigham had been one of the few Democrats to lose his congressional race in 1862 and he stood little prospect of receiving the gubernatorial nomination until his arrest, in May 1863, by General Ambrose E. Burnside. Vallandigham’s arrest, for uttering disloyal sentiments intended to weaken the government, provided legitimate grounds for criticism. But it also helped facilitate circumstances perfectly suited for a revival of the Union Party’s prospects.⁴²

⁴¹ Cardinal, “The Democratic Party of Ohio,” 114-115; Noel Fisher, “Groping Towards Victory,” 35-37; Porter, *Ohio Politics*, 104-107.

⁴² For further detail see Frank L. Klement, *The Limits of Dissent: Clement L. Vallandigham and the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970).

In choosing Vallandigham as their gubernatorial nominee, Democrats hoped, naively, to make the 1863 race about the issue of civil liberties, not the fate of the war against the Confederacy. But choosing the nation's most notorious anti-war spokesperson made this all but impossible. Samuel S. Cox, a leading Democratic congressman, wrote to President Lincoln to explain that he and many other Democrats did not nominate Vallandigham because they shared his view of the war but because, by arresting him, Lincoln had "made the voice of legitimate discussion mute in Ohio." But however much Vallandigham's treatment unsettled Ohio voters, it paled in comparison to their concerns for the fate of the war.⁴³

While events could not have aligned more auspiciously for the Union Party, they undermined Tod's personal hopes for another term. Tod's involvement with military arrests had tarnished his reputation with Union Democrats and provided an unhelpful contrast to Vallandigham campaigning from exile in Canada. Republicans also found reasons to jettison the governor. Tod had not wavered in his categorization of a war fought to resolve "the question of man's capacity for self-government" and his centrist stance continued to irk radicals. In his annual message on January 5, 1863, Tod made no explicit mention of the Emancipation Proclamation, only alluding to the fact that secessionists' unholy rebellion bore responsibility for any interference with slavery. Initially, the governor also rejected offers of African-American service and let recruiters for the Massachusetts fifty-fourth recruit in the Buckeye state. By summer 1863, he had changed tack and threw himself actively into encouraging enlistment, but radicals suspected he acted primarily to alleviate the burden of the draft on white men. Tod's tardiness in acknowledging the war's racial upheavals and his willingness to appoint former Democrats ensured that radical and moderate Republicans found reasons to replace him. Tod's fate

⁴³ Samuel S. Cox to Abraham Lincoln, June 14, 1863, Lincoln Papers.

revealed the difficulties of governing a broad coalition. Even as they stuck to his centrist approach, the party chose a new standard bearer to carry the message.⁴⁴

John Brough, a former newspaper editor, railroad executive and longstanding Democrat, emerged as the candidate acceptable to all. His choice showed that, despite the defeats of 1862, radical Republicans had not succeeded in wresting control of Ohio's Union Party. First elected as a Democrat to the Ohio legislature in 1838, Brough had joined many in his party in denouncing abolitionism and supporting tougher restrictions on free blacks in the state. He had earned a reputation as an expert on finance, skills he then applied to running the *Cincinnati Enquirer* until 1848 when he sold it and became president of the Madison & Indianapolis Railroad, and later the Bellefontaine & Indianapolis Railroad. After his switch to business, Brough had taken no active part in state politics throughout the 1850s and early war years and this absence proved a blessing. When he reemerged by giving a robust speech in favor of the war on July 4, 1863 in Dayton, he immediately became the popular choice to run against Vallandigham. Brough's speech, reprinted thousands of times as a campaign document, acknowledged elements of Democratic critiques while still endorsing the administration.⁴⁵

Although Brough damned slavery's effects on southern society, he expressed his personal willingness to allow the South to keep their domestic institution provided they crush the Slave Power. On the Emancipation Proclamation, Brough admitted he disagreed with Lincoln on the propriety of issuing it, fearing that it "poisoned the minds of the people" by applying to loyal and disloyal southerners alike. Nonetheless, he accepted that to defeat the rebels, they had to attack the institution that allowed the Confederacy to keep fighting. As for the notion that the war was prosecuted for the purpose of freeing slaves, he stated "there is no such object." And as to black soldiers, Brough had no "compunction of conscience" about a measure that would save white lives.

⁴⁴ Noel Fisher, "Groping Towards Victory," 35-37; Porter, *Ohio Politics*, 104-120; Roseboom, *The Civil War Era*, 416-418.

⁴⁵ Miller, *States at War*, 85-86.

On politics, Brough spoke especially to Democrats. To those peace men driving the Ohio party, he had only scorn that they had no words of condemnation for the rebels trying to destroy the best government in the world. Some unfortunate infractions on personal liberties in times of war inevitably took place. On the draft, Tod admitted to opposing the commutation clause that led to accusations of a “rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.” But these errors could never justify opposition that threatened the country. Questions of policy would be settled in times of peace. He hailed Democratic soldiers who understood these arguments, and to the civilian masses he affirmed that he remained “just as rigid a Democrat to-day upon all the essential principles that made up that Democratic Party.” This combination pleased Republicans and Democrats. The party platform finally dropped the Crittenden-Johnson resolution but no embrace of emancipation replaced it.⁴⁶

The campaign saw prominent speakers from all across the North visit the Buckeye state, but Ohio’s soldiers may have had the most influence. As well as playing their part in morale raising victories at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and on their own border repelling John Hunt Morgan’s Confederate raiders, Ohio soldiers wrote thousands of private and public letters home threatening anyone willing to vote for Vallandigham. In just one typical example, an army chaplain wrote in an Ohio newspaper that soldiers sent letters to known Copperheads at home “accompanied with a piece of rope,” and a note that “we’ll settle with you when we get home.” Ohioan General William T. Sherman wrote to Charles Anderson, the Union Party candidate for lieutenant governor, offering “some 20lb rifles that have more sense than 4/10 of the voters of Ohio and if you want them say so. They can throw 20 pounds of metal right to the mark...for the regeneration of poor Ohio consequently for Brough and Anderson.” In their most telling contribution, soldiers voted in near unanimity for the Union Party. Union commanders

⁴⁶ [John Brough,] *Dayton speech of Hon. John Brough: President Lincoln's response relative to the arrest of Vallandigham*. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys & Co., 1863), 9-16; for Tod especially in this paragraph, see Porter, *Ohio Politics*, 104-120.

furloughed them home in great numbers and 41,467 of them voted for Brough and only 2,298 for Vallandigham.⁴⁷

On election day, Brough won 60.6 percent of the vote, a higher share than any gubernatorial candidate would manage again until 1942. Early in the campaign, Union party managers had been warned of “a coolness among the old Republicans and abolitionists” in response to the Union Party placing another centrist Democrat at the head of their ticket. This fear often accompanied Unionist campaigns, but the results suggest that radicals decided that the nature of the Democratic alternative in 1863 was sufficient motivation to mobilize their full strength to the polls. As well as carrying Brough to the governorship, the Union Party captured twenty-nine of the thirty-four Ohio Senate seats and 73 of the 97 House seats. The campaign continued to demonstrate that Ohio’s Union Party constituted its own separate, centrist identity, distinct from Republicanism.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ William Lewis Young, “Soldier Voting the Ohio During the Civil War” (M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 1948), 42; William T. Sherman to Charles Anderson, August 1863, Box 20, Anderson Papers, HL; Arnold Shankman, “Soldier Votes and Clement L. Vallandigham in the 1863 Ohio Gubernatorial Election,” *Ohio History* 82 (Winter 1973): 101; for further information on soldier resolutions and letters and their influence on wartime elections, see chapter 4, and Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 41-47.

⁴⁸ Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1861-1911: The Official Results by State and County* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010), 426; William Howells to Charles Anderson, August 10, 1863, Box 20, Richard Clough Anderson Papers, HL; Heineman, *Civil War Dynasty*, 210.



Figure 4: Governor Leland Stanford



Figure 5: Governor Frederick Low

California

As the conservative political history of California laid out in chapter 1 demonstrated, Democrats had long dominated state politics and only the deep split in the Democracy had allowed Lincoln to win with just 32.3 percent of the vote. The state legislature contained only nineteen Republicans, compared to thirty-eight Douglas Democrats, and twenty-two Breckinridge Democrats. The silver lining for Republicans lay in the fact that, more than in any other northern state, the two

wings of the Democratic Party had truly split in California by 1860 and Douglas Democrats tended to have more in common with Republicans than their former colleagues. Within California, commentators frequently referred to Douglas Democrats also as “Broderick Democrats” or “northern Democrats.” After David Broderick’s death, they often became known as “Conness Democrats” after John Conness, who took over Broderick’s mantle. Breckinridge Democrats were also known as the “Chivalry,” the “Chivs,” or “southern Democrats.” These terms appear in this chapter interchangeably, as they did at the time.⁴⁹

In the secession crisis, many California Republicans joined Democrats in urging compromise during the secession crisis. Republican newspapers proclaimed the illegality of secession but oscillated on the appropriate response, fearing the bloodshed and uncertain consequences of military conflict. Many followed the lead of conciliatory national figures such as William Seward. In the California legislature, Republicans joined with Democrats to pass a resolution supporting strict compliance with the fugitive slave law and denying the right to touch slavery in the states or DC. They also approved the original thirteenth amendment and hoped that these actions would dispose of slavery as an issue in the state’s politics.⁵⁰

The willingness of many Californians to entertain plans for compromise did not reveal a lack of Unionism. While a small minority of Californians would have happily joined the Confederacy, or formed an independent Pacific Republic, most understood their dependence on the federal government and wished to strengthen, not weaken those ties.⁵¹ Differences of opinion hinged on how rather than whether to save the Union. Union newspapers warned that any attempt by Breckinridge Democrats to

⁴⁹ Robert J. Chandler, “Fighting Words: Censoring Civil War California Journalism,” *The Californians* (May/June 1990): 48.

⁵⁰ Chandler, “Fighting Words,” 47-48; Leo P. Kibby, “Union Loyalty of California’s Civil War Governors,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 44 (October 1965): 314-15; Stanley, “Civil War Politics in California,” *Southern California Quarterly* 64 (Summer 1982): 118.

⁵¹ See Ann Casey, “Thomas Starr King and the Secession Movement,” *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly*, Volume 43 (September 1961): 251.

lead the state into an alliance with the South would produce a “Union Party which will sweep California like a whirlwind.” The public reaction to the firing on Fort Sumter confirmed the accuracy of such predictions. The largest of many Union rallies took place in San Francisco on May 11 (Figure 6), where 25,000 people gathered to show their support for the Union cause.⁵²

While these outpourings confirmed California would stand with the Union, a reasonable percentage of Breckinridge Democrats originally hailed from southern states and truly sided with the Confederacy. Marylander Jefferson Martenet wrote home soon after Sumter that “every spark of Unionism has departed from my breast” and expressed his preference for “any alliance to a Yankee alliance.” Martenet chose to stay in Unionist San Francisco but reported many of his acquaintances leaving to join the Confederate army. Disappointed in his own unwillingness to do so, he settled for asking his mother in Maryland to send him a “secession flag” that he would hoist as soon as military defeat forced the Union to recognize Confederate independence.⁵³

The largest concentration of pro-Confederates lay in southern California where the southern leaning Chivalry wing of the Democratic Party had long dominated. The most prominent southern Californian, John G. Downey, sat in the governor’s chair for most of 1861. While Downey accepted the Union sentiments of his state and responded to all requests from the federal government, he still voiced his personal belief that “the only means of preserving the American union is honorable compromise and respect for the constitutional rights of every section.” Many southern California residents exhibited minimal patriotism, if not brazen support for the Confederacy.⁵⁴ The tenor of public

⁵² *Sacramento Union*, February 28, 1861; Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War: Thomas Star King, the Republican Party, and the Birth of Modern California* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 89.

⁵³ Jefferson Martenet to his mother, June 20, 1861, July 5, 1861, and July 20, 1861. Jefferson Martenet Papers, Box 2, Folder 2, HL. Although estimates have varied, most scholars cite 11% of the 1860 population as having migrated from slaveholding states, see Chandler, “The Californians,” 49.

⁵⁴ H. Brett Melendy and Benjamin F. Gilbert, *The Governors of California: Peter H. Burnett to Edmund G. Brown* (Georgetown, Cali: Talisman Pres, 1965), 107. Downey had been elected as lieutenant-governor, providing regional balance to northern Californian, Milton Latham. He became governor when the legislature chose to send Latham to the United States Senate. See Chapter 1 for more details on the political history of southern California.

sentiments in southern California worried the federal government and Union army officials. The presence of Albert Sidney Johnston, future Confederate major general, as head of the Department of the Pacific generated concerns that he might attempt to lead California into the Confederacy by force. Johnson had no such desires but, even after he handed over command to General Edwin V. Sumner, concerns remained. In April, reinforcements had to be sent to Winfield Scott Hancock, sole occupant of the quartermaster depot in Los Angeles, who feared that Confederate supporters in the region might seize his small federal arsenal. In August, General Sumner wrote East that “the disaffection in the southern part of the state is increasing and becoming dangerous” and requested immediate reinforcements. Southern Californian dissenters grumbled, but Sumner probably overstated the likelihood they would act. The resounding Unionism demonstrated in the fall elections of 1861 would help to quell remaining fears of a serious uprising.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ John W. Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days, 1860-1865* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 47, 68-69.



Figure 6: Union Meeting in San Francisco, July 4, 1861. Photo: San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Politics

California's Union majority faced the same public pressure to unite under a shared party banner as manifested in Ohio. In the early summer of 1861, both the Republican and Douglas Democratic conventions issued calls to unite as one party supporting "the federal government, and the defence and vindication of the national flag." But possessing roughly equal strength, neither proved willing to yield. The state's distance from the battlefield may have somewhat lessened the pressure to abandon regular partisan politics. While each decried the other for doing so, Republicans and Douglas Democrats chose separate tickets for the fall campaign. Despite their inability to officially merge, Republicans and Douglas Democrats still had much in common, as they had before the war when they

agreed on internal improvements and even on popular sovereignty as a means to ensure freedom for the territories. The party conventions of 1861 went further, both adopting resolutions mourning the death of Stephen Douglas and calling for increased funding for common schools. These alignments would make cohesion smoother when it came, but, for the moment, the parties continued to circle one another.⁵⁶

With the Breckinridge Democrats also nominating a candidate, the election became a three-way race. Republicans again chose Leland Stanford as their gubernatorial candidate. A lawyer and old Whig originally from New York, Stanford now served as president of the Central Pacific Railroad in which he had been one of the four big investors. The Douglas Democrats settled on John Conness, a businessman who had arrived in New York from Galway, Ireland, as a fifteen-year-old in 1836. Like Stanford and so many others, Conness came to California doing the Gold Rush. An anti-Lecompton Democrat, Conness' career to this point had demonstrated as strong anti-slavery credentials as Stanford's. The Chivalry Democrats nominated John R. McConnell, a former California state attorney general originally from Kentucky.⁵⁷

Local issues featured in the 1861 canvass, but the war remained the primary factor. Outlining a vision of the war that would alienate few Democrats, Stanford bemoaned those who raised the question of slavery "when the very existence of our Government is at stake." Stanford wished all to remember the conflict's global stakes, that "if our Government goes down, the hopes of the oppressed all over the world will go down at the same time...it is a contest between aristocracy and democracy." Downplaying slavery to focus on democracy served Stanford's political ends, but the governor stuck close to this explanation as the war continued. In August 1862, in a supposedly private letter that subsequently appeared in newspapers, Stanford wrote that "slavery was not the real issue" of the war.

⁵⁶ Winfield J. Davis, *History of Political Conventions in California, 1849-1892* (Sacramento: California State Library, 1893), 100-178; see chapter 1 for pre-war policy agreements.

⁵⁷ Republican Party meeting, June 18, 1861, in Davis, *History of Political Conventions*, 174.

Slavery had served as the “great means of creating and sustaining an aristocratic sentiment.” Men fought for “the maintenance of the Union and true Democracy” to decide the fundamental question whether “democracy shall prevail over aristocracy.” Stanford held anti-slavery opinions but, like many, felt these existed on a separate plane to the central purpose of the conflict.⁵⁸

John Conness, the candidate of the Douglas Democrats, faced an uphill battle despite standing on similar ground to Stanford. Both offered unqualified support for the war effort, but, with a Republican as president, Stanford was always more likely to receive pure loyalty voters. Conness joined Stanford in promising to clean out the corruption that had riddled California’s state government, but his claim was weaker since his colleagues had controlled the administration. Another local issue – The Bulkhead Bill – also hurt Conness in San Francisco, the state’s most populous city. This legislation would have effectively granted a monopoly on the San Francisco waterfront to an allegedly shady group of businessmen. Conness claimed he had supported the measure only to secure funds for the state’s common schools, but his position angered many within his own party and beyond.

Conness’ campaign rhetoric suggests he suspected his fate and made sure not to damage the possibility of a future fusion with Republicans. In this three-way contest, he targeted the Breckinridge Democrats and their candidate John McConnell. Conness begged Californians to recognize that McConnell led a “secession party” comprised of “base ingrates to their country.” Conness did not believe Californians would ever elect McConnell but suggested that the possibility could be eliminated by both he and Stanford dropping out of the race, enlisting as soldiers, and allowing the two parties to agree on one Union candidate. Some of his surrogates took more aggressive lines against the Republicans, worrying about “the abolition element.” Democrats understood the distinction between the administration and the government, and if Republican radicals took control of the former then loyal

⁵⁸ *Sacramento Union*, August 21, 1861; Leland Stanford to William H. Rogers, August 2, 1862, printed in *Sacramento Union*, August 23, 1862 and quoted in George T. Clark, *Leland Stanford: War Governor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931), 151-2.

Democrats would act to protect the latter. Democrats would ensure a war fought to save the Government and to “protect the loyal people of the South,” not to end slavery.⁵⁹

John McConnell, the Breckinridge Democratic candidate, somewhat clumsily attempted to rebut the charges of treason aimed at him and his party. In the run-up to the election, he circulated a letter stating his firm belief that the state’s destiny and future prospects depended on the Union. Nonetheless, his party adopted resolutions that damned Lincoln and the war effort, while continuing to argue that California should act as a mediator to achieve peaceful reunion by negotiation. Newspaper organs made clear their fears that war might bring “conscript laws...martial law...millions of lives sacrificed, finally ending in despotism” maintained by an “immense standing army.” Pressed on exactly how he would act if elected, McConnell promised to “obey any requisition the Federal Government...however strongly I may dissent from the policy.” California’s voters saw little need for such leadership at this stage in the war.⁶⁰

As the campaign played out, Douglas supporters made known their intentions to back the Republican candidate. As the San Francisco *Daily Alta* explained, voters had to choose between “the two loyal nominees for Governor, Stanford and Conness.” Republicans argued that Stanford should receive support because an even split in the Unionist vote might allow McConnell to secure an unlikely victory. A distinguished group of San Francisco businessmen made this argument in a widely printed letter that emerged a week before election day. They all claimed to be “politically opposed to the Republican Party” but feared the “dreadful consequences” should McConnell win. Citing their view that Conness lagged his Republican opponent in support, they had “determined to vote for Stanford” and urged others to follow their example.⁶¹

⁵⁹ *Sacramento Union*, September 2, 1861.

⁶⁰ Davis, *History of Political Conventions*, 161, 164-172; *Mariposa Gazette*, September 3, 1861.

⁶¹ *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), September 1, 1861.

Tactical alliances at the local level proved one means that facilitated Douglas supporters backing Stanford. In some counties that had backed Breckinridge in 1860, such as Mariposa, letters appeared from local Republican candidates declining party nominations for posts such as sheriff and county recorder in favor of the Douglas Democratic candidate, explaining that “it will require the united Union vote of this county to defeat the Chivalry ticket.” These agreements, securing success for Douglas Democrats at the county level, may have helped persuade Douglas Democrats to split their ticket and vote for Stanford in the gubernatorial race.

The detail of the election returns suggest that many Douglas Democrats voted tactically to secure Union appointments at the local level and that they split the ticket for statewide offices. When it came to tactical voting, Stanford won a number of counties – such as San Joaquin, Tuolumne, Yuba, Napa, Solano and Yolo – that Breckinridge had won in three-way races in 1860. The dramatic reversals came as a result of Stanford dramatically outpolling Lincoln thanks to a substantial collapse in Conness’ tally versus Douglas’.⁶² When the statewide gubernatorial results arrived, Conness came third: 1.6 percent just under 2,000 votes, behind McConnell, the Chivalry candidate. But all other Douglas Democrat statewide candidates – for offices such as attorney general and secretary of state – came second, ahead of the Chivalry candidate. Put another way, Stanford outpolled all the other Republican candidates by several thousand votes. These results are impressive given the obstacles to split-ticket voting in the nineteenth century. They suggest strongly that Stanford benefited from a groundswell of normally Democratic voters unwilling to risk the possibility of a Breckinridge Democrat becoming governor.⁶³

⁶² This is based in the assumption that people voted for local offices largely in line with their gubernatorial choice, and corroborated by the public statements in newspapers detailed in the paragraph above.

⁶³ *Sacramento Daily Union*, September 5, 1861; Davis, *Political Conventions in California*, 180; Turtorow, *Leland Stanford*, 48. The tickets that most voters used to vote came straight from their newspapers, which listed a full slate of party candidates for every office being elected. Hence, to split a ticket, voters would need to make their own ticket, combine tickets obtained from various newspapers, or cut out certain names to only vote for the top or bottom of the ticket. This process may have been somewhat simplified in the Golden State by the fact that a good portion of its newspapers, unusually, printed the tickets for every party, regardless of their preference.

The final tally revealed Stanford received 56,036 (46.8%) votes to McConnell's 32,750 (27.4%) and Conness' 30,944 (25.8%). Four thousand more Californians turned out than in the 1860 presidential contest, and Stanford received nearly 20,000 more votes than Lincoln had, with nearly all of this coming from the drop off in the Douglas vote and the absence of a Constitutional Union Party ticket. McConnell very nearly matched Breckinridge's performance. The Republican *Marysville Appeal* described Stanford's victory as one of "Union sentiment, not of a party. It is a triumph of patriotism, not of Democracy or Republicanism...it is due to the generous self-sacrifice of men of various organizations, who feared that the division of Union forces would give the State to the common enemy." Many non-Republican voters had made clear their desire for fusion.⁶⁴

California's Union Party began to take shape after Stanford's victory. When the new legislature met in January 1862, they rewarded "the Union Democracy" with a "liberal share of the offices." Supportive newspapers deemed that although some Republicans might object to this, "the great masses of the people will give it their unqualified approval."⁶⁵ John Conness led many Douglas Democrats into the new Union Party officially inaugurated in June 1862. Another Democrat, G.W. Tyler, opened the convention and hailed the setting aside of "political issues and party names" to form a party that "shall rule the destinies of this state for a decade." By this time, congressional Republicans in Washington had already abolished slavery in the District of Columbia, were about to do so in the Federal Territories, and were in the process of drawing up a second confiscation bill. But California's Union Party adopted a platform of resolutions that made no mention of slavery whatsoever. Instead, they celebrated that partisan divisions had been settled and that "the only issue before the nation is

This may have been the consequence of the state's vast size and still limited population meaning that each party may not have had its own newspaper organ in each area of population.

⁶⁴ Election results in Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections*, 65; Tutorow, *Leland Stanford*, 48.

⁶⁵ *Petaluma Argus*, January 14, 1862.

union or disunion.” As in Ohio, the substantial influx of Democrats placed the Union Party on a centrist footing.⁶⁶

As the war went on, the Union coalition grew in strength. The 1862 mid-term elections in the Golden State would prove one of the few comforting results for President Lincoln. California held its contests in September, before the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Union Party won 58% of the vote, securing ninety-four of the 120 seats in the legislature. Only eleven out and out Chivalry Democrats won seats.⁶⁷

Although the timing of the canvass makes it tempting to imagine that, if held a month later, the results would have been less favourable for the Administration, the Union Party went on to record even more comprehensive victories in 1863, after emancipation and black military service. Voters may also have backed the Union Party in 1862 because of the success of the fusion and the disarray of the remaining Democrats within the state. Most Douglas Democrats had moved into the Union Party. Those who remained in opposition had not yet been able to find common ground with the Chivalry Democrats whom they had long opposed and whose loyalty they questioned. Even after emancipation, only a small minority of Democrats abandoned the Union Party to re-join their old party. Some Douglas Democrats, like Conness, held strong anti-slavery views and could hail emancipation easily while others could look at the conservative history of California Republicanism and accept their explanation of emancipation as an essential military measure.

For their part, California’s Union Party quickly accepted and defended the Emancipation Proclamation, initially as a military necessity. The legislature praised an act for the “suppression of the desperate and wicked rebellion.” For the Union to live, slavery had to die. Governor Stanford, somewhat surprisingly, took a lead in his 1863 annual message by proclaiming that the president had

⁶⁶ *Proceedings of the Union State Convention, Sacramento, June 17-18, 1862* (San Francisco: Eastman and Godfrey, 1862) in *California Political Pamphlets* (collated by California State Library, Sacramento).

⁶⁷ Stanley, “Civil War Politics in California,” 121-122; Matthews, *The Golden State*, 173.

issued “a great moral declaration” that “gave a new impulse to human liberty and human progress.” Stanford had not swayed in his belief that Union remained the purpose of the war, but he praised emancipation in stronger tones than many of his gubernatorial colleagues. As chapter five shows, by the end of the war, California’s Unionists travelled an impressive distance in their positive advocacy for black freedom. In the meantime, standing up for emancipation as a moral and military measure failed to dent their electoral prospects or to signify a Republican takeover of the Union Party.⁶⁸

For the 1863 gubernatorial race, the Union Party replaced Stanford, against his wishes, with Congressman Frederick Low, a conservative Republican. John Conness, Stanford’s Douglas Democrat opponent in 1861 and now California’s Union Party senator in Washington, used his influence to mastermind Low’s nomination. Conness may well have borne a personal grudge, but his success in undermining Stanford came because of the release of a private letter from the governor that provided evidence for the claim that he had been against the formation of a Union Party. This charge mattered to Democrats who joined the Union Party as a new entity. They heralded the elevation of Democrats like Conness, which they believed “kills out Republicanism, sickens secessionism, and compacts the Union Party.” While Low had also been a Republican, Democrats held more confidence that his heart lay with the Union Party’s non-partisan identity.⁶⁹

Low became California’s governor in 1863 with 59% of the votes, beating Stanford’s total in 1861 and their share of the vote in 1862. Low received 64,283 of the 108,906 votes cast. In 1860, Lincoln won with 38,733 of 119,827. The vast majority of Douglas supporters had moved resolutely into the Union Party column. These victories spoke to the solidity of the Union Party coalition and to the more extreme pro-southern and anti-war positions taken by some of California’s regular

⁶⁸ Stanley, “Civil War Politics in California,” 123; Analysis of attitudes towards emancipation and reception of Lincoln’s proclamation in William E. Bigglestone, “Lincoln and the Northern California Press” (Master’s Thesis, Stanford University, 1951).

⁶⁹ Robert Denning and J. Henry Rogers, “A Fragile Machine: California Senator John Conness,” *California History*, Volume 85, No.4 (2008), 38.

Democrats. But the uninterrupted political support offered to the Lincoln administration also spoke to the different burden the war placed on the Golden State. While Californians felt the tremors from battles to the East, the war did not shake the state's foundations in the same manner as a Pennsylvania, Kentucky, or even Massachusetts. Exempted from the draft, only 16,000 Californians donned blue uniforms and of those who did, most saw service in the West defending the overland mail service or preventing Texans from invading the Arizona territory. In comparison to other states, the war's greatest toll, in lives lost and damaged, barely reached the Pacific coast.

Governance

Leland Stanford's term in office from 1861 to 1863 revealed that while the state's politics moved to similar rhythms as much of the nation, its governance presented challenges specific to the West coast states of California and Oregon. They revealed, in particular, the complicated relationship California enjoyed with the Federal Government, expecting more and willing to tolerate less than many other states.

Stanford worried about the safety of his state's citizens. Real Confederates, and would-be Confederates in southern California, had visions of a slaveholding empire that extended to the West Coast and beyond. On a few occasions, these visions materialized, most significantly when the California column marched into New Mexico and Arizona to rid those territories of Confederates. Closer to home, periodic worries existed about the defenses of San Francisco's harbor and pro-South groups like the Knights of the Golden Circle plotted various schemes to ship gold, silver, or arms to their allies in the Confederacy. Nonetheless, these episodic dangers never graduated to a major threat after the initial fears over the state's allegiance in early 1861.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ See Kevin Waite, "Jefferson Davis and Proslavery Visions of Empire in the Far West," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 6 (December 2016): 536-565; See correspondence between Gov. John Downey and Secretary of War Simon Cameron on California's "wholly inadequate" coastal defenses. John Downey to Simon Cameron, September 3, 1861 and John Downey to William Seward, November 12, 1861, Governors' Letterbooks on Microfilm, California State Archives, F3646:2, Sacramento, California [repository hereafter cited as CSA]; the official record reveals constant anxieties about security in the West in the many military telegrams that passed

The most regular violence took place between white Anglo communities and Native Americans, clashes that produced debate over whether the state or federal government bore responsibility for California's border security. Governor Downey and then Governor Stanford received repeated requests for aid from Trinity and especially Humboldt counties, in the North-West of the state and over two hundred miles North of San Francisco. The missives from Humboldt County asked for aid from the state, but Governor Downey initially asked Edwin V. Sumner – the Union Army officer in charge of the Department of the Pacific – to act since “the care and management of Indians is exclusively under the provision of the General Government.” When Brigadier General George Wright replaced Sumner in November 1861, Downey continued to press for federal intervention, this time arguing that federal troops with federal arms could quell Indian uprisings “with much less expense, and not with the same excesses, as when conducted under the authority of the State.” Given the hostile relations in frontier regions, Downey's reluctance to arm and endorse local militias made sense while also saving the governor the effort of having to reclaim costs from the federal government. Sumner and Wright both sympathized with the governor but also cited their limited resources and pressure to focus federal actions on threats relating to the Confederacy.⁷¹

Once Stanford succeeded Downey in 1862, he proved somewhat more willing to deal with Indian clashes under the auspices of the state. The governor continued to ask General Wright to deal with “Indian depredations” but also requested to be provided with “five hundred stand of arms” that he could then distribute to affected counties to “protect themselves against repeated outrages.” When Stanford forwarded forty rifles to Butte County, he informed Sheriff John Bidwell that the arms were purely for self-defense and “in no manner must be considered as authorizing a campaign against the

between the coasts during the war. These can be easily accessed in the detailed account of all California's military activity during the war in *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1867* (Sacramento: State Office, 1890).

⁷¹ John Downey to Edwin Sumner, August 28, 1861, October 9, 1861, and John Downey to George Wright, November 1861, Governors' Letterbooks, CSA.

Indians” under state authority or expense. These instances formed small parts of California’s larger conflict with Native Americans that began before the war and continued after it. For those in frontier regions of the state, this seemed the real war taking place between 1861 and 1865.⁷²

While they haggled over who should fund and facilitate it, state militias and federal troops both participated in the violent campaigns against Indians. Agreeing to a large federal action in Humboldt County, General George Wright instructed Colonel Francis Lippitt of the Second Infantry, California Volunteers, that “every Indian you may capture, and who has been engaged in hostilities present or past, shall be hung on the spot.” Wright ordered that women and children should be spared but made clear that he intended measures harsh enough to produce “a final settlement of this war.”⁷³ California’s Native Americans suffered most egregiously, but they represented only one of the non-white groups heavily discriminated against in the Golden State.

As historian Stacey L. Smith has recently argued, it is impossible to separate California’s commitment to free labor for whites from its dependency on the oppression and forced labor of a range of groups classified as non-white. In addition to the expulsion of many native peoples from their lands, California’s politicians during the 1850s had passed a state Fugitive Slave Act, a host of taxes on foreign miners, and created systems of apprenticeship for Native Americans that fuelled an industry of slave labor among women and children. These all took place while Democrats controlled the state government and the wartime ascendancy of the Union Party helped to bring real, if limited, progress.⁷⁴

The wartime context and their own activism saw African-Americans make the greatest strides. The African-American population in the state was small, just over 4,000, but they had spent much of the 1850s campaigning against their precarious status in “free” California. In the late 1850s African-

⁷² Leland Stanford to George Wright, June 16, 1862, June 27, 1862, and Leland Stanford to John Bidwell, July 17, 1862, Governors’ Letterbooks, CSA.

⁷³ G. Wright to F. Lippitt, April 7, 1862, printed in *Records of California Men in the War of the Rebellion*, 419.

⁷⁴ Stacey L. Smith, *Freedom’s Frontier: California and the Struggle over Unfree Labor, Emancipation and Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

Americans held a series of conventions protesting the state's discriminatory laws and submitted petitions to the legislature demanding repeal, particularly focused on the bans on black testimony. African-American newspapers like the *Pacific Appeal* and the *Elevator* continually made the case that the status quo in California mocked the values of the Declaration of Independence. These efforts bore fruit when, in March 1863, Governor Stanford signed the Equal Testimony Bill, finally letting blacks give evidence in legal proceedings on the same basis as whites.⁷⁵

This represented a major victory for African-American activism but heralded no sweeping change in race relations. Throughout the war, San Francisco resident, Charlotte Brown, campaigned for her right to travel on the city's omnibus system. While Brown won some court battles, the company and its white customers ensured her presence was still accompanied by verbal abuse and would only be tolerated when standing on the outside platform. The *Pacific Appeal* editor, Phillip Bell bemoaned the limits of radicalism even in staunchly Republican San Francisco. Still, others fared worse.⁷⁶

California's thirty-five thousand Chinese residents, as well as all Native Americans, found themselves explicitly exempted from the Equal Testimony Bill. The prejudice against Chinese in California ran deep and found expression among Republicans as readily as Democrats. Stanford merely voiced the overwhelming view in the Golden State that the presence of a "degraded and distinct people must exercise a deleterious influence upon the superior race" and pledged to work with the legislature on any actions aimed at "the repression of the immigration of the Asiatic races."⁷⁷ Such opinions would not prevent Stanford, in his role as President of the Central and Southern Pacific Railroads, from employing up to 10,000 Chinese immigrants to help build the transcontinental railroad.⁷⁸ While some radicals within the Union Party slowly came to advocate greater rights for

⁷⁵ Philip J. Ethington, *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 188, Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War*, 203-31.

⁷⁶ Robert J. Chandler, "The Press and Civil Liberties in California during the Civil War, 1861-1865" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1978), 223-226.

⁷⁷ Melendy and Gilbert, *Governors of California*, 118.

⁷⁸ Ethington, *The Public City*, 202-3.

California's Chinese, it came at a significant cost. When Democrats swept the Union Party from office in 1867, they focused particularly on widespread fears that Reconstruction politics would enfranchise Chinese men in California.⁷⁹

Californians conflicts with American Indians had roots in whites' desires for labor, as well as land. Some Indian men joined the multitude of other nationalities and races who worked the state's mines, often under some kind of bound labor contract. The abundance of male labor also created demand for domestic labor, which, as Stacey Smith has documented, "fuelled a market in bound women and children who worked in private households as wards, apprentices, debt-bound servants, and slaves." This exploitation had legislative underpinnings. The 1850 Act for Government and Protection of Indians permitted whites to claim Indian children as wards. An 1860 amendment further expanded an Indian slave trade in northern California by allowing the binding out as apprentices of Indian children or adults convicted of vagrancy or captured in war. Some white settlers in border counties protested this legislation because they recognized that apprenticeships fuelled kidnapping which, in turn, fuelled reprisals. Although the Union Party took no steps towards granting greater rights for Native Americans, they did abolish the apprenticeship system in 1863 and attempted to suppress the trade in Indian women and children.⁸⁰

Californios stood alone in finding themselves on a downward trajectory. Californios, Mexican Californians living in the state before 1848, had been the ruling elite in the region until statehood and the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo had guaranteed their status as full citizens. Reality proved more complicated. The first erosion of status came with the immediate refusal of white Californians to respect the land grants given by the Mexican government. Ongoing legal fights saw Californios lose much of their property. Politically, they formed no united voting bloc. As ideologically incongruent as it might seem, in the 1850s, Californios had regularly backed the Chivalry Democrats. Lending their

⁷⁹ Ethington, *The Public City*, 202-205.

⁸⁰ Smith, *Freedom's Frontier*, 11, 175-205.

support to those who controlled the state, especially in the southern counties, seemed to present the best hope for protecting their rights. And it helped Californios to hold political office at most levels of government in the 1850s. As this strategy bore less fruit, Californios gravitated towards the Douglas Democrats and the fledgling Republican Party. By the Civil War, Kevin O. Starr has judged that “Hispanic sentiment was overwhelmingly Unionist.” While more palatable, this only minimally improved their lot.⁸¹

From the perspective of Union Party politicians, their actions towards California’s minorities served a mixture of moral and political purposes. Republicans and Douglas Democrats shared an anti-slavery perspective and the increase in egalitarian rhetoric that accompanied the demise of slavery prompted more consideration of the lowly status that the nation offered to Mexicans, Indians, Chinese, and all other non-white groups. Equally, Union Party orators excited the patriotism of Californians by using a language of manifest destiny and empire that focused on white destinies. Wartime speeches from Governor Stanford, Rev. Thomas Starr King, or Democrat John Conness all spoke of California’s place in spreading America’s empire of liberty across the breadth of the nation. Men like Rev. King also explicitly tied patriotism to divinity, telling his audiences that where “the sentiment of patriotism is not deep...religion is barren.” This all boded well for attacking the southern slave oligarchy but offered no place for those who, in their thousands, helped build California.⁸²

Unionists also saw an opportunity to punish their political enemies when they took actions to improve conditions for African-Americans and Native Americans. Advocating the overhaul of the ban on black testimony, one Unionist urged that it would “destroy the last remnant of Copperhead Democracy, which had ruled the state so long” and another celebrated the repeal of law enacted “when the refuse ruffianism of South Carolina and Mississippi” had controlled the state. Allocating blame for

⁸¹ Leonard Pitt, *The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californians, 1846-1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Kevin Starr, *Californina: A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), 113 and 110-120.

⁸² Casey, “Thomas Starr King and the Secession Movement,” 259.

the ongoing Indian difficulties, politicians cited years of policies enacted by Breckinridge Democrats that “smacked of cottondom.” Many sought a more progressive settlement of these racial questions, but their actions became more politically feasible in the wartime context. The ability to blame secessionist sympathizers for past sins and to class their legislative solutions as punishment for would-be rebels ensured a larger swathe of public support.⁸³

California’s Unionists also punished Democrats for what they considered treasonous speech. When Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus nationally in August 1862, General Wright banned several California newspapers from using the mail system. Henry Hamilton, editor of the *LA Star*, found himself briefly an inmate at Alcatraz. While the mails soon reopened and prisoners endured short stints in jail, Wright encouraged popular action by expressing that if newspapers “made themselves obnoxious” then “they must blame themselves only, if they suffer.” Reprisals followed as newspapers like the *Visalia Equal Rights Expositor* had their offices destroyed. The *Daily Alta* proclaimed that “liberty of the press is intended for honest and loyal men; not for traitors and knaves,” and, in 1863, the California legislature became the first state in the North to pass laws requiring strict loyalty oaths for attorneys and school teachers.⁸⁴

California had genuine Confederate sympathizers, but these responses probably inflated the threat they posed. During the War, the Chivalry wing of the Democratic Party never threatened to gain power – by 1863 Unionists had 72 of 80 seats in the Assembly – and the state did not face the imminent dangers of Confederate invasion contended with by Ohio or Pennsylvania. The heavy hand utilized probably owed much to the brazen positions taken by some openly pro-South Democrats in California. One newspaper editor named their child, born in 1863, Jefferson Davis Lee Stonewall Jackson Richmond Steele. Most Breckinridge Democrats were more difficult to categorize. William Brewer, a botanist travelling the state for a geological survey in 1863, wrote that “Some of them

⁸³ Smith, *Freedom’s Frontier*, 180, 185, 179.

⁸⁴ Chandler, “Fighting Words: Censoring Civil War California Journalism,” 46-56.

[Breckinridge Democrats] are active Secessionists, but most are only talking men.”⁸⁵ Brewer’s appraisal rings true with the Breckinridge Democrats’ choice of former governor John Downey as their candidate in 1863. When in office at the start of the war, Downey cooperated with the Lincoln administration while criticising their actions. Even if not strict disloyalty, most Californians happily clamped down on such unpatriotic views as veiled treason.

Although there is no doubt California contributed enormously to the war effort, the requirements of wartime finance still provided a stiff test to the state’s Unionism. Just under \$185 million of gold shipped from San Francisco to the East during the war and nowhere did the United States Sanitary Commission (USSC) inspire public support more effectively than in the Golden State. The final report of the Sanitary Commission judged that \$1.2 million of the \$5 million received by the USCC during the war came from California. California also spent \$2.5 million in raising and equipping the 15,725 men that saw federal service. Nonetheless, when the national government asked Americans to accept paper currency instead of gold, many Californians revolted.⁸⁶

As one element of war finance, Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase turned to the issuance of paper money – Greenbacks – guaranteed by the federal government and which the Legal Tender Act of February 1862 stipulated must be accepted as legal tender for payment of all debts, public or private. This created, in historian Michael T. Caires’ phrase, a “Greenback Zone,” where these notes circulated and which covered the majority of the free states. Pockets existed across the nation where the notes failed to reach or where local markets rejected them, but only in California did the system fail to penetrate almost completely. Californians referred to gold as “constitutional currency,” a moniker that rang true since the state constitution banned the printing of paper money. Greenbacks constituted a

⁸⁵ Quoted in Casey, “Thomas Starr King and the Secession Movement,” 259.

⁸⁶ Gold figure from Clark, *Leland Stanford*, 125 and Kibby, “Union Loyalty”. Sanitary Commission figures in Charles J. Stillé, *History of the United States Sanitary Commission* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1866), 241-2; Washington never got around to reimbursing the state for this cost, and the California legislature passed a resolution asking for them to do so as late as 1997. See Chandler, “An Uncertain Influence: The Role of the Federal Government in California, 1846-1880,” *California History*, Vol 81, No. ¾ (2003), 248.

clear infraction against California's hard-money faith and, as Caires has shown, Californians found a variety of official and unofficial ways to prevent their circulation. In their daily lives, Californians refused to accept greenbacks and attached severe stigma to those who attempted to pay with them. This reflected both the state's unique abundance of gold and its Democratic heritage. As Philip J. Ethington has argued, greenbacks and the national banking system reflected the Whiggish direction of administration policy and to many Democrats in California's Union Party "the local ban in greenbacks was not just a gold-region cause, it was a Jacksonian one."⁸⁷

California's opposition to paper money created several crises that forced Stanford to decide where to draw the boundary between his responsibilities to state and nation. The first came in late summer 1862 when California's state treasurer paid the state's share of the national direct tax in greenbacks. Californians had paid their taxes in gold, but the state treasurer, Delos R. Ashley, realized that he could save \$25,000 if he traded the gold for paper and paid the federal government in greenbacks. Ashley saw an opportunity to reduce his state's indebtedness, but his move embarrassed Governor Stanford. The governor wrote to the United States Sub-Treasurer, D.W. Cheeseman, explaining that if he had known about the substitution he would have protested his treasurer's action and promised Cheeseman that "the loyal people of this State have no desire to benefit themselves at the expense of the General Government." Stanford also privately reprimanded his treasurer. Nonetheless, the payment in greenbacks stood.⁸⁸

In January 1863, Stanford used his annual message to urge Californians against letting financial considerations undermine their patriotism, a plea the state legislature responded to by passing the

⁸⁷ Analysis of California's relationship to the war's financial legislation draws primarily on Michael Caires, "The Greenback Union: The Politics and Law of American Money in the Civil War Era," (PhD Dissertation, University of Virginia, 2014), 219-270, quotation on 259; Ethington, *The Public City*, 192; Former Democrat Henry Haight had chaired the Republican state convention in 1860, but by 1862 Haight had drifted from his party and found himself arguing the unconstitutionality of the Legal Tender Act before the California Supreme Court.

⁸⁸ Leland Stanford to D.W. Cheeseman, October 6, 1862 and Leland Stanford to Delos R. Ashley, October 13, 1862, Governor's Letterbook, CSA.

Specific Contract Act. This circumvented the national Legal Tender Act by allowing parties to agree to a contract in advance that stated the means of payment for any form of transaction or debt. If an agreement stipulated gold, a subsequent attempt to use greenbacks would be an illegal breach of contract. The legislation only formalized reality on the ground in California, but it furthered the breach from the federal government and the financial system taking shape across the North. Stanford prepared a veto message but never issued it, citing the willingness of the Lincoln administration to discriminate between paper and gold in paying employees at the navy yard on Mare Island in Vallejo. The California Supreme Court passed judgment on the Specific Contract Act, finessing the issue by judging it constitutional within the state and arguing that it represented no challenge to national financial legislation. While clearly uncomfortable with these developments, Stanford reluctantly accepted that for many Californians, as Michael Caires has written, “greenbacks and loyalty to the Union existed on different levels.”⁸⁹

Historian Glenna Matthews characterized the passage of California’s Specific Contract Act as part of the state’s ongoing “seesaw between the assertion of state rights and the active participation in the national struggle.” But Californians most likely would not have expressed it this way. Unlike modern nationalism, many antebellum Americans accessed and understood their Unionism through their state.⁹⁰

Understanding wartime federalism means grasping how state rights formed part of what Unionists fought for. The national system of governance that they held dear – the Union – flourished by its accommodation of state sovereignty alongside national sovereignty on certain issues. The degree of autonomy granted to individual states is part of why secession seemed so unjustifiable to most

⁸⁹ Caires, “The Greenback Union,” 261; William C. Fankhauser, *A Financial History of California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1913), 220-222, Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War*, 170-173; Larry Schweikart and Lynne Pierson Doti, “From Hard Money to Branch Banking: California Banking in the Gold Rush Economy,” *California History* 77 (Winter 1998/1999): 209-232.

⁹⁰ Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War*, 176.

northerners. When northern states clashed with Washington on particular policies during the war, they often imagined they were protecting the federal-state balance, and in doing so, preserving the overall strength of the Union to which they contributed enormous quantities of men and materiel. Many Californians did not view strict compliance with the Legal Tender Act as necessary to the Union's military cause, so they had few qualms about exercising state sovereignty to prevent implementation. The conflicts between state and federal were real, but they happened within a context where few questioned the overall desire of these states to further the Union cause. Conflict came over means, not ends.

Stanford's tenure demonstrated his conflict between defending state interests and serving the national cause. When it came to paying national taxes, he urged his constituents to feel that "we are but guardians holding our lives and our fortunes in trust for the protection of the Government."⁹¹ Yet he ultimately accepted his state's opting out of legislation designed to fund the war effort. Like virtually all Californians he demanded and welcomed federal aid to fight Indians, build railroads, and lay telegraph lines. When the transcontinental telegraph line became operative in 1861, Stanford sent the very first message to President Lincoln, declaring that California's "patriotism with electric currents throbs responsive to that of her sister States, and holds civil liberty and the Union above all price."⁹² But when the federal government tried to extend some control over the state's lucrative mining and forestry industries, the governor fiercely resisted.

When issues pertained clearly to the nation's military cause, Stanford's Unionism won out. In early 1863, Governor Andrew hoped to recruit Californians to fight in the East under the Massachusetts banner. As governor, Stanford bristled at an action that was "clearly irregular and in violation of the rights of this State." Yet Stanford felt deeply grateful to sister states "fighting a sacred

⁹¹ Quoted in Clark, *Leland Stanford*, 122.

⁹² Joseph Ellison, *California and the Nation, 1850-1869: A Study of the Relations of a Frontier Community with the Federal Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1927), 170.

and common cause,” and wished to allow “Californians to seal their loyalty and devotion to the country and to Constitutional liberty.” Explaining his duties as a citizen of the United States, the governor determined to accept Andrew’s request in order to “preserve and strengthen that nationality.” Even so, after a long paean to Union, Stanford ended with an explicit refusal to accept this instance as a “precedent to bind the authorities of the state in the future.” The war created circumstances in which the prerogatives of states and governors might be set aside, but even national minded executives like Stanford emphasized the temporary nature of this adjustment to the nation’s federalism.⁹³

California had been the most Democratic of northern states before the war and soon after the conflict ended the Democracy again took firm control. The election in 1867 of a Democratic governor and legislature helped ensure that it would be 1962 until California had ratified the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments. This context reminds us how vulnerable the state’s politics looked for Republicans on the eve of war. Lincoln’s 1860 victory came with the lowest vote percentage and tightest margin of any free state. That Stanford’s election in 1861 could be followed by comprehensive victories in every state contest until 1865 is testament to the importance of the Union coalition that took shape in California.⁹⁴

Conclusion

The unity of 1861, and the bipartisan political coalitions that it birthed, was genuine but fragile. Nobody knew whether Union parties would replace Republicanism permanently or whether they would be fleeting manifestations of the first flush of wartime nationalism. But Republicans and Democrats who put aside old animosities to form Union coalitions made a vital contribution to the Union war effort. The enveloping of the Republican Party in Union coalitions moved the party towards the center of northern politics. This diluted Republicanism but helped provide the level of electoral support needed to maintain a war effort that dwarfed any previous conflict the nation had faced. The

⁹³ Leland Stanford to George Wright, January 25, 1863, Governors’ Letterbooks, CSA.

⁹⁴ Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War*, 64.

Union parties of California and Ohio both demonstrate that the progressive achievements of wartime politics often came, not as the result of radical ascendancy, but from a combination of ideology and military expediency realized under the auspices of more conservative Union coalitions.

Civil War narratives consistently recount that compromise died with the outbreak of war. While true for sectional compromise, the partisan compromises made all across the North contributed substantially to sustaining the Union war effort. For Republicans, sacrificing sole control of political power represented a consequential move that only makes sense if they acted from a genuine desire to present a united front in a time of war. When Ohio's Republicans placed Democrats in the executive chair, they sacrificed ideological purity. Radical organs like the *Cleveland Leader* feared that "our Republican principles are in danger in the Union movement." Republicans also gave up considerable patronage. Tod and Brough now considered themselves Unionists, as did the Republicans, and they split appointments between former adherents of each party accordingly. But this still resulted in many Democrats in lucrative offices. Far from a self-serving ploy, embracing Union Democrats represented an impressive demonstration of selfless Unionism from many Republicans.⁹⁵

Counterintuitively, centrist Union parties played a pivotal role in allowing the implementation of radical policies. War brought emancipation, the arming of black men, and later led to Reconstruction amendments granting black political and civil rights. There is a great temptation to see the triumph of this radical agenda and to assume that these outcomes were inevitable and that radicals bore primary responsibility for them. In fact, much of the northern populace had to be convinced that the opposite was true: that centrists who shared their uncertainties manned the helm, and that these leaders acted from evolving military necessity rather than their preconceived agendas. Union parties provided this reassurance. These organizations had not originated as the brainchild of radical Republican politicians, nor simply of conservative Republicans, but of Republicans, Democrats, and a

⁹⁵ Cardinal, "The Democratic Party of Ohio," 112-114.

good number of old Whigs and Americans in combination. The rhetoric they used to justify the war's course often emanated from genuine unease and uncertainty, aptly matching many of their constituents. Historians have not sufficiently recognized that these unwieldy, often contradictory centrist coalitions aided northern voters to support a policy agenda unimaginable before the war began.

As 1861 drew to a close, the national administration appeared to most observers to still be lined up behind the conservative war policy that carried the state elections in California and Ohio. Lincoln had put down periodic false dawns for the radical agenda. The president had reversed John Frémont's proclamation. Simon Cameron's War Department report advocating the use of black troops had been rewritten after Lincoln's firm intervention. The president seemed to be of a mind with his conservative interior secretary, who had confronted Cameron at a Washington party saying that "the Government's position had nothing to do with slavery and the rebellion could and ought to be ended by the arms of free white men alone."⁹⁶ In his own December message to Congress, Lincoln continued to speak to conservatives across the North and in the Border States.

The president heralded his border state policy, rewarded in the Unionism manifested in Kentucky's recent elections. In light of the first Confiscation Act, and his hopes that some states would chose gradual, compensated emancipation, he asked Congress to investigate colonization schemes both for African-Americans freed in the course of war and for free blacks all across the North. He stated his continued hope that the war would not descend into a "violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle."

When it came to explaining the purpose of the conflict and the evils of the rebels, Lincoln produced a formulation able to reach the largest proportion of the Union population. The rebels waged war against "the first principles of popular government" and chose to walk a path that led toward despotism and monarchy. Instead of indicting the immorality of the Confederacy's slave system, he

⁹⁶ Caleb B. Smith to Samuel Barlow, Barlow Papers, Box 37, Folder 4, HL.

spent four of his final five paragraphs attacking the Confederacy's placement of capital above labor. He lamented, in the abstract, the evils of a "free hired laborer being fixed to that condition for life." In doing so, Lincoln tapped in to the vast majority of northerners who considered themselves anti-slavery, but did so without alienating conservatives. Many deeply prejudiced Democrats, who feared a war that might produce emancipation and an influx of freed blacks to the North, could still resoundingly cheer the superiority of the Union's free labor system and the democratic self-government initiated by the Founders. We know that Lincoln, at other times, strongly criticized slavery in moral terms. His decision here not to do so indicated that he shared the centrism of governing coalitions like those in California and Ohio.

But radical rumblings augured an uncertain future, and the president still left himself room to change course in the future. The president warned against determining "in haste" that "radical and extreme measures" had become indispensable to the war effort. But, above all else, "the Union must be preserved, and hence all indispensable means must be employed." The president's implicit warning was that timing mattered, and that if radical measures became unavoidable, he would judge when this criterion had been reached.⁹⁷

Radical Republican leaders believed the time had already come to inaugurate a new phase in the war, and conservative observers saw the omens of renewed partisan conflict on the horizon. William H. Wadsworth, a Unionist member of the House of Representatives from Kentucky, wrote in December to his cousin, New York Democrat Samuel Barlow, informing him of his view that "the ultras intend to make a row." Accurately predicting the Radicals congressional program, "Abolition in the District – Emancipation in the insurrectionary states or districts - & general emancipation," Wadsworth expressed his hope that conservatives would "beat them in this House & have old Abe on our side." The disheartened Kentuckian hoped the radical agenda could be defeated in time to "save the

⁹⁷ All Lincoln quotations from message to Congress, December 3, 1861, in Gienapp, *Fiery Trial*, 111-115.

poor heartbroken remnant of union men in the Slave States.”⁹⁸ Events would not pan out exactly as Wadsworth hoped, but 1862 would see the renewal of partisan conflict, leaving the president and the northern people to mull whether the conservative consensus on the war could and should be prolonged.

⁹⁸ W.H. Wadsworth to Samuel Barlow, December 5, 1861, Box 37, Samuel Barlow Papers, HL.

Chapter Three

1862: Conservatives and Radicals¹

In early 1862, the Army of the Potomac spent month after stationary month encamped in northern Virginia. Having built a mighty army, George Brinton McClellan now seemed disinclined to use it. When McClellan's Peninsula campaign finally began, there existed huge anticipation that it would complement Union successes in the West by capturing Richmond. By July, Robert E. Lee had driven McClellan into a retreat that sent shockwaves across the North. The summer that seemed set to end the Confederate experiment had instead produced great uncertainty over when, and if, the Union would triumph. The political fallout would help to dismantle the party political unity of 1861.

Radical Republicans already felt their agenda jeopardized by the stifling conservative consensus across the North and these military setbacks confirmed their belief that the war needed to move in a new direction. Radicals began taking a series of legislative steps to initiate a harder form of warfare they felt necessary to win the war and ensure that it destroyed slavery. Thaddeus Stevens had struck the first blow when he orchestrated the repeal of the Crittenden-Johnson Resolution in December 1861. Stevens and fellow radicals like Benjamin F. Wade, Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, and Lyman Trumbull, controlled key committees in the House and Senate and they pushed their generally more moderate or conservative Republican and Unionist colleagues in Congress to accept

¹ Some reading this chapter, and this dissertation, might ask where the moderates are. The term moderate was used during the Civil War but it appears rarely because I found it shared traits with conservative and was much less commonly used. Eric Foner's canonical study of the Republican Party, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, discusses moderates and conservatives in one chapter, acknowledging shades of difference within broad agreement. Moderate certainly did not have the same resonance or recognition as conservative or radical. Clear distinctions existed within both parties between conservatives and radicals. Moderates floated between these poles. While their support proved crucial, they tended not to pioneer stances and hence, in some respects, are equally validly seen as reluctant radicals or conservatives. The term moderate also rarely appeared in the overarching manner, outside of a particular party context and applicable to both, that conservative and radical did. See Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 186-226.

key elements of their radical agenda. By early summer, Congress had passed a second Confiscation Act empowering the Union army to free slaves of disloyal owners, and to abolish slavery completely in the District of Columbia and the Federal Territories. Complementing this, Benjamin Wade's Committee on the Conduct of the War continued to push for the removal of conservatives in the cabinet and in military high-command. In September, the President added the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Radicals rejoiced and believed that the people of the North would herald the inauguration of a harder war policy led by a presidential proclamation that served justice and military necessity.

These same developments increased the unease of many of the nation's conservatives who had foregone political opposition in 1861 with some trepidation. At the end of June, a group of approximately thirty-five Democratic and border state Unionist congressmen met in the House of Representatives to formulate a path of loyal opposition that could create a national conservative coalition to provide an alternative to radical plans. Railing against the doctrines of "Secessionists and Abolitionists," the meeting's resolutions praised the "mighty army" that now fought for the "great and noble" purpose of "defense of its Government." While critical of particular measures of the administration, these men expressed unequivocal support of the government, of the war, and of the Union army. This meeting yielded few immediate consequences, but the principles it set forth formed the basis of remarkable electoral success for conservatives in the coming months.²

In the fall elections of 1862, the Democratic Party scored a series of dramatic victories across the northern states. Indiana, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, New Jersey, and Illinois returned a majority of Democrats in their congressional races. In the single most dramatic outcome, New York – the leading contributor of men, materiel, and money to the war effort – elected Horatio Seymour as their new governor. All told, the Republican vote declined 16 percent from 1860. Even where

² *New York Times*, June 29, 1862.

Republicans maintained control, as in Massachusetts, they lost ground. Explaining these results, President Lincoln cited the lost ballots of absent soldiers and a backlash against the Emancipation Proclamation fomented by hostile and influential newspapers. New York diarist George Templeton Strong claimed that “two-thirds of those who voted” did so to convey to Washington that “My business is stopped, I have got taxes to pay, my wife’s third cousin was killed on the Chickahominy, and the war is no nearer the end than it was a year ago. I am disgusted...and shall vote for the governor or congressman you disapprove, just to spite you.” Historians have tended to see these explanations, all hinging entirely on voters reacting *against* the Republicans, as adequate to comprehend the 1862 canvass. These arguments are persuasive and necessary, but insufficient. Dissatisfaction with the administration provides, at best, only half the answer.³

We need to understand why people cast their ballots *for* Democrats, not just *against* Republicans. Prevailing historiography has made it difficult to grasp this possibility by commonly portraying Democrats as “obstructionists and racists, who reacted to Republican-inspired policies on the basis of expediency...that failed to help the Union and often flirted with treason.” This chapter will explore the contours of party politics in Massachusetts and New York during 1862 to argue that the election results signified much more than general war weariness or base rejection of emancipation and other Republican policies. In reality, many people chose to endorse an alternative vision for vigorously

³ Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 187–190; diary of George Templeton Strong, quoted in William D. Mallam, “Lincoln and the Conservatives,” *Journal of Southern History* 28 (February 1962): 42; Edward K. Spann has written that “the November elections were basically a referendum on the Lincoln administration, emancipation, and freedom for black Americans.” Eric Foner and Philip Paludan both view the elections as primarily a referendum on emancipation combined with frustration at the lack of military progress. William Blair has recently highlighted the importance of political arrests, but still frames this in terms of reasons to vote *against* Republicans, rather than *for* a larger Democratic vision. Edward K. Spann, *Gotham at War: New York City, 1860-1865* (Wilmington, Del: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 90; Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 234; William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 166-175; Philip Shaw Paludan, *A People’s Contest: The Union & Civil War, 1861-1865* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 98-102.

prosecuting the war laid out by the Democrats and their conservative allies. These voters punished Republicans for abandoning the political center ground.⁴

Democrats built on the non-partisan loyalty credentials established during the first year of war to offer the electorate an alternative vision for fighting and winning the war. The ideological moorings and practical policies of this vision will be extensively outlined when examining Horatio Seymour's election as governor of New York. Attempting to appeal beyond their party base, Democrats reframed these contests as conservative against radical, rather than Democrat versus Republican. Horatio Seymour proclaimed repeatedly that he and his party would wage the conflict "in behalf of conservative men." Far from advocating peace, they argued that the best route to victory lay in continuing to wage the limited, conservative war that had united all parties in the North in 1861. In the most striking element of this strategy, Democrats repeatedly claimed President Lincoln as a conservative and promised their electoral victories would strengthen his hand.

The campaigns of 1862 reveal that many politicians from both parties viewed the president as a conservative at heart. Historians have often overlooked the fact that, at this point in the war, the dominant understanding of dynamics in Washington portrayed Lincoln struggling to hold at bay the demands of radical Republicans who longed for a war to crush the South and free the slaves. This gave

⁴ Jerome Mushkat, *The Reconstruction of the New York Democracy, 1861 – 1874* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1981), 9; Two influential works of the 1970s, by Jean H. Baker and Joel H. Silbey, stressed the fundamental loyalty of the party during wartime. Recent studies by Jennifer Weber and Michael Landis have swung the pendulum back. Landis considers the northern Democratic Party to have been unabashedly pro-slavery and pro-southern. Weber's *Copperheads* argues that anti-war sentiment was widespread, profoundly threatening to the nation, and fostered by influential and numerous Peace Democrat politicians. Weber has, in Robert Sandow's words, "reasserted the Republican paradigm of Democratic disloyalty." Jean H. Baker, *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 7; Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860 - 1868* (New York: Norton, 1977); Robert Sandow, "Damnable Treason or Party Organs? Democratic Secret Societies in Pennsylvania," in Andrew L. Slap and Michael Thomas Smith, eds., *This Distracted and Anarchical People: New Answers for Old Questions about the Civil War-era North* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 42; Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Michael Todd Landis, *Northern Men with Southern Loyalties: The Democratic Party and the Sectional Crisis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

Democrats the opportunity to renew opposition while decrying partisanship, claiming to serve only the country and the conservative Republican in the White House. The cartoon in Figure 1 shows how Democrats crowded over Lincoln's August 22 letter to Horace Greeley where Lincoln responded to Greeley's "Prayer of Twenty Millions," by pledging to continue to hold the Union as his first and only consideration. Even after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, Democrats continued to believe Lincoln a conservative. In the wake of Democratic victories in November, the *New York Herald* hailed an outcome that would strengthen "President Lincoln's conservative war policy." Lincoln's close friend, Orville H. Browning, vouched for the genuine support of many Democrats for the president. By praising Lincoln in order to open a fissure within the Republican Party, Democrats employed an archetypal instance of centrist political tactics.⁵

Democrats also noted that Lincoln kept George McClellan in command and made support of the general a centerpiece of their rhetoric. McClellan's opinions on how the war should be fought and for what purpose were well-known, and Democrats hoped from early in the war that he might be a future presidential candidate. The general's famous July 1862 letter to President Lincoln from Harrison's Landing encapsulated conservative concerns. McClellan begged Lincoln to recognize that a war for "free institutions and self-government" must not involve the forcible abolition of slavery or military arrests beyond the arena of hostilities. If the president would only pursue a course "constitutional and conservative" then he would win the war while receiving "the support of almost all truly loyal men." Although detested by radical Republicans, McClellan's conservatism did little to diminish his broad support among many Republicans who shared some conservative principles, wished to keep the nation united, and acknowledged the extent to which the soldiers adored their commander-

⁵ *New York Herald*, October 20, 1862.

in-chief. Lincoln's upholding of McClellan allowed Democrats to express allegiance to two conservatives in command of the war effort.⁶

Granting respect to Lincoln as head of the government also helped Democrats in a heated debate over the definition of loyalty that became central to partisan competition in 1862. Particularly after the Emancipation Proclamation, Republicans began arguing that to question the administration while the nation was under siege constituted treason to the government. In Republican minds, even if an action might be of dubious constitutionality in peacetime, questioning it in war equated to materially hurting the war effort, endangering the government, and committing what William A. Blair has called "implied treason." Democrats, and many conservatives, fiercely rejected this, articulating a difference between the government and the administration. Patriots owed unyielding loyalty to the government, but could oppose, carefully, those who administered it. George M. Frederickson's study of conservatives in the Civil War era demonstrated that, while familiar to a modern audience, the Republicans faced an uphill struggle to establish their definition of loyalty. The concept of national loyalty had a lineage associated with the monarchies of the old world. This heritage, combined with a fierce attachment to individualism and democratic liberty, had always given more amorphous parameters to notions of loyalty within the United States. Eventually, Republicans managed to instill among the public an association of treason with Democratic opposition, but not in 1862.⁷

Although ubiquitous in the historical literature, the labels War Democrat and Peace Democrat are deliberately absent from this chapter. Such monikers perpetuate unquestioningly the view of the Democratic Party that Republicans fastened upon them during the war. Crucially, historians commonly

⁶ For Harrison's Landing letter, see Stephen W. Sears, ed., *The Civil War: The Second Year Told by Those who Lived It* (New York: Library of America, 2012), 306-8. McClellan's letter would not become public until August 1863 when he released his official report on the Peninsula Campaign but its sentiments voiced what was already the common perception of McClellan's conservative views. See Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 325.

⁷ George M. Frederickson, *The Inner Civil War: Northern Intellectuals and the Crisis of the Union* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 137-38.

use these labels in discussions of Democrats during the entire war when chronologically they only gained meaningful weight from 1863 onwards. In 1862, only an insignificant minority of Democrats advocated peace. Moreover, the vast majority of Democrats identified themselves with their cause – the Union – rather than the means to achieve it – war or negotiation. Many “War Democrats” argued that military force and peace proposals should go hand in hand while virtually no “Peace Democrats” admitted they would accept anything less than reunion as an outcome of negotiations. The Republican Party worked hard to conflate war with loyalty, and negotiation with treason. In hindsight, we may agree with Republican judgments, but, in the midst of the bloodletting, many questioned such assertions.

Events in Massachusetts provide the ideological contrast and interpretive balance to New York. While the lower North was conservative and electorally competitive, New England contained the most fervently Republican states in the nation and Massachusetts served as a particular hub for Radical Republicans and abolitionists. Studying Governor John Albion Andrew reveals the strengths and limits of that characterization. Andrew held progressive beliefs and pushed for a truly radical Republican Party. But he also showed the limits of radicalism even in the Bay state. At moments in Andrew’s campaign and regularly in his governance, he tacked to the center to win votes and to mobilize his entire state for the war effort. And while Andrew comfortably secured reelection, the results still showed that the swing towards conservatives was a national phenomenon. Andrew faced reelection every year in Massachusetts, and when running against the People’s Party in 1862 – a conservative coalition of Republicans, Whigs, and Democrats – he won with his smallest majority of the war. Moreover, the emergence of the People’s Party demonstrated the deep divisions within the Republican movement, and offered succor to conservative campaigns elsewhere.

VANITY FAIR.



The Monotonous Minstrel.

President Lincoln, (to H. G.)—"GO AWAY, YOU TIRESOME VAGRANT! IT'S ALWAYS THE SAME OLD CROAKING TUNE, 'ABOLITION, ABOLITION, MARCHING ON!'"

Figure 1: Vanity Fair, September 6, 1862.

The Conservative Audience

“Conservatives” played a central role in the politics of the Civil War, yet historians of this era often use the term without offering an explanation of who it encompassed, what beliefs it connoted, and where it placed on the political spectrum. The far end of each party contained groups commonly referred to as “radicals,” “ultras,” or “extremists.” On the Republican side, these were abolitionists or true radical Republicans, and among Democrats, they were Confederate sympathizers or unbridled peace men. Mainstream opinion tended to shun these groups for their perceived willingness to prioritize their respective goals above Union. Next to them, both parties had thousands of more moderate but still committed partisans who were unlikely to switch allegiances. Conservatives, in the center of the northern spectrum, formed the key swing voter bloc that shaped the outcomes of wartime elections. Those conservatives most electorally available tended to be former adherents of some, or all, of the Whig, Free Soil, American, or Constitutional Union parties, who had been cast adrift by the breakdown of the Whig Party and the repeated traumas of the Democrats during the 1850s.⁸

In the pivotal contests of 1862, Democrats hoped to appeal to three particular groups of conservatives. First, they targeted conservative Republicans, those Horatio Seymour called his “conservative Republican friends,” who tended to be old line Whigs. Many of these men had allied with Millard Fillmore and the American Party in 1856 before backing Lincoln in 1860. For such voters, as Eric Foner has written, “devotion to the Union was the cornerstone of their political outlook” and “Daniel Webster and Henry Clay were the conservatives’ ideal statesmen.” They detested abolitionists and fire-eaters alike for endangering the Union. Many were mildly anti-slavery but believed change should happen gradually and constitutionally. Nationalistic in outlook, they resented the South primarily for blocking economic measures like a higher tariff, a homestead bill, and internal

⁸ For an extended analysis of conservatives in the long Civil War era, see Adam I.P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and the Problem of Slavery in Northern Politics, 1846-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017). For an archetypal conservative, see Matthew Mason, *Apostle of Union: A Political Biography of Edward Everett* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

improvements that they believed essential to the nation's prosperity. Such men formed the nucleus of the People's Party formed in Massachusetts in 1862.⁹

Conservative Whigs who had remained unattached to either major party represented the Democrats' best hope for additional votes. These men shared many traits with the conservative Republicans but, where conservative Republicans remembered Henry Clay's personal anti-slavery beliefs, they recalled his injunction against the Whig Party becoming a "contemptible abolition party...utterly subversive of the Constitution and the Union." Vehemently opposed to the tenets of Jacksonian Democracy, they longed for a new political home and a desire for sectional compromise and respect for the nation's founding institutions led many to back the Constitutional Union Party in 1860. As one such voter explained for New York, there were "tens of thousands of voters who were to be found in every town in the state...who had never been connected with either the Democratic or Republican parties."¹⁰

The third group contained Democrats who sided with the administration only with the outbreak of war, deeming partisan opposition unacceptable when the nation's fate hung in the balance. Daniel S. Dickinson represented the most prominent New Yorker of this ilk, who made clear that, "it is not Lincoln and the Republicans we are sustaining," rather "it is the government of our fathers, worth just as much as if it was administered by Andrew Jackson." Many of these men would never return to the Democracy. But no one knew this at the time and many Democrats hoped to reunite them with the main body of the party. These men lined up behind Lincoln early in the war when he articulated a decidedly limited conflict; Democrats hoped they might reverse their decision as the war became more

⁹ Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 187. Former Democrats who had bolted the party in frustration at the controlling influence of southern colleagues tended to be the most anti-southern in their sentiments. See Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 149-185.

¹⁰ Sarah Bischoff Paulus, "America's Long Eulogy for Compromise: Henry Clay and American Politics, 1864-58," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4 (March 2014):41; R J Stevens to R. B. Connolly, Jan 20, 1863, Horatio Seymour Papers, SC7008, Box 7, New York State Library [repository hereafter NYSL]. For the heritage of compromise, rooted in Whig ideas about social harmony, see Daniel Walker Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 23-43.

all-encompassing. Many Administration Democrats would express unease, but, having made their beds, most of them continued to sleep in them.¹¹

Most observers felt that the Democratic successes in 1862 rested on the mobilization of a substantial number of conservative voters. This is, undoubtedly, what Salmon P. Chase had in mind when he wrote to Benjamin F. Butler after the elections stating, “The party which now opposes the National Government is not in any just sense the Democratic party and ought not to be so called. It is simply the opposition, in which old Whigs, know-nothings, and Democrats unite to expel the Republicans from power.” A substantive vision for fighting the war attracted these conservatives into a centrist Democratic coalition in 1862.¹²

The swing towards conservatives was a national phenomenon, manifesting even at the far left of the nation’s ideological spectrum in Massachusetts. Although Republican Governor John Andrew would comfortably secure reelection in 1862, the race still represented the high-point of conservative politics in the Bay State. A People’s Party led by conservative Republicans would reduce Andrew’s margin of victory, demonstrate the deep divisions within the Republican movement, and offer succor to conservative campaigns elsewhere. While personally a committed radical, Andrew’s election and governing decisions reveal the influence of centrism in policy and politics even within the most radical of northern states.

¹¹ DeAlva Stanwood Alexander, *A Political History of the State of New York* (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1906), 26.

¹² William C Harris, “Conservative Unionists and the Presidential Election of 1864,” *Civil War History* 38 (December, 1992): 302, 317. It is impossible to garner exactly the proportion of non-Democratic conservatives who voted in 1862. But it seems clear the result was not merely a case of high Democratic turnout.



Figure 2: Governor John A. Andrew

Massachusetts: Governance

John A. Andrew's tenure as governor of Massachusetts provides strong evidence that shared partisan allegiance did not ensure a governor would enjoy a smooth relationship with the Lincoln administration. Andrew's clashes with Washington tended to come from three sources. Personally, as discussed in chapter 1, Andrew held fiercely radical beliefs and possessed a long history of anti-slavery activism. When he became governor in 1860, Andrew wished to see the president embrace emancipation as soon as possible, and, more generally, hoped to purify the Republican Party of conservative apostates. Nonetheless, Andrew simultaneously recognized that he represented an ideological outlier even within his state. He earnestly desired to keep a broad political coalition together and consequently, at times, pragmatically opposed or protested policies or developments that

he might otherwise have been expected to support. Finally, Andrew took extremely seriously his responsibility to mobilize his state for war and to care for his constituents. This desire led him to cultivate groups within his state that he otherwise had little time for, and to engage in a series of conflicts with the national government over measures likely to burden the people of the Bay state.

State executives could become a headache for the federal government partly because the onset of war triggered expanded remits for governors, just as it did for the president. Many state constitutions limited governors in peacetime but specified a host of financial and military powers that became operative during times of “war, invasion, or insurrection,” when executives assumed the role of state “commander-in-chief.” While the federal government eventually reimbursed many of the costs of national service, the states often paid these costs initially or duplicated payments (such as bounties), and provided a host of additional benefits. These arrangements reflected a deliberate desire from Washington to respect the norms of antebellum federalism and their possible consequences did not go unnoticed. Major General Henry W. Halleck even wrote to Francis Lieber in November 1862 of his belief that “by deferring every thing to Governors of states, it [the government] was building up a northern state rights party that would eventually overpower all Federal authority.” Halleck exaggerated the dangers of what was a combative but functioning federal-state relationship. Nonetheless, his perspective reflects the need to reconsider the prevailing historiographical view of the Civil War as a time when the federal government ran roughshod over the authority of the states.¹³

Like most governors, Andrew used his enhanced wartime powers to build an elaborate recruitment driven bureaucracy to provide for his state’s soldiers, which soon led to confrontation with

¹³ Henry W. Halleck to Francis Lieber, November 23, 1862, Box 9, Francis Lieber Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California [repository hereafter HL]. For recent views of the federal-state balance of power, see Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 50; Laura F. Edwards, *A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Nation of Rights* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 3. For discussion of Andrew’s broad war powers and evidence of the wartime legislation enacted by state legislatures, see Richard F. Miller, ed., *States At War, Volume I: A Reference Guide for Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont in the Civil War* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2013).

the War Department. Until the Enrollment Act of March 1863, governors bore primary responsibility for raising troops. Andrew guarded this duty closely and engaged in a bitter quarrel over the decision by Secretary of War Simon Cameron to grant independent recruiting authority to private individuals such as Major General Benjamin F. Butler, until very recently a prominent and southern-leaning Democratic politician from Massachusetts. Andrew refused to commission officers for the regiments Butler raised. Even a personal request from the president failed to sway Andrew and, with aid from other governors, he helped elicit the issuance of General Order on February 21, 1862. This order represented a clear concession to Andrew and his gubernatorial colleagues by reaffirming governors as the legal authority for raising regiments and commissioning officers.¹⁴

As Union forces geared up for campaigning in the first half of 1862, the new secretary of war, Edwin McMasters Stanton, asked the governors to increase the speed and scale of recruitment, granting Andrew the leverage to secure a better deal for his constituents. As Richard F. Miller has observed, Andrew sought to ensure a “safety net” for the families and dependents of soldiers, recognizing that the willingness of men to serve tied directly to their faith that those they left behind would not suffer undue hardship. Andrew believed that “the purpose of the State...is to provide for the comfort and protection of the soldier’s household, so that the highest duties of patriotism may be found consistent with those of domestic affection.” As a result, Andrew set up an allotment system, by which soldiers could automatically reserve a portion of their monthly pay that their dependents on the home front could access. William Schouler, Massachusetts’ adjutant-general during the war, estimated that this scheme resulted in forty-one Massachusetts’ units transferring over \$3,000,000 during the war and that, in combination with direct cash assistance provided by the state, Massachusetts distributed over \$11,000,000.¹⁵

¹⁴ Richard F. Miller, ed., *States At War, Volume I*, 278.

¹⁵ Richard F. Miller, “For His Wife, His Widow, and His Orphan: Massachusetts and Family Aid During the Civil War,” *Massachusetts Historical Review* 6 (2004): 72, 86-7, 98.

Andrew wished to see such provisions matched at the federal level and so pressed Stanton to offer all new enlistments an advance of one month's pay, the two dollars that traditionally went to brokers, and an upfront payment of twenty-five of the one-hundred-dollar federal bounty. Stanton initially refused all of these requests. Undeterred, Andrew persuaded Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson to secure a congressional resolution approving two of these measures. Holding out for the twenty-five-dollar advance, Andrew made it known that he would otherwise refuse to join his gubernatorial colleagues in asking the president to call for another 300,000 troops. This threat prompted Secretary of State Seward to force Stanton into completing a humiliating volte-face, granting all three of Andrew's demands. Although Andrew played politics with recruitment, his approach clearly served and greatly benefitted soldiers and their families.¹⁶

Andrew's also took these actions to encourage military service because he hoped that effective recruitment would prevent the need for conscription. When the prospect of a federal draft first loomed with the Militia Act of 1862, Andrew privately made his opposition clear. Compulsion would contrast with a long history of volunteer service and, in Andrew's opinion, would "make a mere paper army, unorganized, ineffectual, discontented, valueless – flocks of green men, green officers." In New York, newspapers reported Republican Governor Edwin D. Morgan "averse to drafting," just as Andrew Gregg Curtin in Pennsylvania and David Tod in Ohio similarly expressed concerns. In concert, the governors chipped away at the plan. As loud protests reached Washington, Stanton abandoned the September 3 draft date and issued a circular that simply urged governors to begin the draft "as speedily as practicable." Newspapers reported Washington now ready "to co-operate, in every way possible, with the State authorities." For Andrew, this meant delaying until December, after the fall elections. The draft would become reality, but governors extracted broad latitude in how and when they would administer it in their states. Most ultimately recognized the need for conscription, but they desired the

¹⁶ James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991), 16-17.

maximum flexibility in implementing an unprecedented demand on their citizens. When conscription became a truly federal process in 1863, governors lost autonomy but gained the ability to voice their concerns and distance themselves politically from a widely unpopular measure.¹⁷

While Andrew privately protested the draft, he recognized his duty to offer public support. In 1863, the governor acted personally and through surrogates to pressure Lincoln to bring the federal Enrollment Act before the courts. Andrew believed that securing a favorable ruling – he suggested from the Massachusetts Supreme Court – would lend legitimacy to a needed but unpopular and constitutionally questionable policy. In the meantime, he attempted to soften the blow to his constituents. In public addresses, he recognized that the draft was “new and without precedent” and involved touching rights of which “all men are jealous.” He made a point of thanking the people of Massachusetts for the “unfaltering patriotism” with which they had accepted and sustained the War Department’s policy. Simultaneously, he used his contacts and the wealth of his state to recruit white men from other states, freed blacks from the South, and foreigners from Europe to fill quotas and spare as many of his constituents from conscription as possible.¹⁸

Mitigating the consequences of conscription served the working class, often foreign born, segments of Andrew’s constituency. To the same purpose, the governor also encouraged and hailed the decision of the Massachusetts legislature to overturn a two-year voting delay imposed on immigrant citizens. Andrew stressed that so many immigrants had enlisted “for the maintenance and defense of

¹⁷ William B. Weedon, *War Government Federal and State: In Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania and Indiana, 1861-1865* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1906), 219; *Evening Express* (Boston), August 4, 1862; *Evening Journal* (Boston), August 8, 1862; See Geary, *We Need Men*, 18; Miller, *States at War, Vol I*, 234; see the next chapter for discussion of how Andrew Curtin found ways to protest conscription in Pennsylvania.

¹⁸ John Andrew to Edwin Stanton, July 22, 1863, David D. Field to Abraham Lincoln, July 19, 1863, Lincoln Papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed online at www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/ [hereafter cited as Lincoln Papers]; *Address of His Excellency John A. Andrew to the two branches of the legislature of Massachusetts, January 9, 1863* (Boston: White & Potter, 1863) [hereafter Andrew, 1863 Annual Address], 13-14.

the country,” and had thus proven their patriotism and rights to full citizenship. Such actions had the potential to attract working-class Democratic votes while also serving dictates of justice.¹⁹

To harness his state’s full capacity for war, Andrew also needed to endear himself to the wealthy, educated, conservative elites, collectively known as the Boston Brahmins, who for many years had controlled the state’s politics. Years of association with anti-slavery and other reform causes had prompted many within the state’s high society to see Andrew as a “fanatic, an enthusiast, a sentimentalist, a dreamer of dreams.” Daniel Webster had been the idol of these old Whigs, but his death and the rise of men like Charles Sumner and Andrew marked the decline of New England conservatism. Even so, this group still held political significance and huge social and financial sway. Richard F. Miller has shown how Andrew managed to coopt elements of this elite by channeling their fierce Unionism and by granting a disproportionate number of military commissions to Harvard alumnae. The governor immediately chose four Brahmins as military aides who promoted enlistment and economic support. As Miller notes, the use of “class-based military appointments,” may have also helped to ease class tensions as the presence of famous Massachusetts families as regimental officers may have negated accusations of a “rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight.”²⁰ Andrew understood that the Union cause needed the backing of these conservative elites. Despite years of conflict with these groups, the governor now acted to bring them into his governing coalition to serve their shared larger purpose of winning the war.

Andrew’s pragmatism helped him to acknowledge the economic self-interest of Boston’s Brahmins by voicing caution over the Lincoln administration’s financial policies. In January 1862, the governor expressed his reservations over plans for a federal income tax and other financial legislation that might deprive Massachusetts’ thriving banking industry of significant income. In a stark reversal

¹⁹ *Address of His Excellency John A. Andrew to the two branches of the legislature of Massachusetts, January 3, 1862* (Boston: W. White, 1862) [hereafter *Andrew, 1862 Annual Address*], 14.

²⁰ Richard F. Miller, “Brahmin Janissaries: John A. Andrew Mobilizes Massachusetts’ Upper Class for the Civil War,” *New England Quarterly*, 75 (June 2002): 205, 208, 230-231.

of his usual tack, Andrew suggested a “conservative course of legislation for our banking system,” and urged the legislature to take up the administration’s offer to grant states a 15 percent discount on the federal income tax if they chose to “assess, collect, and pay” the tax “in its own way and manner.” Providing this option was typical of much wartime legislation and reflected Washington’s attempts to reflect the federal-state balance even while greatly enlarging the national remit. While Andrew spoke to the fears of business elites over new financial legislation, he again simultaneously made the government’s case that the nationalization of the currency would ultimately be of great benefit to New England business and their trade with the western states.²¹

Whenever possible, Andrew utilized disputes with Washington to present justifications for striking at slavery. In November 1861, the governor sent a letter to Gustavus V. Fox, assistant secretary of the navy, advocating a naval-military enterprise, proposed by “some of our most practical, experienced, and influential businessmen,” to seize and occupy Texas. In Texas, the army could create a prototype for the future South by declaring immediate emancipation, after which freed slaves would harvest cotton for export. This scheme, a self-aware Andrew explained, served the interests of “commercial men and capitalists,” not just “abolitionists.” When Stanton asked for four regiments to be dispatched in May 1862, Andrew responded with his opinion that, “if the President will...recognize all men, even black men, as legally capable of that loyalty the blacks are waiting to manifest...the roads will swarm, if need be, with multitudes whom New England would pour out to obey your call.” The conservative New York *Vanity Fair* ridiculed Andrew for his suggestion and published a poem entitled “Abe and Abolition,” where it praised the president who stood “unmoved by Abolition’s hue and cry.” The same issue included the cartoon in Figure 3, depicting Andrew asking Massachusetts

²¹ Andrew, *1862 Annual Address*, 22-25; Andrew, *1863 Annual Address*, 25-27; Andrew also used his 1863 address to recount a fight he had won with the Naval Department. Secretary Seward had agreed with Andrew that Massachusetts shipyards would build two ironclads to help provide protection for the New England coast but failed to inform Welles, who promptly intervened in protest. Andrew eventually won out and voiced the details publicly to contrast state efficiency with federal bungling.

soldiers to give “hearty cheers—two for the Nigger and one for the Union.” Strangely, although they ridiculed his reasoning, *Vanity Fair* would soon be making an argument supporting the use of black troops. The deeply prejudice publication aimed to align itself with working white men. As Figure 4 shows, after Lincoln’s call for troops in early July, followed by passage of the 1862 Militia Act, *Vanity Fair* suddenly worried about poor white men getting drafted into the army while free black men remained exempt. While this did not constitute an endorsement of emancipation, it suggested that in the future, Andrew might find unlikely allies for his much more progressive agenda. In the meantime, the governor would not have to wait long for vindication in his push for a turn to emancipation.²²

²² John A. Andrew to Gustavus A. Fox, November 27, 1861, Lincoln Papers; John A. Andrew to Edwin M. Stanton, May 19, 1862, in U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 127 vols. index and atlas (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1880-1901), ser. 3, vol. 2:45; *Vanity Fair*, June 7, 1862.



Figure 3: Vanity Fair, June 7, 1862.

VANITY FAIR.



DRAFTS.

Gentleman of Color.—"YAH! YAH! DARKEY HAB DE BEST OB IT NOW. DAR'S DE WHITE MAN'S DRAFF, AND HERE'S DE NIGGAH'S!"

Figure 4: Vanity Fair, July 26, 1862.

Determined to further his radical agenda, Andrew convened a meeting of the other New England governors, held at commencement at Brown University on September 3, 1862. As Governor Israel Washburn Jr. of Maine wrote to Andrew, it was “time for the States to speak to the Federal Govt.” Washburn contended that Lincoln need only “remove incompetent, unfaithful Generals, & emancipate & employ the slaves,” and “we will have nothing but victories.” This opinion was widely shared at the New England governors meeting, but it drew vituperative criticism from conservative papers in Massachusetts and New York. The *Boston Courier* even reported, almost certainly falsely, that the Providence meeting, in collaboration with the New York War Committee, had formed plans to raise 50,000 men, independent of the War Department, to be put under General John C. Frémont’s command should the president not remove McClellan and embrace emancipation.²³

A few weeks later, a much larger group of northern governors met at Altoona, Pennsylvania in the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation. Andrew led those desiring a soaring endorsement of emancipation and a strong statement of the need to remove George McClellan, but he encountered stiff opposition. Governors Tod of Ohio, Augustus W. Bradford of Maryland, and Curtin of Pennsylvania stepped in decisively to express their absolute backing of McClellan. As the *Boston Courier* reported, “thanks to Governors Bradford, Curtin, and Tod, the Roundheads were defeated in their schemes.” Andrew did help ensure that the final document issued by the governors endorsed the Emancipation Proclamation, but it made no mention of changing army high command; New England’s frustrations with McClellan had not been widely shared.²⁴

²³ William B. Hesseltine and Hazel C. Wolf, “The New England Governors vs. Lincoln: The Providence Conference,” *Rhode Island History* 5 (January 1946):110-111; Judith Phyllis Saunders, “The People’s Party in Massachusetts During the Civil War,” PhD dissertation (Boston University, 1970), 230; see also reporting in the *Boston Courier*, September 8, 1862.

²⁴ *Boston Courier*, September 30, 1862; William B. Hesseltine, “The Altoona Conference and the ‘Emancipation Proclamation,’” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 71 (July, 1947): 195-205. This a rather different characterization to Stephen Engle’s recent appraisal that the state executives met in light of grappling “with widespread dissatisfaction over the administration’s conservative war aims.” Andrew may have felt that way but Curtin and Tod certainly did not. Stephen Engle, “‘It is time for the States to Speak to the Federal Government’: The Altoona Conference and Emancipation,” *Civil War History* 58 (December 2012): 417.

Andrew famously lobbied for and equipped some of the first black regiments of the Civil War and his reputation as a moral light of the time is wholly justified. Nevertheless, as historian V. Jacque Voegeli has shown, a request to take in black refugees revealed the limits of Andrew's, and Massachusetts', anti-slavery sentiment. On September 12, 1862, General John A. Dix, a former free-soil Democrat now in command of Fortress Monroe in Virginia, asked Secretary of War Stanton for permission to ask New England governors to grant temporary asylum to at least some of the 2,000 former slaves who had fled to the safety of the Union controlled Fort. Stanton approved Dix's request but Andrew, with the backing of virtually all Republicans in his state, firmly rejected the proposal according to "motives of humanity." The governor argued that the refugees could aid Dix in the event of a Confederate attack and that they deserved the opportunity to fight for their freedom. Moreover, if relocated, the freedpeople would become a "swarm of homeless wanderers" and, exposed "to the rigors of our northern sky," would be sure to experience "extreme suffering, resulting probably in disease and death." In November, *The New York Times* reprinted Andrew's letter with approbation for the "good and sufficient reasons" laid out.²⁵

Andrew's lack of enthusiasm for taking in refugees captured the reality that, as strong as revulsion to the institution of slavery was in parts of the North, this rarely translated to any desire to change their own virtually all-white society. Musing on the Fort Monroe episode, the conservative Republican *Springfield Republican* concluded that while Massachusetts was an "anti-slavery state" with "a kind feeling toward the negroes who are in bondage...it is neither a negro loving nor a negro respecting state." A Massachusetts soldier, Joseph Collingwood, had always considered himself an abolitionist but serving in the South made him more certain in his belief that "I don't like the black race. I go for white men and fight for white men." Collingwood supported abolition only because he

²⁵ V. Jacque Voegeli, "A Rejected Alternative: Union Policy and the Relocation of Southern 'Contrabands' at the Dawn of Emancipation," *The Journal of Southern History* 69 (November 2003), 765-790; *New York Times*, November 7, 1862.

saw emancipation as a military necessity. A firm Republican, he hated the Democrats but loved George McClellan and had no doubt that “Mac has only to raise his fingers and the army will follow him to Washington and clear out the corrupt place.” Collingwood’s mix of anti-slavery, racism, anti-Democratic, pro-McClellan opinions mirrored many northern Republicans and shows the complexity of opinion at this point in the war. Andrew was far more progressive, but he likely had such sentiments in mind when he refused the Fort Monroe refugees. With the 1862 elections on the horizon, Andrew likely grasped that taking in these refugees might backfire to ultimately harm black prospects in the North and the South.²⁶

Andrew’s refusal provided one flashpoint in a complicated relationship with President Lincoln. At times, Andrew worked hard to cultivate and praise Lincoln, even through the conduit of Mary Todd Lincoln. Hearing that Mrs. Lincoln would be attending an event in Boston, Andrew instructed Samuel Howe that, in light of the Emancipation Proclamation, he wanted to show Lincoln the strongest possible support and that this could be achieved by “paying all proper attention to his wife.” Yet a few days earlier, Andrew had also written to Montgomery Blair admitting his irritation at reports that the president had expressed surprise at his decision regarding the contrabands at Fort Monroe. Andrew took a swipe at the commander-in-chief by asking Blair to convey that the recent Democratic election victories resulted from “a general feeling among the people of the weakness and imbecility of the military operations of the administration.”²⁷

Tensions over the question of black refugees resurfaced in 1864 and Lincoln showed he could be equally testy. Andrew wrote to the president claiming that some “pretended authority” in

²⁶ Voegeli, “A Rejected Alternative,” 775, 771; Joseph Collingwood to his brother, letters of July 22, 1862, October 22, 1862 and November 10, 1862, Joseph Collingwood Papers, HL. Andrew promoted the welfare of freed slaves through organizations such as the Educational Commission for Freedmen, a Boston organization to which he was elected president in February 1862.

²⁷ John Andrew to Abraham Lincoln, June 27, 1861, Lincoln Papers; John Andrew to Samuel J. Howe, November 10, 1862 and John A. Andrew to Montgomery Blair, November 6, 1862, Reel 36, John A. Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

Washington was preventing black refugees from reaching Massachusetts where they hoped to better their fortunes and support their families. He demanded intervention to help them reach the Bay state where there existed “work and wages for all.” In light of Andrew’s earlier claims that relocated blacks would quickly become indigent paupers, the president unsurprisingly took umbrage and drafted a deeply sarcastic response. Lincoln wrote that from Andrew’s letter he could only assume that Massachusetts wished to “afford a permanent home within her borders,” for all “colored people South of Washington” and, if so, he expressed himself delighted to aid the process. Admitting this not to be the case, Lincoln then skewered Andrew’s probable true purpose in trying to “raise colored troops” with “recruits from Virginia,” to lower the burden on Massachusetts. Since the loyal governor of Virginia was also engaged in recruiting these men for service, the president felt disinclined to act on Andrew’s request. As discussed in chapter five, Andrew would feature prominently in radical Republican attempts to replace Lincoln with Frémont as the Republican presidential candidate in 1864.²⁸

Andrew’s record demonstrates that the responsibilities of executive office set governors aside from congressmen who felt no need to temper their partisanship. Andrew maintained a fervent desire to further a radical Republican anti-slavery agenda, but he also fulfilled his duty to govern for his entire constituency. Whenever he could, he pushed the issue of emancipation and, as will be discussed, sought to secure offices for not just Republicans but the right type of radical Republicans. But he also found ways to reach out to old conservative Whig elites, to immigrants, to soldiers and their families of whatever partisan affiliation. These actions represented good, non-partisan governance that may nonetheless have been of electoral benefit. The best political scientists acknowledge that no one model will ever explain voting behavior, but one useful formula suggests that voters will respond to and reward policy that benefits them. Richard L. McCormick, for instance, has argued strongly for a close

²⁸ John Andrew to Abraham Lincoln, February 12, 1864 and Abraham Lincoln to John Andrew, February 18, 1864, Lincoln Papers.

fit between “distributive policymaking and partisan politics” in the nineteenth century. In the midst of war, it is not unreasonable to suspect that Andrew might have seen some electoral benefit from actions that directly supported the thousands of men, of all partisan affiliation, who volunteered to serve their state and nation.²⁹

Politics³⁰

Despite an inclusive approach to governance, Andrew’s correspondence highlighted his concerns about maintaining and purifying the Republican Party. As Dale Baum put it, while “actively soliciting the support of moderates and conservatives for his administration, Andrew continued to assert forcefully the demands of the antislavery cause.” During the secession crisis, Andrew pressed Lincoln to fill his cabinet and all federal posts in Massachusetts with “true hearted & wise Republicans,” who were committed to the “triumph and perpetuation of a party of principle.” The governor’s military secretary, Thomas Dew, when discussing possible tax collector appointments let it be known that “above all the Governor thinks we should be on guard against pretend Republicans.”

²⁹ See Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy: American Politics from the Age of Jackson to the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 20.

³⁰ Depictions of Massachusetts’ wartime politics have varied considerably from Edith Ware’s dated but influential study that saw little difference between the parties to Dale Baum’s depiction of fiercely radical Republicans defeating reactionary, unprincipled Democrats. An excellent volume, *Massachusetts and the Civil War*, edited by Matthew Mason, Katheryn P. Viens, and Conrad Edick Wright offers a series of perceptive essays that interrogate and break down some of the more sweeping depictions of abolitionists, Republicans, and Democrats offered in some of the earlier literature. Edith Ware, *Political Opinion in Massachusetts during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1916); Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984); Matthew Mason, Katheryn P. Viens, and Conrad Edick Wright, eds., *Massachusetts and the Civil War: The Commonwealth and National Disunion* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2015). Other influential studies include: William Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War* (Boston: Dutton & Co., 1868); Henry Greenleaf Pearson, *The Life of John A. Andrew: Governor of Massachusetts, 1861-1865*, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., 1904); David Herbert Donald, *Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 1960); Saunders, “The People’s Party in Massachusetts During the Civil War”; Thomas H. O’Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997).

Such statements reflect the fact that the Massachusetts Republican Party stood almost alone in the nation in being able to openly avow their radicalism and still win.³¹

Radicals had gained control of the Massachusetts Republican Party by 1860, but the immense pressure at the outbreak of the war to put forth a united, non-partisan Union front saw a brief resurgence for conservative Republicans. When Lincoln appointed Charles Francis Adams as minister to Great Britain, an election had to be held to fill his seat in Congress. A bipartisan “People’s convention” quickly organized and nominated the conservative Republican judge, Benjamin R. Thomas. Radical Republicans wanted to offer an alternative but lost out and Thomas, unopposed by either Republicans or Democrats, secured over 90 percent of the vote. Even Massachusetts’ strident abolitionists initially acquiesced in such non-partisan politics. To men like Wendell Phillips it seemed obvious that the war would end slavery and, assuming others thought the same, he welcomed his state’s war spirit as evidence that he had been wrong in thinking “Massachusetts wholly choked with cotton-dust and cankered with gold.” Nonetheless, their certainty that war and emancipation would go hand-in-hand ebbed and flowed and it was to the relief of radicals that both parties refused attempts at fusion for the 1861 fall elections.³²

Although they rebuffed calls to abandon party, Andrew and the Republicans still emphasized united support for the war for Union. At their 1861 convention, the mass of Republicans defeated Charles Sumner’s plea to call explicitly for emancipation. Conservative Republican newspapers like the *Boston Daily Advertiser* rejoiced that Sumner’s purposes were “not the objects and views of Massachusetts Republicanism, nor of Massachusetts Unionism.” Andrew also seemed willing, at this

³¹ Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 57; John Andrew to Abraham Lincoln, January 20, 1861 and John Andrew to Abraham Lincoln, March 11, 1861, both Lincoln Papers; Thomas Dew to Charles Ingersoll, July 12, 1862, Reel 36, John A. Andrew Papers.

³² See chapter 1, above, for how radicals gained ascendancy pre-war. Quoted in Peter Wirzbicki, “‘Today Abolitionist is Merged in Citizen:’ Radical Abolitionists and the Union War,” in Mason, Viens, Wright, eds., *Massachusetts and the Civil War*, 91. For the views of abolitionists, see also John Stauffer, “The Union of Abolitionists and Emancipationists in the Civil War-Era,” and Richard S. Newman, “The Rise and Fall of the Abolitionist Republic,” both in Mason, Viens, and Wright, eds., *Massachusetts and the Civil War*.

stage, to accept that agitating for emancipation could set back radical hopes. This represented an entirely genuine position for Andrew. He was ardent in both his Unionism and his desire for emancipation, and chastised abolitionists like Wendell Phillips when they suggested during the secession crisis that the South should be set adrift. Like most radicals, Andrew believed firmly that the fate of the entire Union depended on ending the institution of slavery that long blighted the nation and the South in particular. Nevertheless, just as saving the Union required ending slavery, so ending slavery required maintaining the Union and the governor did not wish to undermine the unity of the North behind the war effort. In a special message to the legislature on May 14, 1861, the governor declared that he would not risk division by speaking of “that subtle poison” within the nation when all stood united in a struggle to “retain and invigorate the institutions of their fathers.” In October, Montgomery Blair reported to President Lincoln his confidence that Andrew could be relied on not to agitate the slavery issue. Even so, Andrew would not hold fire for long.³³

In his January 6, 1862 address to the Massachusetts legislature, Andrew set the tone for a year when he would press repeatedly for the morality and necessity of emancipation. Andrew recognized that the North’s unity rested in an almost universal desire to protect “Popular Government and Democratic Institutions,” not to destroy slavery. But Andrew hoped his audience would realize that the cause of Union and of freedom for African-Americans could not be separated. Andrew complained that the Bay State had been “treated for years as the Cassandra of the States,” receiving endless abuse for extolling the truths of the dangers that slavery posed to the nation. None could now doubt that war had been inaugurated by “the revolt of Slavery,” and that the fighting made the “extinction of human slavery...inevitable.” Andrew showed little sympathy for Confederates who had spent decades accusing Massachusetts of being the only disunionists in the nation. In a tone rarely used in the Lower

³³ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 2, 1861, quoted in Saunders, “The People’s Party in Massachusetts,” 179; Andrew quoted in Ware, *Political Opinion in Massachusetts*, 71; For Andrew’s relationship with abolitionists, see Frank Cirillo, “‘The Day of Sainthood Has Passed’: American Abolitionists and the Golden Moment of the Civil War, 1861-1865,” PhD Dissertation (University of Virginia, 2017); Miller, ed., *States at War, Vol I*, 289.

North or the Mid-West, where ties to the South were stronger and anti-slavery weaker, Andrew attacked the rebels as traitors to their country, who were guilty of “the greatest crime of history” and “must receive a doom so swift and sure.” Andrew hoped for an eventual moral regeneration of the South, but he believed it could only come through a total military defeat followed by a wholesale restructuring of their social and political order. Slavery had poisoned the South and its people, only a total extirpation of the institution could restore them to an equal place in the nation. This appalled conservatives, who mostly believed that states retained their constitutional rights and that, once loyal southerners could be installed in positions of power, they should rejoin the Union as quickly as possible.³⁴

The certainty of Andrew and other radicals that slavery had to die to save the Union placed them ahead of the political mainstream in mid-1862 and created an opportunity for a bipartisan conservative alliance to emerge. In the early summer, several newspapers called for a new movement to hold the administration to the war aims stated in the Crittenden-Johnson resolutions of 1861. This desire found a notable advocate in the form of Harvard law professor and conservative Republican, Joel Parker. Parker and fellow Massachusetts conservative Supreme Court Justice Benjamin R. Curtis produced several pamphlets during the war offering their opinions on the constitutionality of the administration’s actions, all of which became potent ammunition for conservative politicians in campaigns across the North. Parker published a letter in the Boston *Daily Journal* calling for the Republican Party to cut “itself loose from all unconstitutional projects,” whether related to “emancipation ... conquering States and holding them as territories, confiscating without trial, or any other measure not warranted by the Constitution.”³⁵

³⁴ John Andrew, *1862 Annual Message*, 68-71. These same sentiments had underpinned Andrew’s determination not to give any ground to the South during the secession crisis. See Schouler, *A History of Massachusetts*, 1-48 and Pearson, *The Life of John A. Andrew*, 2:130-176.

³⁵ Saunders, “The People’s Party in Massachusetts,” 190.

In late August, a group of conservatives, including Parker, met and formed the nucleus of the People's Party. The radical Republican newspaper, the Boston *Daily Evening Traveller*, derided this assemblage as containing "gentlemen who have belonged to every party and to no party - Democrats, Republicans, Know-Nothings, and Nobodies." While the *Traveller* accurately showed the breadth of partisan affiliation, it took license in referring to them as "nobodies." Many were prominent members of the Massachusetts elite, including former Know-Nothing governor George S. Hillard, and Constitutional Union gubernatorial candidate Amos A. Lawrence, not to mention Parker. The call they put out for a People's convention stressed that they proposed a "platform broad enough for every man to stand upon," at a time when all party issues and party labels had to be set aside to unite behind putting down the rebellion. The best means to achieve this was by offering complete support to the president and aiding him against those who "palsy his efforts with a feeble and half confidence." Such a stance seemed viable and patriotic at the end of August.³⁶

The People's Party could make upholding Lincoln their *raison d'être* because of the seeming gulf existing between the president and the radicals, particularly those of their own state like Sumner and Andrew. As Judith Phyllis Saunders has written, these conservatives in Massachusetts believed, "from his past behavior and remarks," that the president "was as conservative as they." This narrative looked to Lincoln's border state policies, his revoking of the attempts by Generals Frémont and Hunter to further emancipation, his known opposition to the second Confiscation Act, and his consistent statements, most recently in his famous response to Horace Greeley that his only concern was to "save the Union." Lincoln also had a two non-Republican conservatives, Edward Bates and Joseph Holt, loyally serving in his administration alongside other conservative Republicans like Montgomery Blair

³⁶ *Proceedings of the Convention of the People of Massachusetts: Holden at Faneuil Hall, Boston, October 7th, 1862, in Accordance with the Call of Joel Parker and Others* (Boston: C.J. Peters, 1862).

and Caleb B. Smith. Perhaps most significantly, the president kept George McClellan – the bane of radicals and darling of conservatives – at the head of the Army of the Potomac.³⁷

The radical-led Massachusetts Republican Party convention in early September bolstered the viability of conservative appraisals of Lincoln by passing a resolution calling for immediate emancipation but failing to support an endorsement of the president. Venting frustration at Lincoln's apparent queasiness about the constitutionality of his actions, one voice at the convention even proclaimed that the constitution should be allowed to "slide" for the course of the war. The conservative Republican newspaper, the *Springfield Republican* argued that such sentiments were "essentially disloyal." Indeed, they caused an additional cohort of conservatives to break away from the Republicans to join the fledgling People's Party.³⁸

The People's Party suffered a crippling blow with Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, and, three days later, the Suspension of the Writ of Habeas Corpus across the entirety of the North. Out of nowhere, the president appeared to have rapidly closed the breach with the radicals and dealt a hammer blow to hopes for a "constitutional" war. The confident expectations voiced at a public recruiting meeting in July of sustaining the "conservative policy of the President," had been confounded. Some conservatives, like Amos A. Lawrence, immediately abandoned the People's Party, believing that they had no option but to back the president's new policy wholeheartedly, however unpalatable. Nonetheless, the People's Party rallied and found a Republican, Charles Devens Jr., to be their gubernatorial nominee. They had initially hoped to nominate Charles Francis Adams, who refused, but Devens – a soldier on active duty – still embodied their message to the electorate and the party met in convention on October 7 determined to state their claims of continued relevance despite Lincoln's having pulled the rug from under them.³⁹

³⁷ Saunders, "The People's Party in Massachusetts," 204.

³⁸ *Springfield Republican* (Springfield, MA) quoted in the *Boston Courier*, September 13, 1862.

³⁹ Saunders, "The People's Party in Massachusetts," 219; "War meeting at Faneuil Hall," in *Boston Advertiser*, 14 July, 1862.

In a ploy that conservatives repeated in New York and elsewhere, the People's Party chose to explain Lincoln's recent actions as aberrations, remediable by a healthy dose of conservative support. At their convention in October, speakers continued to attack Republicans for not endorsing the president and stressed that the proclamation had not created a radical. "Union" remained the presidential purpose and emancipation served only as a means to achieve it. Moreover, trying to play every angle, these conservatives stressed that in continuing to support Lincoln they showed themselves to be the true patriots, unlike the radicals who heretofore had refused to support their commander-in-chief. At all times, the clearest contrast was drawn with Sumner who, the day before, had given a rousing speech praising Lincoln's decision to commission the greatest general of all, "General Emancipation." These men also read Lincoln's document closely and found solace in the details. Several stated their belief that "three months is a long time" in the hope that Lincoln might yet change course.

People's Party delegates also began making an argument that many politicians – Republican, Democrat, and all types of Unionist – would use as the war went on, namely that temporary military necessity justified Lincoln's actions. Judge Abbott told his audience that they need only tolerate these measures now and then when the nation's crisis had passed "there will be a day of reckoning, when we can stop to call all our public officers to account; but now is not that time nor that day." The convention ended with glowing endorsements of George McClellan and a commitment to a "more vigorous and successful prosecution of the war." The elites of the People's Party especially feted McClellan, but conservative Republican newspapers like the *Boston Advertiser* also offered robust defenses of the general's performances during the Seven Days, at Antietam, and of his continued popularity among the troops.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ "Proceedings of the Convention of the People of Massachusetts: Holden at Faneuil Hall, Boston, October 7th, 1862, 4-16; [Charles Sumner,] *Emancipation! Its Policy and Necessity as a War Measure of the Suppression of the Rebellion* (n.p.:n.p., [1862]); *Boston Advertiser*, July 5, 1862 and September 16, 1862.

The decision of the Democrats to endorse the People's Party nominees made this conservative coalition the official opposition in Massachusetts, but their chances to convert conservative Republicans were fading. Once President Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, conservatives within his party proved reluctant to abandon ship. Two conservative Republican newspapers, the *Springfield Republican* and the *Boston Advertiser*, sympathized with the People's Party platform and shared in the belief that Lincoln's proclamation did not reflect his true sentiments. But despite their uncertainty about the policy shift, they felt it their duty to maintain the president and his party. The decision to stay loyal to the Republican ticket became easier once some Democrats foolishly asserted at their convention that all the non-Democratic conservatives would be safely enveloped within Democratic Party folds within a year. This made the Democratic endorsement of the People's Party candidates seem like tactical collusion rather than impartial patriotism. Republican papers reported these statements widely and they helped to ensure that several of the conservative Republicans nominated by the People's Party refused to run.

Although the Republicans triumphed resoundingly on election day, the scale of their victory, and hence the performance of the People's Party, needs to be understood within the Massachusetts context. Andrew won with 80,835 votes, 59.6 percent, to Devens' 52,587, 40.4 percent. In a typically grandiose statement, the governor claimed this to be "the most splendid political victory known in our history." But, while a resounding victory, Andrew received a smaller percentage of the vote than in any of his other election campaigns. In 1860, Andrew secured 61.6 percent, in 1861, 67.6 percent, in 1863, 70.7 percent, and in 1864, 71.8 percent. So while the People's Party could not unseat Andrew in staunchly Republican Massachusetts, they nonetheless performed considerably better than the Democrats managed on their own. Indeed, Dale Baum's use of regression estimates to analyze these voting returns has suggested that 10 percent of Republican voters in 1860 abandoned Andrew for Charles Devens in 1862, and that in the congressional races, "about 16 percent of the 1860 Republicans voted for the People's Party in 1862," though only "about 2% of them voted Democratic

in 1864.” The fact that conservative Republicans defected in greater numbers in congressional voting than gubernatorial may be evidence of Andrew’s success in softening his radical image and appealing to conservative elites. Unsurprisingly, the People’s Party also received the backing of the vast majority of those who supported the Constitutional Union Party in 1860.

Even if they posed a minimal electoral threat to Andrew, the centrist conservatives in Massachusetts had shaped the governor’s rhetoric and actions. Andrew had welcomed the enthusiasm of conservatives for the war effort and recognized it with military appointments and a willingness to initially stress Union above liberty. When conservatives opposed him through the vehicle of the People’s Party, it also forced Andrew and other Republican radicals to hone their own Unionist message. In 1860, Republicans had convinced a majority in the North that slavery and slaveholding power had to be restricted for the sake of the nation, that it had to be kept within the bounds of the southern states where it existed. That was very different to suggesting that four million black men, women, and children should be made immediately free. Hostility towards emancipation and the prospect of black emigration reminded radicals of the challenge they faced. The arguments put forward by conservatives forced men like Andrew to learn how to tie their moral condemnation for bondage to military necessity in order to convince a skeptical populace that the Union could not be saved without ending the institution of slavery. In governance and rhetoric, Andrew, like many other governors, learnt to balance principle and pragmatism in wartime politics.

In Massachusetts, the coalition of conservative Republicans, old Whigs, and Democrats that the People’s Party assembled proved insufficient to damage Republican fortunes. Nevertheless, this kind of alliance, and a more fully articulated version of the conservative message that it touted, produced more dramatic results in New York and many of the more electorally competitive states of the North.⁴¹

⁴¹ John A. Andrew to Montgomery Blair, November 8, 1862, Reel 36, Andrew Papers; voting statistics from Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1861 – 1911: The Official Results by State and County* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010); Baum, *The Civil War Party System*, 68.



Figure 1: Governor Horatio Seymour

New York

As discussed in chapter 1, by the time of his wartime gubernatorial nomination in 1862, aged fifty-two, Horatio Seymour had already spent thirty years in New York Democratic politics. Seymour's generally centrist temperament was shared by many in New York and, on the eve of war, Seymour had joined with conservative Republican governor Edwin D. Morgan and his Republican allies Thurlow Weed and William Seward in advocating fervent efforts at compromise to prevent disunion and war. While events at Sumter ended these efforts, conservatives in both parties continued to channel the non-partisan spirit of the times.⁴²

⁴² Russell McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

The 1861 fall elections saw some Democrats break from their party to join Republicans in fusion movements; Seymour, loath to abandon his party, stayed among those Democrats who remained in opposition without opposing. The Democratic renegades hosted a People's Convention that placed Daniel S. Dickinson – a longtime New York Hardshell and Hunker Democrat who backed Breckinridge in 1860 – at its head, running for attorney general, with four Democrats, four Republicans, and one American below him. Conservative Republican Thurlow Weed drafted resolutions that offered robust support for the war while condemning both abolition and secession. Democrats offered no meaningful campaign and the People's Ticket secured majorities of over 100,000, more than double Lincoln's margin in 1860. While their party had ruptured, Democrats had demonstrated their loyalty, with even Horace Greeley's *Tribune*, ever looking for Democratic traitors, judging that within the Democratic Party "nine-tenths of it is probably strenuous in the determination that the constitutional authority of the government shall be maintained and enforced."⁴³

As radical Republicans made legislative inroads in the spring and summer of 1862, New York's conservatives realized that the tenuous non-partisan coalition of 1861 was beginning to crumble. Desperate to preserve bipartisanship, Republican Thurlow Weed conspired with Democrat John Van Buren in a plan to see Democrat John A. Dix chosen first by the Constitutional Union Party, after which Republicans and Democrats would unite behind Dix on a joint Union ticket for governor in the 1862 fall elections. Dix's resume had remarkable cross-party conservative appeal. A former Free Soiler who had been Buchanan's secretary of the treasury in 1861, Dix nonetheless immediately signed up for military service, joining the Union Army, aged sixty-three as a major general. Dix quickly earned national adoration with his telegram to Treasury agents in New Orleans instructing them that "If any one attempts to haul down the American flag, shoot him on the spot." Weed and Van Buren's scheme failed when Dix narrowly lost the Constitutional Union Party nomination to Seymour, after

⁴³ Alexander, *A Political History of New York State*, 26-30; See the previous chapter for details of similar developments elsewhere. *New York Tribune*, November 19, 1861.

which the Democrats immediately endorsed Seymour's candidacy. The conservative wing of the Republican Party controlled by Weed, William Seward, Edwin Morgan, and Henry J. Raymond now hoped to take Dix as their candidate. To their dismay, Horace Greeley's forces secured the nomination for Brigadier General James S. Wadsworth, an avowed abolitionist and vocal critic of General George McClellan. Wadsworth's candidacy presented an opportunity for Seymour to convince New York's voters that the Democratic Party best embodied non-partisan support for the war.⁴⁴

Horatio Seymour went on to secure the most dramatic electoral victory of 1862, and his campaign is highly revealing of the Democratic appeal at its most potent, appealing to a wide swath of the nation's conservative voters. At a time when a patriotic people viewed party politics with great skepticism, Seymour recast the political divide as conservative against radical, not Democrat against Republican. Seymour sought to embody a vision that could motivate the Democratic base and reach out to the swing voters of the Civil War, many of whom self-identified as "conservatives."

Seymour tailored his message to all the conservative groups outlined in the introduction to this chapter but, to achieve victory, he also had to turn out the regular party faithful in droves. Many would vote Democratic almost regardless of the issues. The organizational machine that Democrats since Van Buren had built up was formidable. As Richard F. Bensele has suggested, Democrats could turn out large numbers of "ordinary men...in return for a shot of whisky, a pair of boots, or a small amount of money." But as Jean H. Baker has illustrated, Democrats had also established an enormously powerful and substantive heritage as a party steeped in American nationalism and representative of the broad mass of "the People." Presented with the elitist Federalists, Whigs, and Republicans, many people became "Democrats because they were democrats." By 1862, however, this core Democratic

⁴⁴ *New York Daily Tribune*, February 8, 1861; John A. Dix to Edwin Morgan, 24 December, 1860, Edwin D. Morgan Papers, Collection GK11818, Incoming Correspondence, Box 4, Folder 10, Manuscripts and Special Collections, NYSL; Alexander, *A Political History of the State of New York*, 37-39; Entry of September 27, 1862, *Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson*, Vol. I, ed. John T. Morse, Jr., (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1921), 154; Smith, *No Party Now*, 60.

constituency did not represent a sufficient bloc to win elections across the North. To succeed, the Party had to sway a portion of the non-Democratic conservative vote. The Democratic vision of the Union War would help construct a viable, if fleeting, conservative coalition.⁴⁵

During the 1862 canvass, Horatio Seymour consistently advocated four key positions that formed the foundation blocks of Democratic ideology and identity. Most basic was the legitimacy of partisan opposition during wartime. Articulated most fervently in the early months of the conflict, but not abandoned thereafter, was a second idea: that compromise was an honorable, traditional, and patriotic course of action. Third, Seymour fiercely and constantly upheld the sanctity of the Constitution, specifically the rights he considered it guaranteed to both the individual and to the states under a federal system. Finally, Seymour's Unionism represented by far the most important element of his and the Democratic appeal, consisting, above all, of a determination to win the war by means that would not make reunion with the South impossible.

Legitimate Opposition

Seymour justified renewing political opposition on the theoretical basis that parties served national ends, which he practically demonstrated in the proud history of the Democratic Party. When Jeffersonians first attacked the Federalists, transgressing against the non-party spirit of the age, they cited the need to contain the natural drift to tyranny. Party opposition became just another barrier in the series of institutional checks and balances that kept government serving the people. Seymour harked back to this august heritage, warning that those calling for the abandonment of competition should

⁴⁵ Richard Franklin Bense, *The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ix; Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 322, 317. Bense shares with others like Glen Altschuler and Stuart Blumin the belief that, crudely put, politics was conducted by an uninformed populace and had more to do with entertainment than policy preference. Baker views the nineteenth-century electorate as educated and informed. Undoubtedly, there is truth to both interpretations; alcohol lubricating voting does not preclude it being simultaneously an informed and considered decision. Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *Rude Republic: Americans and Their Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

remember “the vigilance kept alive by party contest guards against corruption...and abuses of power.” Moreover, nobody could question the nationalist credentials of the Democratic Party.⁴⁶

While opposition parties came and went, Democratic presidents (and those pre-dating the party but claimed as Democrats) had won the nation’s wars, put down would be secessionists at Hartford and Charleston, and expanded the boundaries of liberty. Despite the Democrat’s own schism – with southern Democrats leading secession – Seymour still considered the Democracy the only national party, especially now that northern Democrats believed that joining war against their former colleagues had cleansed them of the taint of disloyalty. To achieve reunion after military victory, some kind of reconciliation would be required and he questioned whether the Republican Party – a “thing of yesterday,” which “never embraced our whole country” – could ever facilitate it. The governor had no doubt that the Democratic Party had “been so closely identified with the history and progress of our country, that its dissolution would seem like the severance of the last bond which holds our country together.” Seymour’s logic clearly spoke to the party faithful, but it also appealed to conservatives who had long fretted over the lack of any southern representation in the Republican Party, a reality unprecedented in American political history.⁴⁷

Even while he lauded party, Seymour simultaneously claimed to lead a non-partisan coalition of conservatives that would defend President Lincoln against radical Republicans. These men, Seymour said, “do not wish to restore the Union unless they can revolutionize the social system of the South.” While radicals repeatedly assailed the nation’s chief executive, Democrats understood that he

⁴⁶ Thomas M. Cook and Thomas W. Knox, eds. *Public Record: Including Speeches, Messages, Proclamations, Official Correspondence, and Other Public Utterances of Horatio Seymour* (New York: I. W. England, 1868), 231-233 [hereafter cited as Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*], 50. Significant debate surrounds the question of whether Civil War era voters viewed party politics as a good or an evil for the virtue of society, and whether it in fact was beneficial. For an overview of these debates, as well as his own interpretation of the strength of anti-partisanship, see Smith, *No Party Now*.

⁴⁷ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 41-42; For a comprehensive exploration of Democrats manipulation of disunion rhetoric against Republicans, see Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion!: The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

should be “treated with deference, and spoken of in respectful terms.” Quoting critiques from Republican newspapers, Seymour assured listeners that his election would answer the president’s “private prayers” by “shaking off those radical influences by which it [the government] has heretofore been annoyed and embarrassed.” Campaigning for Seymour, John Van Buren, pressed his audience to understand that the war had to be won under Lincoln and that conservatives should stand by him since “he is a cross of Kentucky on Illinois, and cannot be an abolitionist.” What could be more loyal than defending a president under siege from his own party? Seymour’s respect for Lincoln, and the reframing of party competition as conservative against radical, hoped to court former Whigs uncomfortable with parties per se, as well as recently departed Democrats uncomfortable with partisanship in times of war.⁴⁸

Despite sparing Lincoln, Democrats still had to convince voters that they remained entirely loyal and that none of their criticism of the administration would ever lead them to accept disunion. A memo prepared for Seymour by fellow New Yorker and close associate, Samuel J. Tilden, makes abundantly clear how leading Democrats understood the precarious predicament they faced. Tilden urged Seymour to make a public address aimed at Confederates where the governor should explain that “in no event can the triumph of the conservative sentiment of New York in my election, mean consent to Disunion.” Rather it would constitute the restoration of the Constitution and while Democrats would oppose the radicals, they would maintain the government as long as the rebels opposed it. To anyone who thought they intended “to dissolve the federal bond between these States, to dismember our country, whoever else consents, we will not, no never, never, never.” In doing so, Tilden affirmed that loyalty affixed to the Union, not the administration.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Atlas & Argus* (Albany), October 16, 1862; Seymour, *Public Record*, 73, 74, 52; John Syrett, *The Civil War Confiscation Acts: Failing to Reconstruct the South* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Daniel Walker Howe has argued that Whigs tended to believe that “parties posed a threat to the proper social order:” Howe, *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*, 52.

⁴⁹ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 58; Samuel J. Tilden, *Letters and Literary Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden*, ed. John Bigelow, Vol 1. (New York: Harper, 1908), 167.

Compromise

A commitment to the legitimacy of compromise has been an underappreciated and misunderstood dimension of Democratic appeals. The prominence of peace enthusiasts in the later years of the war, and their success in securing a peace plank in the 1864 platform, has made it seem that compromise emerged as an opportunistic attempt to capitalize on war weariness. In fact, Democrats defended this principle from the outset, and did not see it as incompatible with continuing to wage armed conflict.

During the secession crisis, Seymour had indicted those, North and South, who rejected compromise as guilty of “senseless, unreasoning fanaticism,” and “treason to the spirit of the Constitution.” He stressed that slavery was not a new issue, and that “our fathers disposed of the same or similar difficulties, by compromises.” His attempts to further sectional reconciliation failed, but he never abandoned a commitment to what he called “the vital principle of social existence.” In his inaugural address, Seymour averred that “the exertion of armed power must be accompanied by a firm and conciliatory policy” to entice the South back into the Union.⁵⁰

A remarkable letter written by August Belmont – national Democratic Party Chairman, New York financier, and Seymour ally – to Thurlow Weed demonstrated the Democratic belief that compromise and war both represented valid means of restoring the Union. In this letter, which Weed then passed on to President Lincoln, Belmont proposed two options to save the Union: “the one is by an energetic and unrelenting prosecution of the war to crush the rebellion; the other would be to negotiate with the leaders of that rebellion.” To achieve the first, Belmont advocated a draft for 500,000 men. To secure the second, he recommended sending one or two “conservative” men to

⁵⁰ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 23, 31, 24, 101; Stephen Douglas shared Seymour’s hopes for compromise during the secession crisis, see Robert W. Johannsen, “The Douglas Democracy and the Crisis of Disunion,” *Civil War History* 9 (September 1963): 229-247, and Martin H. Quitt, *Stephen A. Douglas and Antebellum Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 169-185; Alexander, *Political History of New York State*, 16.

Richmond (he suggested Seymour) as a prelude to a “national convention for the purpose of restructuring the Federal compact.” Belmont valued restoration of the Union above all else and this ensured that he would never rule out compromise as a means to achieve it. But, if the “sword had to be the arbiter,” then so be it.⁵¹

Constitutionalism

Democratic protests against unconstitutional actions represented widely held and genuine concerns that were rooted in the long political history of the nation. The republicanism of the revolutionary generation had identified the genius of American government in its ability to protect individual liberty from government’s natural inclination to abuses of power. Since the founding, Democrats had opposed Federalists, Whigs, and then Republicans, all of whom they viewed as “intent on destroying the liberties of the American people through the extensive intrusion of government power.” The lineage of the Democratic mindset explains why wartime critiques were not opportunistic responses to Republican ascendancy. Stephen A. Douglas, in his famous 1861 speech exhorting Democrats to acknowledge that “there can be no neutrals in this war, only patriots – or traitors,” also implored them to remember that they were “born under the constitution of the United States” and should “be prepared to enforce the inalienable rights which it confers.” Seymour echoed Douglas in October 1861, specifying the need to protect “freedom of conscience, the protection of our persons, the sacredness of our homes, the trial by jury, [and] the freedom from arbitrary arrests.” Douglas and Seymour both warned against dangers to the constitution from the outbreak of hostilities, even while they wholeheartedly endorsed a vigorous prosecution of the war.⁵²

⁵¹ [August Belmont,] *Letters, Speeches and Addresses of August Belmont* (New York: DeVinne Press, 1890), 79-82.

⁵² Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, 25; Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas*, Reprint edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 840-87; Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 35. In a recent review of scholarship on the Democratic Party, Thomas E. Rodgers has argued that “republicanism and republican virtue may also provide a framework for sorting out the divisions of the Democratic Party during the Civil War.” Thomas E. Rodgers, “Copperheads or a Respectable Minority: Current Approaches to the Study of

In the midst of the 1862 fall campaign, Democrats repeatedly talked, not just about the emancipation proclamation, but about the president's "two proclamations." Contemporaries put much greater emphasis than historians have on Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus, which imposed martial law for individuals "guilty of any disloyal practice," across the entire United States. The broad language and geographic reach sent chills down the spines of those watching for the fate of civil liberties. In September of 1862, the *New York World*, a Democratic newspaper, pledged its willingness to support a candidate of any stripe willing to promise a war "vigorously prosecuted by strictly constitutional methods." Historians have often seen such Democratic indignation as irresponsible and hypocritical harping. Yet, as William A. Blair has argued in an extensive study, "there was much to criticize concerning abuses of liberty," and Mark E. Neely has noted that Seymour took the lead in voicing Democratic dissent against the thousands of arbitrary arrests made by the Lincoln administration.⁵³

Seymour recognized that the dogmas of republicanism and the memory of the Revolutionary experience still imbued the political culture of both parties and made all Americans primed to fear for the fate of liberty in war. When Republicans defended arrests as "military necessities," Seymour saw only the "despotism of the Old World," and responded that anyone who claimed "that Abraham Lincoln...may rightfully do what George Washington would not do in the darkest days of the Revolution, does not know what Constitutional liberty is." Republican lawyer and congressman Lyman Trumbull showed the unease of many within his party when he asked Congress in 1861, "what are we coming to if arrests may be made at the whim or caprice of a cabinet minister." To all those unsettled by the administration's actions, Seymour promised a clear, if practically dubious alternative.

Civil War-Era Democrats," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 109 (June 2013), 130, 137; Baker, *Affairs of Party*, 143-176.

⁵³ James A. Dueholm, "Lincoln's Suspension of the Writ of Habeas Corpus: An Historical and Constitutional Analysis," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 29 (Summer, 2008): 47-66; *New York World*, September 18, 1862; Blair, *With Malice Toward Some*, 10; Mark E. Neely, *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 200-209.

Democrats would wage war constitutionally, never allowing the government or military arbitrarily to seize property, deny legal rights, or muzzle presses.⁵⁴

Emancipation

By the eve of the Civil War, most northern Democrats believed in the superiority of the free labor system and considered themselves against the extension of slavery. Many shared the Republican view that slavery had a negative effect on southern whites and virtually all wanted the territories free for white laborers. Democrats like Seymour imagined that the United States would, ultimately, become all free. But questions of timing and method were critical. Democrats had no interest in forcing the issue and would wait as long as it took for southern states to take their own decisions to free their slaves, quite possibly with gradual schemes of emancipation following the example of northern states like New York. Democrats feared immediate emancipation because they believed it would risk servile insurrection, race war, and permanent disunion. Freed slaves, unprepared for emancipation, would be unwelcome North and South. When emancipation became a reality, the greater degree of racism among Democrats would make the policy more objectionable than for Republicans. But while especially acute among Democrats, it is important to acknowledge that racial prejudice and fear of emancipation crossed party lines.⁵⁵

Lincoln's election in 1860 demonstrated that the Republican brand of antislavery could secure an electoral majority, but this victory had merged antislavery with racism. The unanimous support for banning slavery in the territories would keep them free for white men and ensure slaves remained in the South. This resonated with many northern states who had taken measures in the 1850s to limit the already restricted rights of free blacks. Ohio Republican Congressman John Sherman had little doubt

⁵⁴ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 34-35, 255, 84; Alexander, *A Political History*, 19.

⁵⁵ For recent elaborations of this point, see Jonathan Earle, *Jacksonian Antislavery and the Politics of Free Soil, 1824-1854* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) and Smith, *The Stormy Present*. Lincoln's proclamation revoking General Hunter's order of emancipation, in William E. Gienapp, ed., *This Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 123.

that while “the great mass of this country are opposed to slavery,” the black race “was spurned and hated all over the country North and South.” In 1860, 54 percent of New Yorkers gave their votes to Abraham Lincoln, while 64 percent of them also voted to reject a proposal for black suffrage.⁵⁶

The purpose of outlining northern prejudice is to make clear that when emancipation became a reality during the war it presented a challenge to both parties. Republican success with conservatives in 1860 had depended on convincing voters that a great deal of space and substance lay between the labels “Republican” and “Abolitionist.” Democrats could now use emancipation to reignite claims that the Republican Party was obsessed with race, the premise behind the “Black Republican” label. Yet they had to tread carefully. In time, Republicans would reverse this accusation, using the Democratic backlash to emancipation to argue that the Democrats were now the party who had lost sight of saving the Union due to their infatuation with questions of race.

Emancipation featured prominently for Democrats in 1862, but usually as part of a larger indictment of Republicanism, not merely as a visceral racist backlash. On one occasion, Seymour did refer to schemes of immediate emancipation and the arming of slaves as a “proposal for the butchery of women and children, for scenes of lust and rapine, and of arson and murder.” This is probably the most commonly used Seymour quotation, but it represents the exception rather than the rule. Seymour made these comments before President Lincoln issued the Proclamation, using it to characterize the desires of radicals like Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, which he believed the President fiercely opposed. Seymour attempted to drive a wedge between the president’s approach to slavery – promoting gradual, compensated, state led emancipation coupled with colonization – and the desire that was unfairly but commonly attributed to radicals of wanting to incite slaves to slaughter their

⁵⁶ Jacques V. Voegeli, *Free But Not Equal: The Midwest and the Negro during the Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1-28; Richard S. Newman, “The Age of Emancipating Proclamations: Early Civil War Abolitionism and Its Discontents,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* Vol 137 (January 2013): 33-55; Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967); Gallagher, *The Union War*.

masters. Seymour clearly held racist views, but he left the crasser appeals to be voiced by extremes within the Democratic base. Organs like the *New York Daybook* (which became the *Weekly Caucasian*), the *New York Daily News*, and the *New York Journal of Commerce*, were much more willing, when not suppressed by the Lincoln administration, to openly race-bait. At this point in the war, politicians like Seymour, and newspapers like the *New York World*, and the *New York Herald*, held the line against these fringe elements within the Democratic Party.⁵⁷

Seymour adopted a more restrained approach that reframed emancipation to speak to conservatives who placed all questions of race far below their adherence to the Union and the Constitution. As Russell McClintock has written, former Whigs “feared Republican antislavery agitation yet frowned on Democratic race-baiting.” After Lincoln issued his famous document, Seymour immediately took to questioning emancipation’s constitutionality. Such a proclamation, he argued, could apply only to “those who have been true to our Union and our flag.” This may sound strange, given that Lincoln exempted loyal border states from the impact of the proclamation. But to Seymour’s mind, the rebellion of a state did not attach disloyalty to individual loyal slaveholders within its borders. Treason could only forfeit personal property rights on an individual basis and he rejected the idea that “the conduct of a disloyal majority can forfeit the property of a loyal minority.” This perspective aligned perfectly with his concern for loyal Unionists within the Confederacy.⁵⁸

Seymour, like many Republicans, never abandoned hope in southern Unionism. The war had to embolden the hibernating loyalists who could weaken the Confederacy and represent the future leaders of a restored South. Emancipation served to “humiliate and mortify the loyal men of the South” who deserved support and protection. A conservative war policy, by contrast, would “kindle anew the fires of patriotism” among the “many thousand loyal men who only waited to hear that they could be safe

⁵⁷ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 54.

⁵⁸ McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War*, 36; Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 54, 69.

within the limits of the Union.” Seymour grossly overestimated the scale of Unionism within the Confederacy, but, in doing so, he embraced a core tenet of Republican beliefs about a Slave Power Conspiracy. Seymour’s rhetoric had cross-party appeal by tapping into the notion that a minority of slaveholders repressed and deluded the loyal white majority of the South. Seymour argued repeatedly that the radical agenda of immediate and total emancipation would abandon exactly the Unionists who Republicans claimed to support.⁵⁹

Yet even while he critiqued the consequences of emancipation, he also left the door open to accept the measure, under the right circumstances. At this stage in the war, many conservatives began to conceive that emancipation might be necessary to save the Union. This did not prevent them from simultaneously fearing that, done too suddenly, emancipation endangered law and order and posed a threat to the Union. Seymour spoke to these concerns by acknowledging that the war would, of course, damage slavery, accepting that “no man has ever doubted that the slaves of men in rebellion can be rightfully taken from them.” Such a process could take place within controlled bounds and held the possibility of a perfectly gradual embrace of freedom. Charles G. Loring, a Massachusetts’ conservative, explained the perfect scenario. After military defeat, the slave states would return “with the political power of slavery essentially crippled or destroyed,” after which the government could “provide for the termination of the system by gradual emancipation, under wise and humane laws administered by a highly civilized and powerful nation, with a just regard to the rights, welfare and interests of all.” Loring captured the perspective of many conservatives trying to reconcile freedom with order to avoid anarchy.⁶⁰

It is also significant that the November elections fell between the preliminary and final versions of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Democratic *Herald* actually endorsed the proclamation, saying that it represented merely the enforcement of the Second Confiscation Act and praising the inclusion of

⁵⁹ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 47, 99, 364.

⁶⁰ Loring speech at enlistment drive meeting at Faneuil Hall, reported in *Boston Advertiser*, 14 July, 1862.

colonization. The *World* strongly disapproved of the document, while admitting their struggle to reconcile the proclamation with the President's "sagacity, his sense of justice, or his self-poise of character." If Democrats had known that the final version would jettison colonization and embrace black military service, it is unlikely they would have exhibited such restraint. As it was, some Democrats vainly expressed the hope that Democratic election successes would provide Lincoln the justification to rescind a document they yearned to believe he had issued only reluctantly under radical pressure.⁶¹

Union

Seymour's Unionism represented the most important element of his electoral pitch. At one level, as recent studies have demonstrated, Union represented an almost universally revered concept. As James K. Polk said in 1847, Union represented "an altar at which we all can worship." Union invoked the founders and their fragile experiment in self-government that now offered an unprecedented level of religious toleration, personal and political freedom, economic opportunity, and social mobility. For a nation of European immigrants, these possibilities offered an idyll unthinkable under the autocratic, class-ridden monarchies of their past. On these points, nearly all Northerners agreed, and preserving these benefits formed the most common motivation among soldiers in the Union army.⁶²

Nonetheless, two strands of Unionism developed in the late antebellum years that became a clear dividing line during the war. Historian Rogan Kersh, tracing ideas about Union since the founding, distinguished between those who argued for a "sustainable" Union and those who sought a "moral" one. Those who focused on the Union's sustainability, like Seymour, believed that the Union was a "sacred trust received from our fathers," which only needed to be preserved to guarantee its

⁶¹ *New York World*, September 26, 1862.

⁶² See Varon, *Disunion!* and Gallagher, *The Union War*; Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 104; Rogan Kersh, *Dreams of a More Perfect Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 109.

blessings would spread abundantly to all parts of the country. Frederick Douglas proclaimed the alternative, moral conception of Union when he proclaimed himself a “believer in Union...because I believe it can be made a means of emancipation.” Far more northerners subscribed to the “sustainable” Union and conservatives particularly fumed at the idea that Union did not represent, in and of itself, the highest moral cause.⁶³

Within the conservative concept of Union, the South featured prominently in understandings of the present and prescriptions for the future. Seymour made clear that victory had to serve the “common good of all sections” and a New York Democratic enlistment pamphlet made clear that men rallied to the cause in order to prove that “Bunker Hill and Mount Vernon, New York and New Orleans shall never be dissevered.” This understanding of the war’s purpose contained an inherent formulation for the future, namely that there would be no post-war reconstruction, only reunion. Radicals like Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens were already articulating theories that the seceded states had “committed suicide” or that the North should treat them as “conquered provinces.” Both scenarios would place them under congressional control and make possible a wholesale restructuring of southern society. If conservatives held the reins of power, there would be only a reconciliation with loyal southerners forged in shared sacrifice. Emancipation represented the biggest obstacle to realizing this outcome.⁶⁴

A conservative war would never equate Union and emancipation. James Oakes has recently claimed that Republicans did not distinguish between liberty and Union. The war’s purpose “never had to move from Union to emancipation because the two issues – liberty and union – were never separate for them.” But to conservatives of all former political affiliation, this distinction mattered greatly, and, in New York at least, conservative Republicans forcefully articulated it. Indeed, it formed the dividing

⁶³ Kersh, *Dreams of a More Perfect Union*, 165.

⁶⁴ Pamphlet issued by the Democratic Republican General Committee from Tammany Hall, Horatio Seymour Papers, Box 24, Folder 4, Manuscripts and Special Collections, NYSL.

line between the Weed and Greeley wings of the party. As one conservative Republican newspaper put it, radicals advocated “an unscrupulous and revolutionary radicalism, which would seize upon the rebellion as a pretext to break down the barriers of law,” and unleash an “anarchy of radicalism.” Democrats latched onto this to argue that emancipation demonstrated that congressional radicals controlled the White House, speaking of Union only as a cloak for emancipation and racial equality. Men like preacher Lyman Beecher fueled Democratic fires when proclaiming that at last “The Union as it was meant to be, and not as it was, is to be our doctrine.” Against such heresy Seymour maintained that only “this great conservative party,” could foil the “theorists and fanatics,” and “rear up the shattered columns of Union.”⁶⁵

Democrats recognized the necessity, above all else, of an unequivocally pro-war stance. Democrats had enlisted with equal ardor as Republicans in 1861 and their politicians and newspapers argued vehemently that they represented the more pro-war party or, at least, the party whose pro-war sentiments and plans had a better chance of success. Seymour repeatedly stated that the party must “re-enforce our armies in the field” and “strengthen the hands of government” to put down rebellion. Frustrated Republican papers bemoaned the “glittering generalities,” and questioned how Democrats believed they could better “support the Government in the prosecution of the war,” but they could not help but acknowledge that Seymour stuck to this claim. Seymour’s pro-war Unionism made the Democrats credible, and his party also found ways to harness their stance to provide an alternative to a divided Republican Party.⁶⁶

Democrats used unqualified support for George B. McClellan as a key means to stress their pro-war but anti-radical position. Offering Little Mac all the troops he could dream of, the *Herald* contrasted such loyalty with the “abolition radicals” in Congress who had doomed the Peninsula

⁶⁵ James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), xxiii; *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, September 23, 1862; Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 104, 84, 73; Varon, *Disunion!*, 345; *New York Herald*, September 30, 1862.

⁶⁶ *Morning Express* (Buffalo), September 17, 1862; Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 58.

campaign by holding back reinforcements and interfering “with the commands of our ablest and most patriotic generals.” The *Atlas & Argus* agreed that McClellan would have undoubtedly secured victory on the Peninsula had he not been “abandoned by the politicians of Washington.” When McClellan repelled Lee’s invasion of the North at Antietam in September, Democrats lambasted men like Greeley who continued to criticize Little Mac in the aftermath of a battle that Democrats deemed a resounding triumph. McClellan was a known conservative and Democrats believed his persecution by radicals to be entirely politically motivated. Even worse, their focus on emancipation was “exasperating even the most unwilling rebels,” strengthening Confederate resolve.⁶⁷

Timing is key to grasping the plausibility of expressing loyalty by backing McClellan. While we know he fell dramatically from grace and repute, as the fall elections approached, McClellan remained at the head of the Army of the Potomac. Soldiers of all political allegiance continued to adore him. By contrast, the Republican candidate and brigadier general, James S. Wadsworth, had bitterly attacked his commanding officer after the Peninsula campaign. Wadsworth, correctly, claimed that Lee had far fewer men and that no excuse justified the failure to take Richmond. Nevertheless, while McClellan retained his position at the head of the nation’s leading army, such attacks lent credence to the idea that the radical obsession with emancipation represented the true threat to military success. John Van Buren readily twisted this knife into Wadsworth, proclaiming that “when the country is at war, the bitter enemy of the Commander-in-Chief should not be placed at the head of the government of this State.” At least one New York regiment expressed its support for Seymour, specifically because Wadsworth had been part of a clique within the army known to be “loud and virulent in its abuse of McClellan.”⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *New York Herald*, September 11, 1862; *Atlas & Argus*, August 1, 1862.

⁶⁸ *Atlas & Argus*, October 16, 1862; Letter of William Chittenden Lusk, quoted in Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 188.

The consistency and plausibility of the Democrats' pro-war position is pivotal to grasping why many conservative voters chose them in 1862. A former Whig from Kentucky wrote to Millard Fillmore rejoicing that New York had elected Seymour rather than the "Abolitionists, headed by Wadsworth." Now, the bluegrass native crowed, they would "beat the Northern radicals, who have so bedeviled President Lincoln, at the ballot box, so we shall soon overwhelm the southern radicals now in open secession, with the Bayonet." Numerous soldiers expressed similar opinions. New York soldier Asa Holmes, 114th New York Infantry, instructed his son that "if you here Eny man or woman talk abolition or against slavery cick his ass for me." Holmes stressed that if he should die in this war, "I want you to say that I died A good cause fighting to save the Union." Holmes' letters also reveal how devastating the rise of a peace faction within the Democratic Party would be. By the summer of 1863 his letters positively frothed with venom against Democratic peace men who "ar trators to the union" who "ourter be in prison with the Rebels or in hell." Nonetheless, in 1862, the election post-mortem in New York's newspapers confirmed that contemporaries saw the Democratic message not as a sign of widespread peace sentiments or defeatism but as an alternative conservative vision of the war.⁶⁹

In the election aftermath, Republican newspapers revealed the deep split in their party. Radicals offered something close to the interpretation that has trickled down through the historiography. Greeley's *Tribune* cited Republicans "absent in arms," and others who refused to vote because they were "disheartened and disgusted by the no-progress of the War." Greeley channeled John Andrew in arguing that Lincoln had only to stop kowtowing to slavery and arm black men by the thousands in order to see the army overflow with recruits and march triumphantly to success. Thurlow Weed, in his *Albany Evening Journal*, offered the conservative Republican explanation. Weed decried Wadsworth's

⁶⁹ Leslie Gormly to Millard Fillmore, 30 October 1862, Millard Fillmore Papers, Roll 50, Lester W. Smith and Arthur C. Detmers, eds., *Microfilm Edition of the Millard Fillmore Papers* (Buffalo: Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society and State University College at Oswego, 1975); Asa Holmes to Frank Holmes, 22 January 1863, 24 April 1863 and 3 July 1863, *John L. Nau Collection of Civil War Collection*, Houston, Texas, Document Box 45.

radicalism and the foolish platform that had cemented emancipation alongside Union. These “obnoxious...Ultra Abolitionists” had abandoned the issue “upon which we were united” and “narrowed down to an AntiSlavery War, about which the People have been and will remain divided.” In appearing to modulate their Unionism, Weed believed that the Republicans had tossed away their huge majorities of 1861. This Republican infighting had clearly been of significant benefit to Seymour.⁷⁰

Democratic newspapers, and even some Republican ones, reiterated the meaning of the conservative triumph. The *New York Herald* and The *New York World* both celebrated a victory for conservatives over radicals that showed New York had “thunder[ed] out her demand for a more vigorous prosecution of the war.” The *Herald* added that now that the “Jacobins” had been rebuked, “President Lincoln’s administration” might “yet win the glory of a Union restored.” *Vanity Fair*, a Democratic, conservative paper welcomed the election of Seymour (Figure 6) and published a cartoon (Figure 7) showing Lincoln exclaiming that he could keep the Union train on the Constitution tracks now that he had “the right fuel,” in the form of wood marked “Dem Maj” that Seward is placing in the engine. While celebrating the Democratic victories, *Vanity Fair* also hailed the defeat of extremists within the party. Despite the resounding success for congressional Democrats in Ohio, Clement Vallandigham, already the most notorious anti-war voice in the nation, managed to lose his bid for reelection and *Vanity Fair* gleefully placed Vallandigham on the front page of their post-election issue, under the tagline, “Out in the Cold”. Republicans like Henry Raymond doubted that Seymour and his party could deliver his conservative vision but still acknowledged in the *Times* that the governor had pledged fealty to the Union and to a renewed zeal in the prosecution of the war.⁷¹

⁷⁰ *Albany Evening Journal*, November 8, December 9 & December 13, 1862 and *New York Tribune*, December 12, 1862; *New York Daily Tribune*, November 10, 1862.

⁷¹ *Vanity Fair*, November 8, 1862.

Historian Thomas E. Rodgers, in a recent review of scholarship on the Democratic Party, challenged scholars to “try to explain why Republican politicians’ efforts to motivate their voters with claims of disloyal Democratic organizations had so little effect in 1862 and so great effect in 1863 and 1864.” Answering this question becomes much simpler when you focus on the Democrats themselves, rather than Republican depictions of them. As Seymour demonstrates, Republicans failed to make accusations of disloyalty stick because they had minimal basis in reality. In 1862, Democrats offered voters a loyal alternative to a divided Republican Party.⁷²

⁷² Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, 144; *New York World*, November 7, 1862; *New York Herald*, November 5, 1862 & November 6, 1862; *New York Times*, November 6, 1862; Rodgers, “Copperheads or a Respectable Minority: Current Approaches to the Study of Civil War-Era Democrats,” 145.

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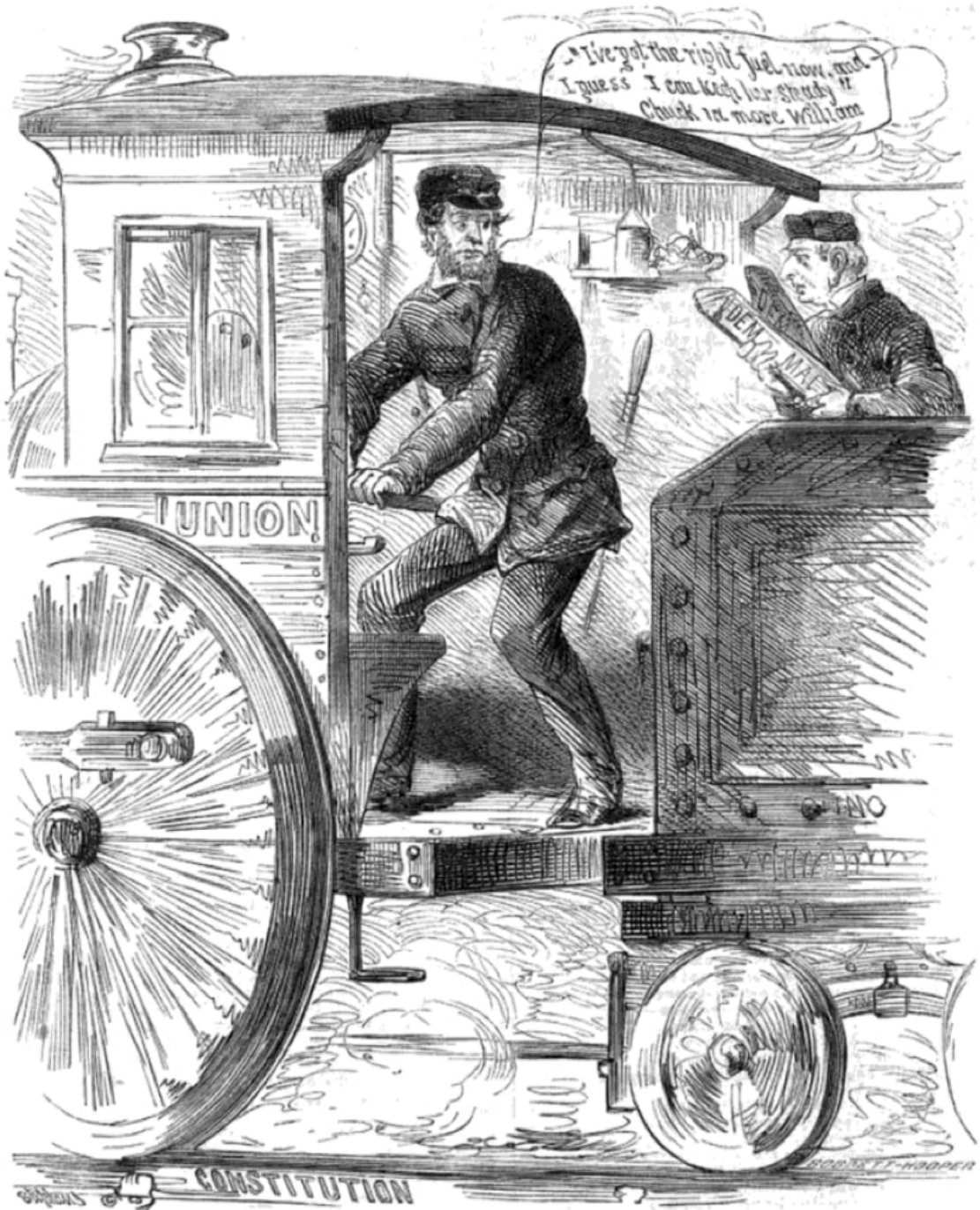
BOBETT-HOOPER

HORATIO SEYMOUR.

OUR NEW GOVERNOR — OR, AT LEAST, AS GOOD AS NEW.

Figure 2: Vanity Fair, December 13, 1862.

VANITY FAIR.



KEEP ON THE TRACK!

Figure 7: *Vanity Fair*, November 22, 1862.

Conclusion

The positions taken by the People's Party in Massachusetts and Seymour in New York aligned with the majority of their national Democratic colleagues. Leonard P. Curry's examination of congressional Democrats in the thirty-seventh Congress concluded that Senate Democrats had been so acquiescent in support of the war that they were "frequently not truly opposition." Democrats in the Senate and House backed all funding for the war, offering significant obstruction only on questions relating to black troops, the suspension of habeas corpus, and emancipation measures beyond the First Confiscation Act. On questions of public lands and internal improvements – typically seen as an entirely Republican agenda – Democrats showed remarkable support. Measures such as the Land Grant Colleges Act, the Homestead Act, and the Pacific Railroad Act received the backing of over 80 percent of Senate Democrats and well over 60 percent of Democrats in the House. These figures were the consequence of the limited ideological convergence among northern Democrats and Republicans in the late antebellum years. Under the leadership of men like Stephen Douglas and infused by the Young America movement, northern Democrats backed policies that favored free labor to open and develop the continent for white men, in the process restricting slavery's expansion. Overall, Curry concluded that "except for a few aberrant individuals...congressional Democrats formed an integral and important part of the old political "center" – that massive repository of political power in America."⁷³

As observers came to terms with the resounding rebuke dealt to Republicans in the 1862 canvass, it remained unclear how Lincoln would respond. The president had offered mixed signals. In September, he rebuffed demands from Edwin Stanton and Salmon P. Chase to remove McClellan from command but did issue the preliminary emancipation proclamation. The day after the elections,

⁷³ Leonard P. Curry, "Congressional Democrats: 1861-1863," *Civil War History* 12 (September 1966), 218, 228.

Lincoln finally removed McClellan but sent a somewhat baffling message to Congress that suggested he might be getting cold feet about emancipation.⁷⁴

In his communication of December 1, 1862, the president asked Congress to pass constitutional amendments that would make gradual emancipation with compensation and colonization part of America's foundational document. Having set forth that, come January 1, 1863, all slaves in areas then under rebellion would be "forever free," Lincoln now proposed amendments that might postpone freedom to 1900. He also suggested, in vague language, that Congress should appropriate further funds for colonization. The president seemed to be reverting to his previous Border State policy, characterized by an unwillingness to embrace freedom by presidential decree. Yet Lincoln simultaneously used his message to dismantle arguments for colonization and urged the nation to prepare to accept black freedom within the United States.⁷⁵

Lincoln's address to Congress, unsurprisingly, generated much confusion and some derision. Orville Browning referred to it as an "hallucination," Wendell Phillips said it belonged "to the past," and a printer of the *Liberator* mused that "the vacillations of President Lincoln will greatly perplex the future historian." *Harper's Weekly* imagined African-Americans receiving the astonishing news that emancipation, only a month away, might be delayed a full thirty-seven years (Figure 8). Historians have often been kinder than contemporaries. Yet Eric Foner nonetheless considered it "a curious document," and Mark E. Neely judged that Lincoln was "confusing the public, not preparing it" for the onset of emancipation. As Neely suggests, the key outcome was that many, such as George Templeton

⁷⁴ George Ward Nichols wrote to Andrew describing the lack of faith among his radical friends in Congress that President Lincoln would follow through on emancipation and recounted their plans to enact much more sweeping legislation in the next Congress. George Ward Nichols to John Andrew, October 29, 1862, Reel 15, Box 10, Folder 12, John A. Andrew Papers.

⁷⁵ Preliminary proclamation and annual message in Gienapp, ed., *This Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln*, 136-137, 143-150.

Strong, asked themselves, “Will Abe Lincoln stand firm and issue his promised proclamation?” As 1862 drew to a close, nobody knew for sure which direction the president would choose.⁷⁶



Figure 8: Harper's Weekly, December 20, 1862.

Lincoln's fluctuations reveal the struggles of a leader trying to find a middle path along which the entire nation would follow him. He clearly wanted to alienate neither conservatives nor radicals. Orville Browning, an old and close friend of Lincoln's from Illinois, recounted in his diary near the end of 1862 that he told the president that, until his proclamations, the Democratic masses were

⁷⁶ Allan Nevins, *The War for Union: War Becomes Revolution, 1862-1863* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 339; Louis P. Masur, *Lincoln's Hundred Days: The Emancipation Proclamation and the War for The Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 184; Foner, *The Fiery Trial*, 236; Mark E. Neely, *Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation: Constitutional Conflict in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 131; Guelzo; *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, 200.

“warmly supporting him” and that Lincoln needed to realize that the Republican Party could not put down the rebellion on its own. The president apparently fully assented to Browning’s assertion that only “a union of all loyal men,” could win the war. When, in the aftermath of defeat at Fredericksburg, radical congressmen attempted to force the removal of William Seward – widely perceived to drive the president toward conservatism – Lincoln outmaneuvered them and managed to procure and then reject the resignations of both Seward and the radicals’ leader, Salmon Chase. The president appeared to be sending a clear message that he would continue to hew to the center.⁷⁷

As the next chapter will show, although Republicans took significant strides in 1862 to place the war on a new footing, they soon retreated from celebrating or even definitively accepting their revolutionary transformations as part of a lasting national settlement. The rhetoric used by Republican dominated Union parties in 1863 would strikingly resemble that employed by their conservative opponents in 1862. Massachusetts’ People’s Party, a coalition of Democrats led by conservative Whigs, determined to back the war but have “no discussions about political, social, or party measures.” Andrew Curtin in Pennsylvania won reelection in 1863 echoing this tactic exactly, choosing, in his own words, to “avoid the discussion of the policy of the general government, while giving a hearty support to the national authorities in all their measures to suppress the rebellion.” Voiced by opposite sides of the political divide, these common sentiments highlight the centrist politics of this era and the problems of imagining two polarized national parties.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Browning diary entry of November 29, 1862 and Gideon Welles diary entry of December 19-20, 1862, both in Sears, ed., *The Civil War*, 614-15, 685.

⁷⁸ *Proceedings of the Convention of the People of Massachusetts*, 3; William H. Egle, *The Life and Times of Andrew Gregg Curtin...* (Philadelphia: Thompson Publishing Company, 1896), 199.

Chapter Four

1863: Military Necessity and the Rise of the Copperheads

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln signed the final version of the Emancipation Proclamation. No states had taken the opportunity to protect their slave property by returning their allegiance to the United States. Nothing had come of the constitutional amendments proposed in his 1862 annual message. The loyal Border States continued to reject all of Lincoln's appeals and enticements to end slavery on their own terms. Lincoln's long-held hopes for gradual, compensated, and voluntary emancipation, coupled with colonization, had been dashed. Perhaps borne of these frustrations, the President's final Emancipation Proclamation moved him closer to the radicals within his coalition. Two key changes from the preliminary document signified this shift: the president removed the proposal to colonize former slaves abroad and included a provision explicitly authorizing freed slaves to enlist in the Union army. These steps, followed by a federal draft in March, represented a risky gamble. They seemed to mark a decisive shift to a harder form of war, away from the unifying propositions of the 1861 Crittenden Resolution and towards the "remorseless, revolutionary struggle" that Lincoln had hoped to avoid.

These developments gave further weight to the Democratic accusation of 1862 that radicals had seized control of the administration and transformed a war for Union into a war for emancipation, racial equality, and political despotism. Writing to Ulysses S. Grant in March 1863, Henry W. Halleck seemed to confirm Democratic fears. Halleck wrote that "the character of the war has very much changed within the last year. There is now no possible hope of reconciliation with the rebels. The Union party in the South is virtually destroyed." This appeared to vindicate warnings that the Lincoln administration's actions obliterated southern Unionism, which conservatives believed constituted the only possible basis for a lasting reunion. If Democrats could make these accusations stick, then they

might prove their electoral successes of 1862 to have been the first wave of a tide that would sweep Lincoln out of the White House in 1864.¹

This chapter looks at the election of Thomas Elliott Bramlette as governor of Kentucky and the reelection of Andrew Gregg Curtin in Pennsylvania to show why that did not happen and why 1863 marked a pivotal turn in northern politics. By the end of the year, Union parties across the loyal states had managed to regain much of the center ground congressional Republicans had seemingly abandoned in 1862. This success hinged on the strategic decisions of Union parties but even more so on the failings of the Democratic Party.

The military setbacks in late 1862 and the first half of 1863 helped prompt the rise of peace sentiments among Democrats. In the aftermath of their 1862 successes, mainstream Democrats understood the need to restrain their extreme peace men. As a prominent Illinois Democrat wrote in January 1863, “there are some hot headed fools here and there who would ruin anything,” but he thanked God that “the radicals among the Democrats have not the control of their party as have the radicals among the Republicans.” But the military defeat at Fredericksburg saw Union morale plummet. Even supportive publications like *Harper’s Weekly* turned on the president as Figure 1 shows. The situation only deteriorated with military stalemate on the Mississippi and then the crushing loss at Chancellorsville in the late spring. The government had turned toward a harder form of war with no victories to compensate and radical Peace Democrats howled for an armistice and garnered increasing support.

But the prominence of Peace Democrats provided an outlet for northern civilians to transform despair to anger. These “Copperheads,” would come to be as despised as Confederates, including by many Democrats. The *Harper’s Weekly* cartoon (Figure 2) from the end of January shows Copperheads being turned away even by Jefferson Davis’s butler, explaining the Confederate president wants no

¹ Brooks D. Simpson, ed., *The Civil War: The Third Year Told By Those Who Lived It* (New York: The Library of America, 2013), 106.

friendship from “Peace Sneaks.” The military victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July would reinvigorate Union party politicians, but the boost they received was enhanced by the fact that many Democrats had seemed to give up on the Union army. Allowing peace Democrats to become prominent party spokespeople in 1863 would place the heaviest of millstones around the neck of the Democratic Party for the rest of the war.²

Union parties made the most of Democratic failings by adopting a formula for electoral victory built around damning Democrats as traitors and embracing the concept of military necessity as a means to cover partisan differences with patriotism. These arguments represented the rhetorical accompaniment to the institutional formation of Union parties. When grappling with unprecedented and unpopular legislation, the way that politicians explained and justified policy mattered almost as much as the policy itself. The “military necessity” justification resonated with an electorate united around winning the war but discomfited by government actions intolerable in peacetime. For most politicians and voters, this did not represent a centrist gloss for radical intentions but reflected their genuine rationale. As one Union Party congressman from California, T.G. Phelps, candidly explained, “we have been forced to adopt measures in Congress which are new to us...we can only hope that they will answer reasonably well the purposes for which they were designed, and pass away finally, as most of them will, with the occasion which called them into existence.” Phelps reflected 1863 campaigns where Union politicians told voters they had only to temporarily accept measures required to save the Union, not to embrace a radical Republican future.³

The turn to a harder form of warfare in 1863 also presented governors with profound challenges to maintaining civic peace within their own states. Political, social, and military realities overlapped in a year where the actions of the Lincoln administration caused more unrest and met more

² T Churchill to Horatio Seymour (including letter from Judge Caton), 28 January, 1863, Horatio Seymour Papers, 1764-1906, SC7008, Box 7, Manuscripts and Special Collections, New York State Library [Hereafter repository is NYSL].

³ *Daily Alta California* (San Francisco), April 14, 1863.

criticism than ever before. Military arrests bred disquiet and conscription laid a heavy burden on the governors, both in terms of supplying manpower and through the direct interference of a federal bureaucracy operating within the states. Emancipation and black military service strained against deeply-held notions of racial hierarchy and suspicions that Republicans sought a war for black freedom, not Union. Curtin and Bramlette attempted to navigate this turmoil by reflecting and responding to the needs and concerns of their people. Their duty to govern for all the people in their states encouraged centrist political positions with the widest possible appeal. It also encouraged them to flex their political muscles against unpopular measures enacted in Washington. Both Bramlette and Curtin regularly secured the backing of President Lincoln in squabbles with the War Department and with Union generals in the field. This allowed them to stress their states' independence in order to cater to the particular concerns of their constituents and distance themselves from unpopular measures while still supporting the war effort. The two very different elections that Curtin and Bramlette won made clear that, even while the means of waging war escalated, the purpose remained resolutely unchanged. Both politicians clung to a war for Union as the only way to preserve peace and harmony on the home front.



Figure 1: *Harper's Weekly*, January 3, 1863.

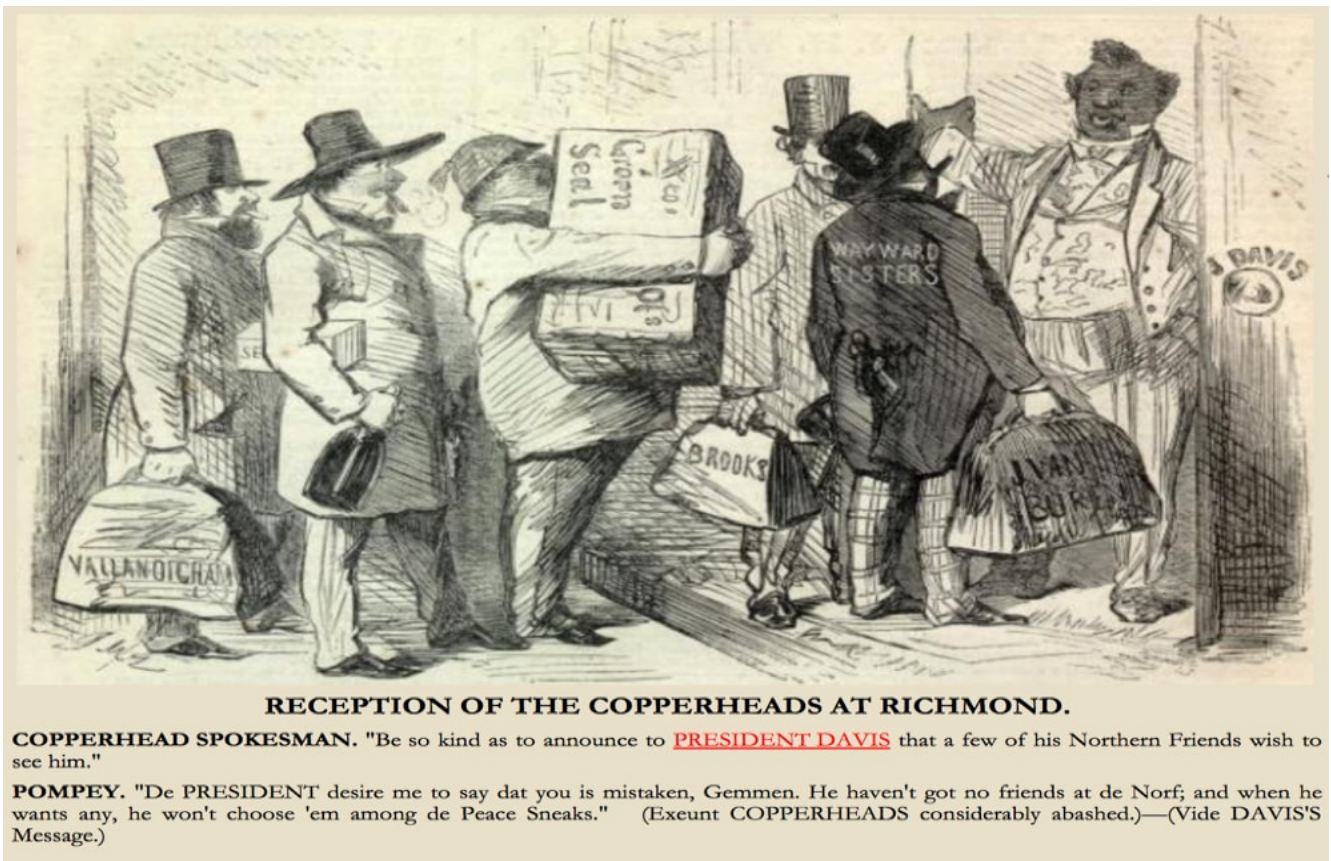


Figure 2: *Harper's Weekly*, January 31, 1863.

Rise of the “Copperheads”

The first real political tests for the administration came with spring elections in New England. Held in March and April, these contests came at one of the lowest points in Union morale. New England represented strong Republican territory, but the three states with races – Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island – were the most competitive in the region. In Rhode Island and New Hampshire, Union Republicans defeated Democrats in two very close contests. Particularly given that New England elected its governors every year, these races did not garner vast coverage. The Connecticut race did capture attention across the North due to the controversial Democratic candidate, Thomas Hart Seymour.

As the *New York Times* explained, the Connecticut election represented a watershed because “it [the election] is the first one in a Free State in which the peace issue has been clearly put forth.” They contrasted the race with Horatio Seymour’s candidacy of the previous year which had “made no demonstration against the war itself,” only its handling. The minority of Connecticut Democrats with strong reservations about the war had lain dormant and ineffective to this point. Now, with Union morale plummeting, they secured the gubernatorial nomination for Thomas Seymour, a former governor and Minister to Russia under Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan. Seymour declared unequivocally that the time had come to abandon “the monstrous fallacy that the Union can be restored by the armed hand.” Seymour claimed that reunion could be achieved through a negotiated peace. Unlike his distant cousin Horatio in New York, Thomas Seymour lost. He polled impressively, but most put the defeat down to his avowed Peace sentiments.⁴

Seymour’s campaign only worsened the schism developing within the Democratic Party. Peace Democrats refused to abandon Thomas Seymour’s arguments, believing they would soon persuade the northern majority. They saw no reason to believe that the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg

⁴ *New York Times*, March 19, 1863; Joanna Cowden, “The Politics of Dissent: Civil War Democrats in Connecticut,” *The New England Quarterly* 56 (December, 1983): 538-554.

lay ahead. In their minds, further Union defeats would justify ever more tyrannical actions from an administration that would stop at nothing to achieve its radical goals. To War Democrats, Thomas Seymour's defeat reinforced their belief that to abandon the war represented a chronic failure of patriotism and a guarantee of electoral oblivion. New York Democrats had spoken out against the utterance of peace sentiments in advance of the Connecticut race, trying to limit the damage to the party. On March 21, the front page of *Harper's Weekly* carried reporting of the grand anti-Copperhead Union meeting in New York on March 6, highlighting the participation and speeches of prominent Democrats James T. Brady and John Van Buren. Van Buren had been an important stump speaker for Horatio Seymour and declared with no ambiguity that he and the governor continued to see no alternative other than a "vigorous prosecution of the war." To War Democrats, Horatio Seymour's campaign remained the model to follow, demonstrating how loyal opposition could simultaneously castigate the administration but support the government. War Democrats remained the majority among the political class and the masses of Democratic voters and soldiers, but the Peace Democrats endured. These two factions would vie, unequally, for the soul of the Democratic Party during the remainder of the war.⁵

The early summer of 1863 saw important military and non-military developments that affected the political calculus for the rest of the year. The victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, while far from decisive in the larger trajectory of the war, brought much needed relief and hope across the Union. Since the calamity of the Seven Days campaign, the Lincoln administration and the Republican Congress had embraced measures to strengthen the military – the draft and emancipation most notably – that increased the emotional strain on the civilian population; finally they seemed to be yielding dividends. July saw the worst civil unrest of the war break out in New York City. Protests that began as a response to conscription descended into an ugly three-day race riot that saw a black orphanage

⁵ *Harper's Weekly*, March 21, 1863.

burned to the ground and over 100 people killed. Historians have differed on Governor Horatio Seymour's role and culpability. Partisans at the time, unsurprisingly, defended or indicted the governor. Even while Seymour's responsibility fell far below what his opponents claimed, the appalling riots damaged his reputation and that of his party and supporters. The riots helped Republicans to collapse the distance between Peace and War Democrats in the public mind as bloody chaos in the Union's largest city supported accusations that Democrats inflicted dangerous partisan divides on an already agitated populace.⁶

In Ohio, Democrats made the fatal decision to nominate Clement L. Vallandigham, the nation's most notorious Peace Democrat, as their gubernatorial candidate. Despite the sweeping Democratic gains in 1862, Vallandigham had managed to lose his congressional race. His political prospects looked bleak until Union soldiers dragged him from his house in the middle of the night on May 5 and placed him under military arrest. General Ambrose E. Burnside had decided that Vallandigham's incendiary rhetoric had crossed over into treason. Vallandigham would receive his party's nomination largely as a protest against what they deemed an arbitrary and despotic military arrest. Even many administration supporters balked at this violent suppression of free speech, taken without prior approval from Lincoln. *Harper's Weekly*, the most read illustrated newspaper during the war, noted that Vallandigham had been "fast talking himself into the deepest political grave ever dug when Burnside resurrected him." The paper's editorial hoped Lincoln would tread carefully and remember

⁶ Several works have looked extensively at the riots. Among these historians, there has been a range of appraisals of Seymour's role in, and handling of, events. The most sympathetic is Stewart Mitchell who attempts to almost entirely absolve him of responsibility. James Geary is relatively sympathetic. Iver Bernstein criticizes Seymour in places but takes no strong position. By contrast, Eugene Murdock and Laurence M. Hauptman consider Seymour significantly responsible. Hauptman writes that "much of the blame rests on his shoulders." 386. Stewart Mitchell, *Horatio Seymour of New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938); James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991); Iver Bernstein, *The New York Draft Riots: Their Significance in American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Eugene Murdock, *One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971) and "Horatio Seymour and the 1863 Draft," *Civil War History*, Volume 11, Number 2 (June 1965); Laurence M. Hauptman, "John E. Wool and the New York Draft Riots of 1863," *Civil War History* 49 (December 2003):370-387.

that, however appalling Vallandigham's words, Americans had "not yet learned to look with complacency on the methods which are familiar to Old World despotisms." Democrats could hardly have put their concerns better.

Despite anger at the nature of his arrest, most voters cared more about his incendiary critiques of the war effort and his brazen calls for an end to the war. Vallandigham's Union Party opponent, John Brough, routed Vallandigham in October. As chapter two demonstrated, Brough received the support of many loyal Democrats. The decision to abandon Vallandigham was made easier by the fact that Brough himself had been a Democrat until this point and ran a typical centrist campaign. In a speech on July 4, widely printed as a campaign pamphlet, Brough slammed Vallandigham's treason and praised Lincoln while telling his audience that "to assert that the object of the war is to secure the freedom of the negroes, is false. There is no such object...all the errors of commission and omission should be given to the winds until the rebellion is crushed out, and then if you wish to bring them into a political campaign, I will go with you...I tell you that I am just as rigid a Democrat to-day upon all the essential principles that made up that Democratic Party."⁷ Vallandigham's arrest and candidacy generated extensive coverage and shaped politics all across the Union. The rise of anti-war leaders and the heavy hand of the Union military would both shape a tumultuous election year in the Bluegrass state.⁸

⁷ *Louisville Journal*, July 28, 1863; [John Brough,] *Dayton Speech of Hon. John Brough: President Lincoln's Response Relative to the Arrest of Vallandigham*. (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, Keys & Co., 1863), 7.

⁸ Simpson, ed., *The Civil War*, 226-7.



Figure 3: Governor Thomas Elliott Bramlette

Kentucky

The turn to a harder war combined with the low Union morale helped split the political coalition that had voted to keep Kentucky in the Union in 1861. While few wanted to reverse that decision by attempting to join the Confederacy, many now disagreed on what Unionism meant in Kentucky. In February 1863, a number of former Democrats who had been members of the Southern Rights Party of 1860 broke from Kentucky's Union Party to hold their convention to nominate a gubernatorial candidate. They hoped to align themselves with the growing number of Peace Democrats nationally, but a draconian intervention by the Union army dispersed their meeting. But as the spring and early summer of 1863 brought no improvement in Union fortunes militarily, these Peace Democrats broke irrevocably from their Union Party colleagues, ostensibly over the nomination for governor of Thomas E. Bramlette. The choice of Bramlette, a Whig lawyer and until recently a colonel

in the Union army, sharpened internal divisions. Bramlette agreed with most Kentuckians that the Lincoln administration embraced ever more unnecessary and unconstitutional measures. But Bramlette's soldier status angered some Democratic elements of the Union Party who wanted a candidate willing to unabashedly criticize the administration and the interference of the military in Kentucky. As a result, these Democrats broke away and privately secured Charles A. Wickliffe – a former governor, congressman, and postmaster general under President John Tyler – to run against Bramlette on a Peace platform.⁹

The anti-administration mood in Kentucky ensured that both Charles Wickliffe and Thomas Bramlette claimed to be the true Democratic Party candidate. Even though mostly former Whigs, the Union Party that backed Bramlette often called themselves Union Democrats, while the aggregation of predominantly Southern Rights Party members who supported Wickliffe claimed to be simply the Democratic Party.¹⁰ Both would criticize the administration vehemently, but they differed over how the state should respond to the maltreatment.

To understand the stances that Bramlette and Wickliffe took in 1863, it is necessary to view the war's progression through Kentucky's eyes. Kentucky's Unionism shared aspects with that of virtually all nineteenth-century Americans. Kentuckians revered the founding generation and the sacred inheritance they had bequeathed. They celebrated the political liberty and economic opportunity for white Americans that the Union had made possible, and they hailed their nation as an example of democracy and constitutional government that served as a beacon of inspiration to the old world. But

⁹ E. Merton Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 170-174.

¹⁰ There was a small but growing minority within the Union Party who leaned towards the Lincoln administration. In 1864, they would break off to send delegates to the National Union Party convention in Baltimore and help Lincoln to secure a remarkable 30% in Kentucky, but at this stage they united behind Bramlette's candidacy. For an example of a Kentuckian Union Party congressman who made this journey, see Green Clay Smith, *Green Clay Smith Papers*, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky [hereafter, FHS].

unlike in most of the loyal states, when Kentuckians donned blue uniforms they nearly all fought, as Patrick A. Lewis has recently framed it, for Union *and* slavery.

As discussed in more detail in chapter 1, the majority within the Bluegrass state had spent 1860 and the secession crisis attempting to quell the disunionist madness of their southern sister states. Bluegrass slaveholders backed John Bell in 1860 as they desperately sought to proselytize for slavery's safety within the Union. They believed that the constitution, Democratic congressional majorities, and Republican pledges of non-interference amply protected the institution of slavery where it existed. Union and Slavery functioned, in Patrick Lewis' words, as a "set of interconnected and symbiotic institutions, ideas, and ideals." Slavery in Kentucky differed from the institution further south, but the white majority defended it no less fiercely.¹¹

In 1863, the final Emancipation Proclamation shattered the Union and slavery axis. Some slaveholders decided that they "were for the Union first, last, and all the time without proviso or condition." But for others, emancipation produced deep disillusionment and uncertainty over past actions and future decisions. Even those who would never contemplate abandoning the Union, still felt that Lincoln had pulled the rug from under them. Their promises during the secession crisis that the Republicans would not touch slavery now stuck in their throats. As the war continued, this sense only grew.¹²

It is important to recognize that this increasing disillusion with the Union cause did not commonly signify a desire to join the Confederacy. Kentucky Unionists had judged in 1861 that slavery lay safe inside the Union. While emancipation rendered that view false, it did nothing to change their original perception that the Confederate experiment would not be able to preserve and strengthen slavery. Moreover, Kentuckians knew the measures taken by the Confederate government.

¹¹ Patrick A. Lewis, *For Slavery and Union: Benjamin Buckner and Kentucky Loyalties in the Civil War* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 3.

¹² Hambleton Tapp and James C. Klotter, eds., *The Union, the Civil War, and John W. Tuttle: A Kentucky Captain's Account* (Frankfort: The Kentucky Historical Society, 1980), 27.

As newspapers in the Bluegrass state recognized, confiscation and conscription happened earlier and more comprehensively under Jefferson Davis than Abraham Lincoln.¹³ Dismayed Unionists tended to retreat into a type of aggressive neutrality towards both sides. Many Kentuckians resigned from the Union army after emancipation, but few of them joined the rebels. Thomas Bramlette's gubernatorial campaign in August 1863 captured Kentuckians in the midst of grappling with what Unionism meant to them in an age of federal emancipation.

Bramlette did not defend emancipation, but he contextualized it and played down its significance. Bramlette did this in two main ways. First, he emphasized that the Proclamation did not apply to Kentucky. This exemption meant that the federal government could not free slaves or arm black men within the confines of the Bluegrass state. This allowed Bramlette to try and finesse the issue by saying, naively or deceptively, that "the negro...will, I trust and believe, not become a matter of aggression or dispute between us and the Federal Government. I have every reason to feel assured that this subject will be left wholly to the disposition of the people of Kentucky, without any interference by the federal authorities." In Bramlette's optimistic perspective, his state's loyalty served as a "guardian angel" against interference with slavery. In reality, historians like Aaron Astor, Victor B. Howard, and John David Smith have shown how slavery began disintegrating from very early in the war and black recruitment began soon after Bramlette took office. Even so, Bramlette used Kentucky's exemption from Lincoln's proclamation to keep his head in the sand on an explosive political issue in his state.¹⁴

¹³ See *Louisville Journal*, July 21, 1863.

¹⁴ Message of Governor Bramlette to the General Assembly of Kentucky at the December Session, 1863 (Frankfort, KY: WM. E. Hughes, State Printer, 1863), T.E. Bramlette Official Documents as Governor of Kentucky, 1863-67, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY [hereafter KDLA]; Aaron Astor, "The Crouching Lion's Fate: Slave Politics and Conservative Unionism in Kentucky," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 110 (Summer/Autumn 2012): 293-326; John David Smith, "The Recruitment of Negro Soldiers in Kentucky, 1863-1865," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 72 (1974): 364-90; Victor B. Howard, "The Civil War in Kentucky: The Slave Claims His Freedom," *The Journal of Negro History* 67 (1982): 245-56.

There existed some basis for Bramlette's claim that Kentucky's Unionism would protect them from the effects of the Emancipation Proclamation. In March, Lincoln ordered substantial enlistment of African-Americans to begin. Kentucky's Unionists, especially Congressman Garrett Davis and George D. Prentice – the highly influential editor of the *Louisville Journal* and prominent mouthpiece for the Kentucky Union Party – made it abundantly clear that any attempt to recruit black soldiers in Kentucky would cause widespread outrage and risk violent protest. Even Union generals in the state agreed. The War Department delayed but eventually decided that trying to enroll black men in Kentucky risked civil strife and, most likely, a net loss of soldiers. On July 22, Stanton suspended a proposed enrollment. Coming two weeks before the August 3 election, this allowed Bramlette to claim that Kentucky would remain safe from federal encroachment. While Kentucky's exemption lasted into 1864, longer than any other Border State, black recruitment would eventually come and, as discussed in the next chapter, it would bring with it a major collision between Bramlette and Lincoln.¹⁵

The second and most significant means by which Bramlette diminished the emancipation issue was by setting it against the sanctity of Union. Bramlette echoed his opponents' criticisms of Lincoln's unconstitutional actions but argued fiercely for a loyal and constitutional response. As the Union Party platform stated, "the radical measures of the administration are false in principle and false in policy," but these errors could be remedied only by "legitimate means." As frustrating as they found it, Unionists had to offer all material support for the war while waiting for the excesses emanating from Washington to "be corrected by the ballot-box." This approach rested on the distinction between the government and the administration, only the latter of which could be legitimately disparaged. Bramlette raged against Peace Democrats who he believed had forgotten that they lived under "the best government in the world, and that it should not be overthrown because of any obnoxious measures or policy of any administration." Union always stood far above slavery in Bramlette's priorities and he

¹⁵ William C. Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States: Preserving the Union* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 225-230.

affirmed on multiple occasions that “to preserve the life of our Government against rebellion and fix its perpetuity—not to determine the status of the negro—has been the unyielding spirit and purpose of Kentucky loyalty.” Bramlette echoed the sentiments of many Kentuckian Union soldiers such as Samuel W. Pruitt. Pruitt’s daughter had given up on the war by 1863 and taunted her father with the prospect of entertaining rebel suitors. A despairing Pruitt raged against Confederates and their “cowardly whelp” sympathizers at home and promised to “put down the rebellion” in the field and then “put Old Lincoln down at the ballot box.” Bramlette and Pruitt denied vehemently that emancipation divested Kentuckians of their duty to save the Union and this conviction underpinned the difference between Bramlette’s Union Party and Wickliffe’s Democrats.¹⁶

Wickliffe’s campaign decided that the unconstitutional measures of the administration now forced honorable men to try to end the bloodshed. Accepting the nomination, Wickliffe denied the right of secession but argued that “military necessity” was leading to “military despotism.” Wickliffe had been elected as a Union Party congressman in 1861 and he now remembered his pledge that if the war became one of abolition, “it will receive no support from me of either men or money.” Wickliffe and his supporters hoped to force an armistice and call a national constitutional convention, which they argued could restore peace to the Union through negotiation. Lincoln’s actions at the nation’s helm increasingly struck these Democrats as heinous examples of executive tyranny and military rule. If the war crushed all vestiges of the old Union that they loved, then what greater danger did an independent Confederacy constitute? Better to end the fighting and attempt to salvage the remnants of constitutional government through conciliation and compromise.¹⁷

¹⁶ Thomas E. Bramlette, Message of Governor T. E. Bramlette to the General Assembly of Kentucky, at their Adjourned Session of 1863-4, 4 January 1865, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Messages to the General Assembly, 1863-1867, BR1-288 to BR1-317, KDLA; Samuel W. Pruitt to Bettie Pruitt, April 20, 1863 and April 25, 1864, Samuel W. Pruitt Papers, FHS. Union Party platform, printed in *Louisville Journal*, April 7, 1863; *Louisville Journal*, July 21, 1863.

¹⁷ *Louisville Democrat*, June 23, 1863.

These opposing parties in Kentucky identified strongly with War and Peace Democrat factions vying for prominence elsewhere in the United States. Wickliffe accepted his candidacy “on the platform of the Ohio State Democracy,” that nominated Vallandigham, while Bramlette’s supporters repeatedly claimed that “The Union party of Kentucky is the real and only Democracy of the State.” Prentice’s *Louisville Journal* acknowledged that “the Peace faction is at war with the Northern Democracy,” but left no doubt about the relative strength of each movement. In his judgment, the Peace Democrats formed a “pestilent but powerless faction.” In delineating their loyal course, Kentucky’s Unionists drew on the arguments put forth by Seymour and New York’s War Democrats in 1862.¹⁸

Two elements of Seymour’s campaign and tenure attracted Kentucky’s Union Party. First, Kentucky’s Unionists spoke glowingly of the pro-war but anti-administration New York governor who “pledges himself unreservedly to support the Government in the prosecution of the war, while he condemns, in a bold and manly tone, all its illegal acts.” Equally significant for Kentuckians was Seymour’s recasting of the 1862 election as conservatives against radicals. Perhaps more than any other state, Kentucky deemed itself the bastion of conservatism and conservatives. In the past, this had translated into a proud Whig Party tradition, one that never really died in the Bluegrass state. But the fact that that Bramlette and most of his allies identified as Whigs presented a problem. These men had been conditioned from their political infancy to see the Democracy as their great foe. Yet, as they looked around for allies against the perceived radicalism of the Republican Party, there seemed to be only one viable option. Thanks to the 1862 campaigns, these old Whigs could now ally with War Democrats by conceiving themselves “in thorough union with the conservatives of the North.”¹⁹

Kentucky’s Unionists even recast War Democrats as heirs to the Whig Party and the nucleus from which a new national conservative party would emerge. George Prentice’s *Louisville Journal* led

¹⁸ *New York Times*, June 30, 1863; *Louisville Journal*, August 11, 1863, June 23, 1863, and September 29, 1863.

¹⁹ *Louisville Journal*, August 25, 1863; *Lexington Observer & Reporter*, July 15, 1863.

Kentucky's Union newspapers in lambasting both those Democrats who advocated peace and those who had jumped ship to join the administration. When asked why he would not support War Democrat John Brough against Peace Democrat Clement Vallandigham in Ohio, Prentice explained why neither candidate represented a true, acceptable conservative. Vallandigham's peace sentiments constituted treason, but Brough was a misguided "Republican Democrat." He contrasted Brough to former President Lewis Cass, an acceptable "Union Democrat." Men like Cass now participated in a movement "on the simple basis of that devotion to the government itself which underlay the Old Whig party and the Old Democratic party alike." The only difference in the loyal states lay between the "radical party" and the "conservative party." The "conservative" label served Bramlette's needs to resonate with constituents at home and across the North.²⁰

The conservative vision for the war in Kentucky shared a great deal with Democrats nationwide, but it also stressed elements particular to the state's position on the front line of the conflict. Bramlette often stated explicitly that Kentuckians had rallied to the cause upon the specific principles of the Crittenden resolution of 1861. The Resolution, passing Congress in the wake of First Bull Run, embodied a limited, conservative war waged for no "purpose of conquest or subjugation," only to "defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and to preserve the Union, with all the dignity, equality, and rights of the several States unimpaired."²¹ The rationale, as well as the

²⁰ *Louisville Journal*, June 20, July 21, 1863 and October 20, 1863; Prentice's hopes for a national conservative party had a long history. As discussed in chapter 1, Kentucky's Opposition Party of the late 1850s – a Whig-American amalgamation – had entertained hopes of uniting with conservative northerners to create a national, centrist presidential ticket in 1860. While Prentice looked to northern Democrats in 1863, he had looked to conservative Republicans in 1859. Men like Prentice had even hoped at that point that internal improvements and a protective tariff could unite sensible Republicans and the Upper South Opposition around a presidential candidate such as John Bell, Thomas Corwin, or Edward Bates. See Daniel W. Crofts, "The Southern Opposition and the Crisis of the Union," in Gary W. Gallagher and Rachel A. Sheldon, *A Political Nation: New Directions in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Political History* (University of Virginia Press, 2012), 99.

²¹ Speech of Gov. Thomas E. Bramlette, at the Meeting Held at Frankfort, September 19, 1864, to Ratify the Nomination of Gen. George B. McClellan for President of the U.S., T.E. Bramlette Official Documents, KDLA; "Crittenden Resolution | Teaching American History," accessed August 12, 2015, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/crittenden-resolution/>.

contradictions, of trying to fight such a soft war came through powerfully in a poem published on July 28, 1863 in the *Louisville Journal*:

“Strike, strike for the Union; but in anger strike not;
Remember the strife is ‘twixt brother and brother.
Our loved country is bleeding, our help she is needing;
Then strike for the Union, yet in anger strike not,
But rush to the conflict, its dangers unheeding,
In one hand the olive – the sword in the other.

[Final verse]

“We will strike for the Union; ay, strike with our might.
But, oh ye that rule us, restore our McClellan;
Hear ye not how the nation, in wild acclamation,
Demands the loved chieftain to lead in the fight?
O, restore him, restore him; our country’s salvation
Depends on such spirits as noble McClellan!”²²

The lyrics highlight the wrenching nature of the war’s impact on loyal Kentuckians. Unlike in most states, for Kentucky, it really was a brothers’ war. The beloved statesman, John J. Crittenden, had sons serve as generals in opposing armies, representing only the most famous example of a common occurrence. The state had long advocated sectional compromise and even zealous Unionists felt conflicted about taking up arms against foes with whom they felt great affinity. The poem captures the somewhat absurd propositions this produced: “strike for the Union; but in anger strike not...in one hand the olive – the sword in the other.” These represent unwise mantras for an effective military force. They demonstrate Kentucky’s hope that war and peace could be pursued simultaneously through the type of limited conflict sought by the poem’s hero, George Brinton McClellan. Kentucky’s firm commitment to a conservative war sprung from both the strains of a tumultuous present and fears of a bloody, retributive future.

Kentuckians’ close ties to the South made them greatly apprehensive of the consequences of a hard war for Reconstruction. Samuel Smith Nicholas, a jurist and President of the University of Louisville, attacked the legal basis for administration policies. Nicholas praised a recent speech by

²² *Louisville Journal*, July 28, 1863.

Governor Seymour in which the *New Yorker* expressed his belief that, “in prosecuting the war for restoration of the Union, coercion and conciliation should go hand in hand.” Such a policy, Nicholas argued, represented the only path that “after the war is over, will leave the two sections in such a state of feeling toward each other as to render restoration very desirable.” This captured the great fear that lurked among Unionists as the war dragged on and became ever more extreme: when would the chasm between the sections become so vast that reunion could not bridge it? Widespread hopes for a soft-war still constituted a pro-war position, a reality underlined by the limited traction that Wickliffe’s peace candidacy gained.²³

While Bramlette’s election seemed likely under any circumstances, as the August canvass neared, the Union army made it clear that they had no intention of leaving the decision solely in the hands of the electorate. To exercise the franchise in Kentucky, voters had to swear an oath that they had never supported or aided the rebellion, understanding that violation would leave them liable to a potential death sentence meted out by military commission. Kentuckians objected to loyalty oaths on principle, but they also required an unrealistic standard of behavior in a state where the war split so many families. Loyal Unionists might still offer shelter or comfort to sons or siblings who had sided with the Confederacy. Such actions clearly broke the oath. The situation escalated with General Burnside’s action on July 31 to declare martial law “for the purpose only of protecting the right of loyal citizens and the freedom of election.” George Richard Browder – a Methodist preacher and Confederate sympathizer living close to the Tennessee border – did manage to vote the Peace Democratic ticket, but he also reported areas where Union troops refused to allow votes for Wickliffe and decried “an election by bayonets!” Cora Owens Hume, another Confederate sympathizer, claimed that “the abolitionists withdrew the Wickliffe ticket from the Pole at Portland” because the Democrat

²³ *Louisville Journal*, July 14, 1863.

had been receiving too many votes. There can be little doubting the military interference when Burnside ensured that Union soldiers oversaw polls on election-day all across Kentucky.²⁴

Bramlette secured an unsurprisingly resounding victory, gaining nearly 80% of the votes cast. While Kentucky's Union Party had made its opposition to the actions of the Lincoln administration vocally known, the president still rejoiced that Wickliffe had been "terribly beaten," and hoped for smoother relations with the state of his birth. The *Cincinnati Gazette*, which reported regularly on Kentucky's affairs and had wide influence on both sides of the Ohio river, celebrated that "Copperheadism has been defeated in Kentucky...the State Government is to be controlled by men about whose loyalty there is no question." Historian E. Merton Coulter has claimed that the military interference in the election was "to such an extent that the freedom of the election was almost destroyed." Coulter's appraisal rings true in so far as the contest could not be called a "free election" in any modern understanding of the phrase. Nonetheless, while the margin of victory is surely misleading, the outcome seems reliable. Turnout dropped significantly in 1863, but Bramlette's vote count would have secured a majority even of the 1860 total. In a somewhat upbeat inaugural, Bramlette hoped for cooperation with Washington and made no mention of emancipation, black troops, or military arrests. This federal-state ceasefire would be brief.²⁵

Bramlette complained regularly to Lincoln over the actions of Union army generals in his state. Bramlette would first clash with General Jeremiah T. Boyle – a Kentuckian Whig slaveholder – who had seemed the perfect candidate to run the District of Kentucky until he arrested several hundred civilians he deemed disloyal.²⁶ After protests from Bramlette's predecessor, Governor James F.

²⁴ Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States*, 233-234; Richard L. Troutman, ed., *The Heavens Are Weeping: The Diaries of George Richard Browder, 1852-1886* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 163; Cora Owens Hume Diary, Volume 1, 87, FHS.

²⁵ *Cincinnati Gazette*, August 4, 1863; Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky*, 177; Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States*, 233-36.

²⁶ Unionists' anger at Boyle grew when he decided, against the will of the party convention, to run as a congressional candidate in 1863, threatening to divide the Union vote.

Robinson, President Lincoln ordered an end to military arrests “except on the order of the Governor of Kentucky.” Along with Burnside’s imposition of martial law, Boyle’s actions ensured fierce criticism of federal military commanders during the 1863 election season. Bramlette next clashed with Washington over the actions of Union Generals Eleazer A. Paine and Stephen G. Burbridge. Boyle’s arrests paled in comparison to Paine’s actions in Western Kentucky where the general summarily executed forty-three people in his efforts to enforce loyalty. Paine was removed from command and court-martialed, but it brought no end to federal-state conflict. Burbridge, Boyle’s successor, drew fire for his zeal for black recruitment, military arrests, and for instituting a hugely unpopular system of trade permits. While Lincoln stood fast on enrolling African-Americans, Bramlette’s constant pressure helped persuade the president to intervene to amend the trade system, to reverse some of the most prominent military arrests, and to remove Boyle, Paine, and Burbridge from command.²⁷

Bramlette’s conflicts with senior generals demonstrate the complicated relationship he had with the military he used to serve. Many other northern governors would love to have had Bramlette’s military record as a qualification for office. But in Kentucky, the Union army served as much as an occupying force as a defensive or liberating one. The permanent presence of Union troops placed a heavy burden on the local population. Bramlette’s service bolstered his reputation for loyalty but, given the constant friction between civilians and soldiers, he chose not to dwell on his military credentials when campaigning.

²⁷ Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States*, 115-116; John David Smith and William Cooper Jr., eds., *A Union Woman in Civil War Kentucky: The Diary of Frances Peter* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 146; Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States*, 242-3; the trade permit uproar became known as “The Great Hog Swindle,” as Union officials tried to get farmers to sell surplus hogs at reduced cost to the army while placing restrictions on which farmers were allowed to trade and who they could trade with. Lucrative government contracts were seen to go only to “Unconditional Unionists.” See Thomas Bramlette to Abraham Lincoln, November 14, 1864, Albert G. Hodges to Abraham Lincoln, December 1, 1864, Lincoln Papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed online at www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/ [hereafter cited as Lincoln Papers].

As a former soldier, Bramlette shared the military's determination to crush out treason but, as governor, he worried about the consequences. Bramlette spoke of the need to suppress "every form of treason...to banish its shadow, as well as its substance." He even asked the legislature to amend the state's penal code to provide "preventive, as well as punitive remedies." Yet simultaneously he hailed the United States' "perfect political liberty" and maintained that the "right to differ is a free and unquestionable right." Aware of the widespread disillusionment with the Lincoln administration – much of which he shared – Bramlette fiercely rejected attempts to conflate legitimate political opposition with treason. Bramlette's feuds with generals and his attempt to protect free speech also stemmed from his desire to prevent a rending of the social fabric on the home front.²⁸

A letter to President Lincoln underlined the governor's concern for preserving civic peace. In November 1864, Bramlette wrote to Lincoln explaining the anger caused by General Burbridge's trade permit system. Bramlette argued that "it is certainly better to risk the chances of even a disloyal man trading, than cut off hundreds of loyal men by such regulations." Burbridge thought only of stamping out disloyalty; Bramlette, as governor, sought to "preserve peace and order." In his divided state, laying an indiscriminate and heavy hand risked creating more rebels than it squashed. In a somewhat desperate plea, Bramlette wrote to Lincoln, "I beg of you Mr. President to assist me...in preserving peace, order and amity in Kentucky." The president listened, replacing Burbridge with General John M. Palmer. When Bramlette conveyed his thanks, he stressed that the appointment had brought "harmony" to the state. The challenge for Bramlette lay in balancing the need for harmony with the threat posed by internal enemies.²⁹

The real existence of Confederate sympathies and allegiances on the Kentucky home front created festering tensions among civilians. Cora Owens Hume, a fifteen-year old Confederate

²⁸ Speech of Gov. Thomas E. Bramlette, at the Meeting Held at Frankfort, September 19, 1864, to Ratify the Nomination of Gen. George B. McClellan for President of the U.S., T.E. Bramlette Official Documents, KDLA.

²⁹ Thomas E. Bramlette to Abraham Lincoln, November 14, 1864 and Thomas E. Bramlette to Abraham Lincoln, February 20, 1865, Lincoln Papers.

sympathizer in Louisville noted in her diary the arrest of a Mr. Hill who refused to stop “singing Bonnie Blue Flag” at a Union rally. In her own act of protest, Owens noted that when Lincoln declared a “day of fasting and prayer,” she “ate an uncommonly hearty dinner.” Frances Peter, a Unionist, noted that in spring 1863 the “secesh ladies” in Lexington had received word to expect the arrival of rebel forces. In readying themselves they went to a Mr John Lee, the local Unionist confectioner, asking him to “put rebel flags on their cakes,” only to be told by Mr. Lee that “he would see them and their cakes in a very hot place.” Peter reported that the same “secesh ladies” ensured that Confederate graves received more lavish upkeep than Union ones in Lexington’s cemeteries. Some of these women would be arrested for their disloyalty and historian Kristin Streater has shown that these instances increased as Union forces linked “the contribution that women’s domestic activities made in sustaining the rebellion” to increases in guerrilla activity.³⁰

The activities of Confederate guerrillas represented the greatest threat to social order, and Governor Bramlette used all the means at his disposal to meet the danger. Infuriated by raiders taking loyal citizens hostage, Bramlette instructed all military commanders to respond to abductions by acting to “immediately arrest at least five of the most prominent and active rebel sympathizers in the vicinity.” The governor also used a murder case to further underline his message about how the state of Kentucky would treat these bandits. Michael Foley, a former Union soldier, had been found guilty of killing Merritt Dicken, a charge Foley admitted. Foley’s defense rested in his mistaken belief that Dicken had been part of a roving band of Confederate raiders. This represented sufficient justification for Bramlette, who granted Foley a full pardon and wrote that “no man who kills a guerrilla should suffer if I can prevent it” since they all deserved “death whenever wherever & by whomsoever taken.”

³⁰ Cora Owens Hume Diary, Vol 1, 69, 45, FHS; Smith & Cooper Jr., eds., *A Union Woman*, 116, 136, and Kristen L Streater, “Not much a friend to traiters no matter how beautiful’: The Union Military and Confederate Women in Civil War Kentucky,” in Kent T. Dollar, Larry H. Whiteaker, and W. Calvin Dickinson, *Sister States, Enemy States: The Civil War in Kentucky and Tennessee* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), 258.

Despite Dicken having not actually been an outlaw, Bramlette reasoned that Foley's pardon was justified by the fear and confusion that guerillas spread in communities throughout the state.³¹

The Foley case represented one of several examples where Bramlette seemed to use his authority to grant pardons and remit fines as a tool to ease home front tensions. Considering a plea from Rockcastle County, Bramlette admitted he knew nothing of the specifics of the case but remitted the fine "simply from the consideration of the well-known suffering of the people in that section." The most common pleas dealt with fines or sentences concerning liquor, gaming, carrying concealed weapons, and slavery related offenses. Bramlette nearly always remitted these. At a time when his constituents dealt constantly with loss and suffering, as well as real threats to their physical safety, it made sense to show leniency for relatively minor and somewhat understandable vices. The Union army also benefited as the governor remitted many fines for gaming and drinking incurred by off-duty soldiers. Ironically, given his firm stance against military interference in the state, Bramlette also pardoned several Union soldiers convicted of interfering at polling stations to ensure the governor's election. Overall, while Bramlette wished to maintain order, he seems to have judged that he could aid social harmony in his tinderbox state by easing back on the state's punishment of low-level infractions.³²

The crumbling of slavery's societal foundations also presented another opportunity for Bramlette to use his pardoning power. Bramlette remitted large numbers of fines for offenses such as selling liquor to a slave, selling a knife to a slave, hiring out a slave without the owner's permission, allowing a slave to trade, and theft of a slave. As late as November 21, 1865, Bramlette received

³¹ Thomas E. Bramlette, Proclamation by the Governor, 4 January 1864, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Proclamations, 1863-1865, BR1-358 to BR1-359, KDLA; Hill & Knott to Thomas E. Bramlette, 16 December 1864, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor's official correspondence file, petitions for pardons, remissions, and respites 1863-1867, BR12-138 to BR12-143, KDLA.

³² Newton Whitehead to Thomas E. Bramlette, 7 October 1863, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor's official correspondence file, petitions for pardons, remissions, and respites 1863-1867, BR8-335, KDLA.

petitions asking him to remit fines imposed for “selling liquor to slaves.” The willingness to remit these fines did not signify any anti-slavery sentiment on Bramlette’s part, merely a recognition of the reality in his state. The Federal Government estimated that 71% of Kentucky’s slaves had been freed by March 1865, though not all had left their former owners. Bramlette’s lieutenant governor, Richard T. Jacob, pardoned a renowned abolitionist preacher, Calvin Fairbank, who had served twelve of a fifteen year sentence for aiding fugitive slaves. Such crimes had appalled antebellum Kentucky. When signing the pardon, Jacob’s justified his action on the grounds of Fairbank’s “extremely critical” health. Reporting the decision, the *Lexington Observer and Reporter* mused that Fairbank had “suffered enough for what others are doing daily with impunity.” When Bramlette remitted slavery related fines, he did so to prevent his constituents suffering from the uncontrollable collapse of slavery in Kentucky.³³

Fairbank’s case points to the thorny problems raised by the continued legality but ever-increasing impracticality of fugitive slave legislation. While freedom made increasing inroads in Kentucky, all slavery legislation remained on the books and the institution continued to function, albeit impaired. Many escaped slaves from the Confederacy languished in Kentucky jails, arrested according to laws that mandated their return to owners in sister slave states. In April 1863, Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt decided that fugitives entering Kentucky came under the remit of the Confiscation Acts and Emancipation Proclamation. As tensions mounted, Bramlette wrote to the legislature stating his clear view that no provision within state law allowed the federal government to take custody of these slaves. Nonetheless, the governor also frankly admitted that “this purpose of the law [the return

³³ John A. Peebles et al. to Thomas E. Bramlette, 21 November 1865, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor’s official correspondence file, petitions for pardons, remissions, and respites 1863-1867, BR16-331 to BR16-332, KDLA; Marian B. Lucas, “Freedom is Better than Slavery: Black Families and Soldiers in Civil War Kentucky,” in Kent T. Dollar, Larry H. Whiteaker, and W. Calvin Dickinson, eds., *Sister States, Enemy States: The Civil War in Kentucky and Tennessee* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009), 199; Leslie Combs to Thomas E. Bramlette, 14 April 1864, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor’s official correspondence file, petitions for pardons, remissions, and respites 1863-1867, BR10-183 to BR10-184, KDLA; *Lexington Observer & Reporter*, April 20, 1864.

of fugitive slaves] can not now be accomplished,” and encouraged the legislature to act to resolve the confrontation. Above all, Bramlette urged his state’s representatives to prevent a “collision with the federal authorities upon the question of which shall take charge of and dispose of the fugitives from the belligerent States.” Pledging loyalty to the Union government while having to oversee the rapid but undesired disintegration of slavery presented profound political and governing obstacles.³⁴

While all knew that the institution of slavery would be vulnerable as soon as war broke out, the annual reports of Kentucky’s Superintendent of Public Instruction demonstrate how completely the war disrupted the rhythms of everyday life. Kentucky’s common school system had been a great source of pride in the strong Whig state. In 1860, an average of 107,219 children attended school. By 1862, “in consequence of the recent invasion of the state,” that figure more than halved to 43,654. But invasion constituted only part of the problem. The imposition in August 1862 of a loyalty oath had a particularly damaging effect. All teachers, officials, and trustees had to pledge “without any mental reservation,” that they had never aided the rebellion in any way. The superintendent judged that the consequences in terms of lost funds and teaching staff “visited unmerited punishment on thousands of innocent and defenseless children.” These oaths proved unpopular and problematic at least partly because they extended public standards of loyalty and political allegiance into traditionally private realms such as schooling.³⁵

Petitions for clemency to the governor also offer further evidence of how civilians had to stress correct political standing in seemingly apolitical settings. Repeatedly, petitioners couched their appeals in their loyalty to the Union war effort and to Kentucky’s Unionist political party. Pleading a fine for assault in December 1863, Isaac Sharrow informed the governor of his seven sons and grandsons

³⁴ Howard, “The Civil War in Kentucky,” 245-256; Thomas E. Bramlette, Speech, 13 February 1864, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Messages to the General Assembly, 1863-1867, BR1-318 to BR1-319, KDLA.

³⁵ Legislative Document No. 25, Annual Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction of Kentucky, For the School Year Ending December 31st, 1862, Kentucky Documents, 1862-1863, 1-7; KDLA.

fighting for the Union, only a subset of his “thirty two close relations fighting for the Union.” Another constituent, Harry Kearns, succeeded in escaping penalty for an assault after explaining that he only responded in an appropriate manner to being called a “damned abolitionist & a damned liar” while out “electioneering for Thomas E Bramlette.” Issues of loyalty percolated through all elements of Kentucky’s wartime society.³⁶

Beyond correct political standing, Kentucky’s paternal culture pressured plaintiffs to buttress their appeals with language that played on prevailing notions of religion, gender, and class. This supports Aaron Astor’s claim that “order – social, economic, racial, and ultimately political order – was the central pillar to antebellum Upper South social thought.” The continued salience of such concerns, as well as their erosion, shines through in the governor’s clemency files. Testaments often recounted the piety of both a wayward offender and his poor (in all senses) widowed mother who depended on her son’s support. Instances of petty larceny were explained as temporary aberrations in the behavior of honest working people suffering under crippling wartime poverty. Yet petitions also revealed some of the changes the war brought to hierarchies of social standing. John McBride, fined for running a brothel, pleaded with the governor to understand his predicament. He claimed that “Cases frequently occur now...when good men, are deceived by the false representations of bad women, who represent themselves to be the wives of soldiers.” Without being able to verify the events, this hints at fascinating possibilities. Either McBride used the enhanced status of soldiers’ wives during the war to concoct a feasible defense, or soldiers’ wives grasped their own heightened societal stature and used it as a means to cloak their clandestine activities. Whichever scenario constituted reality – or

³⁶ Petitions for Pardon: Isaac Sharrow to Thomas E. Bramlette, 12 December 1863, BR9-60 to BR9-61, and Henry Kearns to Thomas E. Bramlette, 9 March 1865, BR12-411 and BR12-411A, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor's official correspondence file, petitions for pardons, remissions, and respites 1863-1867, KDLA.

if both of them did – the case highlights the ways that men and women took advantage of the changing societal, political, and cultural norms in wartime Kentucky.³⁷

By the end of 1863, Bramlette presented something of a conundrum to Lincoln and his supporters in Washington. The governor distinguished between the administration and the government and asserted state sovereignty to challenge the federal government and Union army. But he loudly proclaimed his loyalty and never put himself in absolute opposition to the administration. In his message to the legislature at the end of 1863, Bramlette claimed that “our federal relations are at this time of the most amicable and kindly character.” In his view, “differing in opinion as to some of the measures of the administration,” had not “degenerated into hostility to the government.” There existed no excuse for “relaxing our efforts to sustain the government and suppress the rebellion.” Despite his near constant criticism, Bramlette’s resolute Unionism made him far preferable to Wickliffe who threatened to cut off men and money. Bramlette demonstrated the extreme end of the War Democrat position during the war. At times, he offered vehement denunciations of Republicans, but he also assailed Peace Democrats with equal gusto. In pure Republican states, men like Bramlette were painted as ersatz loyalists or outright traitors. Since Kentucky had no Republican Party, the governor’s successes had to be welcomed, even by radicals, as evidence of loyalty under fire.³⁸

³⁷ Quoted in Lewis, *For Slavery and Union*, 57; These traditional gender hierarchies also manifested in responses to the national prominence of twenty-one-year-old abolitionist orator Anna Dickinson. Dickinson spoke frequently on behalf of Republican candidates in 1863, mostly in New England, and her appearances received national coverage. The *Louisville Journal* felt the need to opine that this “cackling hen...has created a sensation far beyond her merits,” finding her remarkable only for “being so often out of her place and in that of a man.” *Louisville Journal*, June 9, 1863; John McBride to Thomas E. Bramlette, n.d. Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor's official correspondence file, petitions for pardons, remissions, and respites 1863-1867, BR8-308 to BR8-309, KDLA. Susan Zaeske has looked at petitioning among anti-slavery women as a permissible tool that allowed them to “assert substantial political authority.” This dimension was muted within Kentucky’s political culture. Nonetheless, these petitions do echo Zaeske’s findings in showing women exercising “political literacy” and while they mostly did not use petitions to transition “from a tone of humility to a tone of insistence,” they wielded that tone of humility as a political weapon. Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women’s Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 1-8.

³⁸ Message of Governor Bramlette to the General Assembly of Kentucky at the December Session, 1863 (Frankfort, KY: WM. E. Hughes, State Printer, 1863), T.E. Bramlette Official Documents as Governor of Kentucky, 1863-67, KDLA.



Figure 4: Governor Andrew Gregg Curtin

Pennsylvania

Bramlette's election in August cheered the Lincoln administration, but it augured no certain success in October's crucial gubernatorial contests in Ohio and Pennsylvania. These races promised a true indication of whether Union parties could take advantage of the growing prominence of anti-war Democrats to reverse the Democratic gains of 1862.

Andrew Curtin's reelection campaign in Pennsylvania epitomized the way that Republican coalitions, now running as Union parties almost everywhere, regained hold of the center ground after the electoral defeats of 1862. Democrats in Pennsylvania in 1863 wanted to run against radical Republicans willing to defend and embrace the measures that constituted a harder form of war – conscription, emancipation, black military service, suspension of habeas corpus. Instead, they got

Curtin. If placed in an audience listening to Curtin and his surrogates on the stump, you could be forgiven for thinking it was 1861. Democrats complained that neither Curtin nor his press organs “say one word about State policy...they are mute as mice upon the subject of the Tariff, the question of emancipation and negro equality, the suppression of free speech and the press, arbitrary arrests, &c., &c.” Curtin’s first term and reelection campaign showed how Union parties distanced themselves from Republicanism in efforts to embody a genuine non-partisan Unionism designed to attract votes from across the political party spectrum.³⁹

Historian William A. Blair has written that Governor Curtin failed to articulate “any political ideology,” but we can better comprehend Curtin by understanding that he consistently advocated a type of centrist Unionism that sought to enlarge the appeal of Republicanism, even if that meant significant changes in the party’s principles and membership. In 1860, Curtin had largely excised the two most divisive elements of Republican ideology – anti-slavery and anti-southernism – from his campaign. Once the war began, Curtin sought to turn patriotism into policy, focusing relentlessly on his fealty to the Union and to the soldiers who fought to protect it, earning him the sobriquet “The Soldier’s Friend.” The vast majority of the northern population supported a war to save the Union, only a minority of whom identified with Republicanism or with a conflict waged to free the slaves. To try to capture as many of those who supported the Union war for the Union political party, Curtin chose, in his own words, to “avoid the discussion of the policy of the general government, while giving a hearty support to the national authorities in all their measures to suppress the rebellion.” In January 1862, a Democratic paper hailed the governor’s commitment to the “restoration of the Union as it is, nothing more, nothing less.” In his third annual message, delivered six days after Lincoln’s final emancipation proclamation, Curtin made no mention whatsoever of emancipation, simply restating the determination of his people to “preserve the government.” Curtin’s relentless focus on restoration of the Union aimed

³⁹ *Lancaster Intelligencer*, August 25, 1863.

to secure a middle ground between the perceived extremes of radical Republicans and anti-war Democrats.⁴⁰

As explained in more depth in Chapter 1, Curtin led a Union Party that represented a broad swathe of political opinion. The party boasted prominent radical Republicans like Thaddeus Stevens, as well as many equally committed moderate Republicans. During the war, Simon Cameron, despite being more Machiavellian than principled, nonetheless acted as head of the radical, anti-Curtin element at the state level. But the Union Party also contained former Democrats and many old Whigs and Know-Nothings. As a party delegate explained to President Lincoln in January 1861, the “Party is not composed of Republicans alone, nor even in great part...I am not a Republican, but an Old Line Whig, with strong American proclivities...Very many of our Whig friends voted the Republican ticket reluctantly.” Curtin, an old Whig, stood on the conservative side of his coalition and tailored his appeal to this constituency. Faced with the Democratic alternative, radical Republicans had no option but to back Curtin, allowing the governor to focus on the conservative swing voters who constituted the decisive element of Pennsylvania politics.⁴¹

Curtin worked hard during his first term to ensure that his governance matched his inclusive, non-partisan electoral rhetoric. The governor centered his appeals around his reputation as the “soldier’s friend,” an identification that operated throughout his tenure as both political appeal and governing strategy. Supporting the soldiers was universally acceptable. Radicals in his own coalition

⁴⁰ William Blair, “We are Coming, Father Abraham – Eventually: The Problem of Northern Nationalism in the Pennsylvania Recruiting Drives of 1862,” in *The War was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 205; William H. Egle, *The Life and Times of Andrew Gregg Curtin* (Philadelphia: Thompson Publishing Company, 1896), 199; *Pittsburgh Post*, January 9, 1862, quoted in Stanton Ling Davis, “Pennsylvania Politics, 1860-1863” (PhD dissertation, Western Reserve University, 1935), 214; George Edward Reed, ed., *Papers of the Governors, 1681-1902*, Volume 8 (Harrisburg: State of Pennsylvania, 1902), 469.

⁴¹ R.P. King to Abraham Lincoln, January 18, 1861, Abraham Lincoln Papers. For more detail on Curtin, his election by the People’s Party in 1860, and Pennsylvania’s political history, see chapter 1, above, as well as Jack Furniss, “Andrew Curtin and the Politics of Union,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 141 (April, 2017):145-176.

could not directly object and it offered no ideological barrier to pro-war Democrats tempted to cross the aisle. Curtin always tried to act commander-in-chief of his state and frequently ensured his communiques with Washington and military leaders in the field found their way into friendly newspapers. Figure 5 shows a cartoon from *Vanity Fair*, a conservative New York publication, depicting Curtin throwing Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson out of Pennsylvania in 1862. Curtin had been passing information about Jackson’s movements in Maryland to McClellan and they both believed Confederate intended to march into Pennsylvania. The cartoon hardly represents accurately any role Curtin played, but it demonstrates the benefit of Curtin’s tactic of taking every opportunity to identify with the military. Nonetheless, advocating for his state’s soldiers would bring Curtin into regular conflict with Washington.

VANITY FAIR.



A FRIENDLY HINT.

Governor Curtin.—“FRIEND JACKSON, THERE MUST LEAVE OF A SUDDEN; THERE HAS NO BUSINESS HERE, AND I MUST REPROVE THERE—THUS!”

Figure 5: Vanity Fair, September 27, 1862.

Throughout the war, Curtin clashed repeatedly with the War Department, whether administered by Simon Cameron or Edwin M. Stanton. Cameron was a bitter personal enemy of Curtin's since the mid-1850s, while Stanton and the governor became deeply estranged due to three years of acrimonious dealings. Curtin, along with several other governors, early protested Simon Cameron's decision to send private individuals into the states with the authority to recruit volunteers and form and officer regiments. Lincoln would intervene to affirm that all authority over regiments rested with the governors. Curtin protested directly to the president about General Order 154, which gave federal recruiting officers the authority to fill up regiments by drawing from state reserve units. Curtin deemed this order "unjust to the people of the States & calculated to demoralize and destroy volunteer organizations." Lincoln passed the letter to Stanton who considered Curtin's protest "ill-advised, revolutionary and tends to excite discontent and mutiny in the army." Stanton recommended that the governor be "severely rebuked by the President," but his critique fell on deaf ears and the offending order was soon rescinded.⁴²

Stanton understandably focused on his own responsibilities and his patience with Curtin wore thinner still over disagreements regarding the length of enlistment for Pennsylvania soldiers. In July 1862, Lincoln called for 300,000 three-year recruits. Worried that the three year stipulation presented a disincentive, Curtin forced a concession from the War Department by choosing, on his own volition, to accept men for nine and twelve months service. While clearly unhappy with Curtin's actions, Lincoln wrote to the irate Stanton that they had no choice but to accept the men since they might otherwise "fail perhaps to get any on other terms from Pennsylvania." Even after the Enrollment Act of 1863, Stanton still found himself bowing to Curtin's wishes. When Robert E. Lee invaded Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863, Curtin called for emergency troops to serve only until "I as governor of the State deem the emergency over." The instituting of a federal draft placed more power in the hands of the

⁴² For details on the Curtin-Cameron feud, see Chapter 1, above. Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, Oct 27, 1862; Edwin Stanton to Abraham Lincoln, Oct 30, 1862, Lincoln Papers.

War Department, but it also freed up governors like Curtin to distance themselves from an unpopular measure. Curtin repeatedly questioned Provost General James B. Fry over the accuracy of Pennsylvania's quotas and ensured that these testy exchanges found their way into Pennsylvania's newspapers – further enraging an already infuriated War Department.⁴³

Why did Curtin, a loyal governor dedicated to the war effort, take such a combative approach? Always hoping to garner cross-party support, Curtin tried to implement the draft in a way that mirrored common perceptions of the measure as extreme but required. Conscription contradicted a long American tradition of lauding citizen soldiers and fearing standing armies. Curtin shared the concerns of other governors like John Andrew that the draft risked creating a “mere paper army” filled with “green men.” While he acknowledged the need for men, the governor described conscription, in a private letter to Lincoln, as “very odious in the state.” Speaking to soldiers in camp, the governor promised to keep them in the field not “one hour longer than needed.” Contesting Pennsylvania's quotas, Curtin stressed to Provost General Fry that he did not want to “add much to any feeling of hostility that may exist in the minds of the people against the Draft.” At other times, Curtin invoked the need for labor power on the home front, and cited the imminent harvest and the “furnaces, workshops, and mines...standing idle,” as justifications for keeping War Department demands at bay. Curtin clashed with the War Department to serve his political prospects by distancing himself from unpopular measures and exercising his authority in federal-state relations.⁴⁴

⁴³ Blair, “We are Coming, Father Abraham – Eventually,” 193; Telegram from Governor Andrew Curtin to Mayor Alexander Henry, June 20, 1863, Box 1, Folder 12, Alexander Henry Papers (Collection 278), Historical Society of Pennsylvania [repository hereafter HSP].

⁴⁴ John A. Andrew to Edwin M. Stanton, 17 August 1862, quoted in William B. Weeden, *War Government Federal and State: In Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Indiana, 1861-1865* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1906), 219; Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, September 4, 1863, Lincoln Papers; David Davis to Daniel Davis, July 18, 1863, Document Box 59, DL0797.15, Nau Civil War Collection, Houston, Texas; Andrew Curtin to James B. Fry, August 11, 1863, RG -26, Records of the Department of State, Secretary of the Commonwealth – Executive Correspondence, 1790 – 1968, 47th roll – Jan 1, 1863 to December 24, 1863, microfilm, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg [repository hereafter PSA]; Andrew Curtin to Lorenzo Thomas, June 18, 1862, in Richard F. Miller, ed., *States at War: Volume 3: A Reference Guide for Pennsylvania in the Civil War* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2014), 154; Andrew Curtin to Darius Couch, July 23, 1863, Executive Correspondence, PSA.

A letter the governor in 1864 demonstrated the real value Curtin reaped from his obdurate approach towards the War Department but simultaneous identification with Pennsylvania's soldiers. Engaged in a dispute with Washington over mustering out dates, an officer in the Reserves wrote to the governor, explaining that "we appeal to you because you first conceived us, brought us into existence, our military father, and have at all times protected and defended us against assault." The phrase "military father," is a remarkable echo of Lincoln's moniker, "Father Abraham," used to great effect in the 1864 presidential election. For both Curtin and Lincoln, it helped them gain backing from War Democrats appalled at Copperheads making their party seem, in historian Jonathan W. White's characterization, "unpatriotic and anti-soldier." Many of these men saw their desertion of the Democracy as temporary. John White Geary, a Democrat who backed Curtin in 1863 and even succeeded him as a Republican governor in 1867, wrote as late as 1864 that he longed for the day when the party's "gallant sons return the fold, and democracy shall be like truth." By downplaying the Republican element of his coalition and cloaking himself in Unionism, Curtin made it especially easy for soldiers of any political hue to support him.⁴⁵

Lincoln regularly sided with Curtin in his clashes with the War Department because he understood that state executives served their own political constituencies and because he understood the political importance of an image as the soldiers' protector. Years after Lincoln's death, provost marshal general James Fry contributed a chapter to a book of reminiscences on President Lincoln. He told a story of a Northern governor who was "earnest, able and untiring" but who "always wanted his own way" when it came to matters of raising and equipping troops. The governor's dispatches so

⁴⁵ Timothy J. Orr, "A Viler Enemy in Our Rear," in *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 171-199; Timothy J. Orr, "'We Are No Grumblers': Negotiating State and Federal Military Service in the Pennsylvania Reserve Division," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 135 (October 2011): 472; White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*, 4; John White Geary Letters, 24 October 1864, Geary Family Papers, Collection 2062, Volume 2, Letter Transcripts, 1859-1865, HSP.

irritated Secretary Stanton that he brought them to Lincoln's attention. The president replied with one of his famous stories:

Never mind, never mind; those dispatches don't mean anything. Just go right ahead. The Governor is like a boy I saw once at a launching. When everything was ready they picked out a boy and sent him under the ship to knock away the trigger and let her go. At the critical moment everything depended on the boy. He had to do the job well by a direct vigorous blow, and then lie flat and keep still while the ship slid over him. The boy did everything right, but he yelled as if he was being murdered from the time he got under the keel until he got out. I thought the hide was all scraped off his back; but he wasn't hurt at all. The master of the yard told me that this boy was always chosen for that job, that he did his work well, that he never had been hurt, but that he always squealed in that way. That's just the way with Governor _ . Make up your minds that he is not hurt, and that he is doing the work right, and pay no attention to his squealing. He only wants to make you understand how hard his task is, and that he is on hand performing it.⁴⁶

It may not have been to Curtin that the president referred, but it seems very likely. The message applied, and there is no doubting that a profound rift existed between Curtin and Stanton. Lincoln grasped much better than his secretary of war that the governor's "squealing" served the needs of his constituency at home and did not impinge on his loyalty or ability. Soldiers had become the heartbeat of Curtin's administration; serving them, and being seen to serve them, was at the heart of his centrist approach.⁴⁷

While the military sphere served as his primary focus, the governor grasped the symbiotic relationship between the home front and battlefield. As one of Curtin's state agents, R. Biddle Roberts wrote: "I devoted my time always first to the soldier, but in many instances the desires of the civilian were so blended with the welfare of the soldier...the widow in quest of her late husband's back pay...the anxious wife, parents, or other relative, in quest of some lost one who has given up his life in the field." William A. Blair has suggested that Curtin's disinclination to implement the draft came

⁴⁶ James B. Fry, "James B. Fry," in *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of his Time*, ed. Allen Thorndike Rice (New York: North American Publishing Company, 1886), 401-2.

⁴⁷ The governor in the story was named as Curtin by James Matlock Scovel in an article entitled "Recollections of Lincoln and Seward," in *Overland Monthly*, 2nd ser., 38 (1901): 270. The story also appears in McClure's "Abe" *Lincoln's Yarns and Stories: A Complete Collection of the Funny and Witty Anecdotes that Made Lincoln Famous as America's Greatest Storyteller* (Philadelphia: J.C. Winston Company, 1900). Stephen Engle has also recently identified Curtin as the governor in the story. See Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 479. For the Stanton-Curtin rift, see John W. Forney to Abraham Lincoln, Sept. 14, 1864, Lincoln Papers.

from his belief that it “ran contrary to civilian concerns” and that the governor “paid more attention to the needs of home.” In one sense, this is true. The powerful images from *Harper’s Weekly* (Figure 6) further illustrate how morale at the front and at home were linked inextricably; governors like Curtin recognized this and whenever they had the opportunity to affect this relationship positively, they took it. When he pressed for emergency troops to be mustered out, Curtin explained that “the furnaces, workshops, and mines in which they were employed are standing idle.” When he worried about the violence that might ensue from enforcing the draft in strongly Democratic mining regions, he fiddled the quotas to exempt them. In the short-term, these actions kept men out of the army, but Curtin believed they refracted to his and the nation’s benefit by preventing unrest and catering to the personal needs of soldiers and their families.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *Report of Col. R. Biddle Roberts, Pennsylvania State Agent at Washington, D.C.* (n.p.: n.p., [1863]), accessed through HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://babel.hathitrust.org>; Blair, “We are Coming Father Abraham,” 192, 206; Andrew Curtin to Darius Couch, July 23, 1863, Executive Correspondence, PSA; Erwin Stanley Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism: A Study of Pennsylvania and Presidential Politics, 1860-1872* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 154.



Figure 6: Harper's Weekly, December 26, 1863.

Curtin's policies sought to assist all those who supported the Union war effort and Judith Ann Giesberg has uncovered some of the practical steps the governor took to help working-class women. Deprived of absent husbands, many had to manage farms and families on their own, often writing to Curtin asking for "money, furloughs, and discharges." As men died in unprecedented numbers, requests poured in for help to retrieve and bury the bodies of fallen sons, brothers, and fathers. Curtin

and his agents helped where they could, both on an individual basis and by setting up larger schemes. In 1862, the governor secured legislation to transfer wounded soldiers back to the state for treatment closer to loved ones. In 1864, he helped initiate an asylum for soldier's orphans and, as Giesburg discovered, in 1865 Pennsylvania set up a program that reimbursed families for expenses incurred in the harrowing task of recovering the bodies strewn across southern battlefields. The *Philadelphia Press* demonstrated the political benefits this could reap when it reported that the governor's audiences were often populated by "bright-eyed women, who were anxious to hear an argument by which to convert some doubting husband, brother, or lover." Like Curtin's negotiations around the draft, these actions must be seen as both civilian and military, non-partisan and political.⁴⁹

Curtin and his surrogates would focus overwhelmingly on the Union and on the soldiers in 1863, but they could not entirely avoid the three most controversial and problematic policy issues of the year: emancipation, black military service, and arbitrary arrests.

On the question of emancipation, Curtin had thus far done an impressive job of staying silent. Democratic newspapers had admitted they looked "in vain for abolition ravings" while Democratic soldiers praised the governor who had "advocated no radical measures." In his third annual message, delivered six days after Lincoln's final Emancipation Proclamation, Curtin made no mention whatsoever of emancipation, simply restating the determination of his people to "preserve the government." His evasions suggest that he fully appreciated the extremes of opinion within his state. Many Democratic soldiers, and some Republican ones, resented emancipation and feared its consequences. Tom Crowl, of the 87th Pennsylvanian volunteers, expressed the not uncommon view that "This Nigrow freedom is what is playing hell... We never enlisted to fight for Nigrows." On the other hand, Pennsylvania had a long and proud history of abolitionism, with many of its citizens

⁴⁹ Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 34, 43, 150-51; Reed, ed. *Papers of the Governors*, 465; *Philadelphia Press*, October 8, 1863.

fighting, physically and rhetorically, to end slavery and secure long denied rights for America's black population.⁵⁰

At a Union League meeting in March in Philadelphia, Curtin did commend, after a fashion, the policy of emancipation. He asserted that slaveholders had forfeited their property rights and legally that "property" was now fair game to the Union army. Curtin assured his audience that no influx of black labor would ensue because "the free negro does not seek a Northern climate... he is constrained by a law of nature... the negro will not only remain in, but go to the South... as its climate is adapted to his physical conformation." Curtin did not sound *anything* like an abolitionist. But Philadelphia's most influential African-American newspaper, the *Christian Recorder*, could understandably still celebrate his role in a meeting whose overall message proclaimed the downfall of slavery.⁵¹

When on the stump, the governor did occasionally address black military service. Acknowledging that he had equipped black men when Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia had invaded Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863, Curtin stated that "when the rebels were on our soil, I would have armed black and white, and yellow men; I would have equipped the clovenhoofed gentleman himself." Curtin used this deeply unpleasant analogy of being willing to arm the devil more than once and it hardly represented a glowing endorsement of black service. He went on to praise their service but also carefully noted that their responsibilities had been of a non-military nature. Overall, *The Christian Recorder* mostly supported the governor. Curtin was criticized in 1864 for having taken no steps to remove any of the odious black laws of the state, but black regiments were reported leaving

⁵⁰ *Pittsburgh Post*, January 9, 1862, quoted in Davis, *Pennsylvania Politics*, 214; Reed, ed., *Papers of the Governors*, 469; quoted in Dennis W. Brandt, *From Home Guards to Heroes: The 87th Pennsylvania and its Civil War Community* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 163. For a detailed discussion of Union troops' views on Emancipation, see Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 75-118.

⁵¹ *Philadelphia Press*, March 12, 1863; *Christian Recorder*, March 21, 1863.

for the front with “three cheers” for the Governor, and returned in 1865 to a “welcome home” event where Curtin was the honored guest.⁵²

The sources are not available to know for sure Curtin’s inner feelings on race, but the limited nature of his public endorsements continued to differentiate him from the radicals within his party. Indeed, *The Pittsburgh Gazette* – a Cameron organ – attacked Curtin in the summer of 1863 for surrounding himself with counsellors who complained that the conflict had become “a negro war” and that “for every South Carolina rebel they would hang a Massachusetts abolitionist.” Democratic newspapers claimed that “Curtin is not ultra abolition enough for Cameron and his crew,” and that “supporters of Curtin...indignantly repudiated the epithet ‘Abolitionists.’” Supporting emancipation after the fact had not dislodged Curtin from his centrist footing.⁵³

On the subject of military arrests, Curtin actually joined Democrats in criticizing the administration, albeit much less stridently. On January 28, 1863, Albert Boileu, editor of the *Philadelphia Evening Journal* was arrested and taken to Fort McHenry for an article that praised Jefferson Davis and questioned Lincoln’s capacity to restore the Union. Boileu’s case quickly became a partisan football. On February 12, 1863, Curtin responded with a message that railed against traitors but also stated that the “courts of justice are open,” that only Congress had the right to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, and that anyone accused of treason deserved a fair trial. Republicans took offense at what they saw as an unseemly bid for conservative support. Democratic papers welcomed the missive, including the *New York World*, which claimed that it earned Curtin a “backseat among the defenders of the rights of free speech.” Later in the year, in a private letter to President Lincoln, the governor would call the suspension of habeas corpus a “heavy blow” and at the Union Party convention, he helped squash resolutions praising Stanton for his role in military arrests. Curtin’s continual attempts to cater

⁵² *Philadelphia Press*, September 18, 1863; *Christian Recorder*, July 30, 1863, October 17, 1863 and October 28, 1865.

⁵³ *Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 28, 1863; *Lebanon Advertiser*, August 5, 1863 and *Lancaster Intelligencer*, October 27, 1863.

to the Union Party masses rather than the Republican base would continue to anger radicals within his coalition.⁵⁴

Curtin's health suffered during the war, and in 1863 he announced his intention not to run for reelection, hoping privately to secure a War Democrat, General William Franklin, as his replacement. The plan fell through when Franklin, a man described by his biographer as "conservative in politics, social values, and military strategy," received only seven votes at the Democratic convention. When Curtin reneged on his pledge and made known his intention to run, radical Republicans, led by Simon Cameron's supporters, desperately attempted to replace the governor with the radical John Covode. The *Pittsburgh Gazette*, a Cameron organ, launched a vitriolic campaign against Curtin, praising hostile "Republicans" and berating the "Union Party" were it to re-nominate the governor. The *Gazette* asked readers to consider whether Curtin was "not more strongly inclined to the Peace Democracy, than to ourselves." The infuriated Cameron wrote privately to President Lincoln averring "there are many good Republicans and pious Christians who would see him [Curtin] in Hell." Curtin's renomination showed his strength with conservative Republicans and other Union Party backers. Faced with the Democratic alternative, radical Republicans had no option but to grudgingly endorse his candidacy.⁵⁵

Pennsylvania's Democrats chose sitting Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice George W. Woodward as their gubernatorial candidate, reflecting the importance that Democrats gave to the issue of constitutional liberties. Democratic papers urged votes for "Woodward and the Constitutional Rights of White Men... Woodward and the Union... Woodward and Civil Liberty" against "Curtin and

⁵⁴ *Altoona Tribune*, February 24, 1863; *Erie Observer*, February 21, 1863; *Republican Compiler* (Gettysburg), February 23, 1863; *New York Times*, February 14, 1863; Arnold Shankman, "Freedom of the Press During the Civil War: The Case of Albert D. Boileau," *Pennsylvania History* 42 (October, 1975): 313; Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, September 18, 1863.

⁵⁵ Mark A. Snell, *From First to Last: The Life of Major General William B. Franklin* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), xiii; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 29, 1863 and July 27, 1863; Simon Cameron to Abraham Lincoln, September 18, 1863, Lincoln Papers; Democrats eagerly picked up on the *Gazette's* attacks, arranging for their publication as a campaign pamphlet. See Biddle Family Papers, Box 39, Folder 2, HSP.

Negro Equality...Curtin and Abolition Disunion...Curtin and Despotism.” They assailed Curtin’s reputation as the “soldier’s friend,” and attempted to counter it by highlighting Curtin’s Know-Nothing background in order to call Woodward the “poor man’s friend.” Woodward’s greatest strength lay in his judicial status, which lent considerable weight to criticisms of unconstitutional actions taken by the Lincoln administration. Woodward’s greatest weakness rested in the fact that, as a sitting justice in 1862, he had ruled it unconstitutional to allow soldiers to vote in the field. Preventing men from voting in an election where you are the candidate represented terrible politics, and the judgement drew derision from the Union press while enhancing Curtin’s “soldier’s friend” appeal. This ruling against soldier voting helped Curtin’s Union Party to claim that Copperheads had hijacked Pennsylvania’s Democracy.⁵⁶

While minority elements called for peace, no senior Democrats uttered the unequivocal language of men like Clement Vallandigham, Thomas Seymour, or Charles Wickliffe. The official Democratic platform lambasted arbitrary arrests and restrictions on freedom of speech, but also denounced the intimation that the party would “ever consent to peace upon any terms involving a dismemberment of the Union.” The convention endorsed a limited war to “defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and to preserve the Union.” Woodward’s campaign chairman, Charles John Biddle, even acted to prove the party’s patriotism by temporarily resigning his position to help defend the state from Lee’s invasion. As traditional custom dictated, Woodward largely stayed quiet, but his two sons fought for the Union and, in the week before the vote, he stated publicly his support for the war’s continued prosecution.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ *Daily Patriot and Union* (Harrisburg, PA), October 12, 1863; *Columbia Democrat and Bloomsburg General Advertiser* (Bloomsburg, PA), August 22, 1863; Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Election of 1864* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014), 15-16.

⁵⁷ *Daily Patriot & Union* (Harrisburg, PA), June 18, 1863; *Lebanon Advertiser*, June 24, 1863; Biddle Family Papers, Box 39, Folder 1, HSP; *Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), October 5, 1863. For a more detailed discussion of Woodward, see Arnold Shankman, *The Pennsylvania Anti-War Movement, 1861-1865* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh-Dickinson University Press, 1980), 129.

The title of the Union Party official address – “Our Country, Right or Wrong!” – became the unofficial motto of Curtin’s campaign, repeated by speakers across the state. The phrase seemed to openly acknowledge discontent with Republican governance. Adopted by the Democratic Party during the War with Mexico, the phrase had long been attacked by abolitionists like Wendell Phillips for its “trespass” on the “domain of morals.” For Pennsylvanians in 1863, it offered an inspiring but also temporally limited message. The full address celebrated the end of slavery and asked people to recognize especially that “the destiny of free government throughout the world” lay at stake. But it climaxed by acknowledging persistent divisions: “If...anything is left undone, which some think ought to have been done, or anything has been done which some think should have been left undone, we reserve these matters for more opportune discussion in the calmer days of peace.” This represented a traditional invoking of ‘military necessity.’ But by explicitly hinting that measures might be revisited once the war passed, it placed an additional layer of doubt on the steps taken. As the Union Party slogan, it invited waverers to embrace Curtin’s coalition.⁵⁸

Isaac Wayne MacVeagh, Chairman of the Committee, led a band of speakers across the state who used this centrist message to appeal to conservatives, especially Democrats. MacVeagh knew that, especially in certain parts of the state, radical Republicanism thrived and plenty of radical speakers like Thaddeus Stevens turned out this element of the Union Party vote. But MacVeagh himself helped front the appeal to swing voters, opening a meeting in Lancaster proclaiming that all loyal Democrats were “declaring their fealty to their Union.” Repurposing much opposition rhetoric, he stated that “if you desire peace, you will vote Curtin; if you would prevent another draft, you will vote Curtin,” otherwise, he warned, “all this effort to maintain the old Union, and to preserve the old Constitution,

⁵⁸ W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013), 229. It also served as the wartime motto for conservative newspaper, the *Boston Courier*. See Thomas H. O’Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 53; *The Alleghenian* (Ebensburg, PA), September 17, 1863.

shall have been in vain.” The emphasis on the *old* Union and Constitution surely represented an attempt to reject Democratic claims that the meaning of the war had shifted from Union to emancipation. MacVeagh maintained that restoring the Union remained the purpose of the war. The next speaker, Greene Adams, drove the message home. An old Whig lawyer from Kentucky, Adams admitted that he still owned slaves but accepted that the institution was doomed. He urged Pennsylvanians to recognize the larger goal and join him in serving “the cause of Union” by reelecting Curtin.⁵⁹

If slaveholders did not sufficiently convey the inclusive message, Union Party podiums also regularly hosted Democratic converts. Few embodied Curtin’s message better than Colonel Thomas C MacDowell, until 1862 the editor of the fiercely Democratic Harrisburg *Patriot and Union*. MacDowell told voters “I have been a Democrat all my life...I am a Democrat still...I take back nothing that I have ever cherished in the way of principles; I sacrifice nothing that I have ever loved.” But MacDowell feared Democratic victories could produce Confederate recognition from Europe, leading to the permanent destruction of the Union that both parties cherished. For this reason, he urged Democrats to “Stick to the government; stand by those who are administering it for the time being; and if there are any abuses, I will, after a while, in more peaceful times, join hands with you to reform all those abuses.” With enthusiasm or reluctance, all were encouraged to recognize that, for now – “Right or Wrong” – the only option was to accept military necessities and vote for Curtin and the Union.⁶⁰

Illness limited Curtin’s personal appearances in his 1863 campaign, but when he did take the stump he eloquently invoked the Union cause and said nothing to alienate conservatives. He dutifully repeated the campaign slogan that “I accept all that is bad as well as all that is good in the Government,

⁵⁹ *Philadelphia Press*, September 18, 1863.

⁶⁰ Macdowell was imprisoned briefly in 1862 for material suspected of inciting civil unrest. John A. Marshall, *American Bastille: A History of the Illegal Arrests and Imprisonment of American Citizens during the Late Civil War* (Philadelphia: T. W. Hartley, 1876), 501; and *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph* (Harrisburg), October 7, 1862. Speeches in *Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), September 28, 1863, October 13, 1863.

for I am for the Government, right or wrong.” But he focused mostly on the positive and substantive associations of Union. Opening with a paean to the troops, he reminded his audiences that “for the Government, your neighbours have bled and eat the dust.” Again and again, he proclaimed “I thank my God that I have one virtue of which I can boast – loyalty to my country.” On election eve in Philadelphia, he drew on the historical ballast of the founders: “here, this night, on the sacred ground where the Government was formed... I praise my God that he directed and controlled me that I have been and am faithful to my country.” In a perilous present, harkening to a shared and sacred past made for a resonant rallying cry. Come election day, he had no doubt that “Pennsylvania will declare her fidelity with the ballot-box, as she has done with the cartridge-box.”⁶¹

While the military did not affect Pennsylvania’s election as flagrantly as in the Bluegrass, the state’s soldiers still used their status to both threaten and encourage civilian voters. Pennsylvania’s soldiers engaged in a relatively widespread phenomenon of publishing letters and resolutions in 1863 that threatened to march home to deal with Copperheads if the Democrats prevailed. Mark E. Neely has discovered upwards of 20,000 Illinois soldiers who threatened their state’s Democratic legislature. Nowhere did soldiers threaten their state’s voters more explicitly than in Ohio where one army chaplain wrote in a newspaper that soldiers sent letters to known Copperheads at home “accompanied with a piece of rope,” and a note that “we’ll settle with you when we get home.” As Timothy J. Orr has shown, Pennsylvania troops also published numerous threats to return home to deal with the “viler enemy in the rear.” This intimidation represented a serious infringement on the freedom of home front elections.⁶²

⁶¹ The *Alleghenian*, September 3, 1863; *Philadelphia Press*, October 7, 1863 and October 12, 1863.

⁶² Connecticut Resolution from Simpson, ed., *The Civil War*, 91; William Lewis Young, “Soldier Voting the Ohio During the Civil War” (M.A. thesis, The Ohio State University, 1948), 42; Orr, “A Viler Enemy in Our Rear,” 176; Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Union Divided: Party Conflict in the Civil War North* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

Pennsylvania's soldiers also found ways to voice their opinions more positively, praising the governor's loyalty, his love for the troops, and even publishing their own replica gubernatorial votes. On August 28, 1863, the Third Division, First Army Corps, praised "the Hon. Governor, who has a heart overflowing with gratitude toward the widows and orphans whose husbands and fathers have died true and patriotic soldiers." In the week before the election, Charles Yahn publicly begged his sibling to vote for the "the right hand man of the United States – Governor Andrew G. Curtin." Just in case civilians still struggled to grasp their message, the troops published replica votes. Nearly all mirrored those of the 5th and 10th Pennsylvania Reserves, which recorded lopsided Curtin victories of 310 to 12 and 383 to 9. From the confines of camp, the rank and file offered all the support they could short of actually casting a ballot.⁶³

Conservative soldiers could also applaud Curtin for his defense of the man most hated by radical Republicans: the general from Pennsylvania, George Brinton McClellan. In March of 1862, Curtin wrote to Lincoln that he and the masses had "entire confidence in the fidelity and ability of General McClellan."⁶⁴ In September, at the Altoona conference of loyal war governors, he successfully defended "Little Mac" against radicals, such as Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts, who wanted his removal.⁶⁵ It was little surprise when, a few days after the conference, Curtin received a letter from the general, praising the governor and the people of Pennsylvania for the support they offered in the "defence of their frontier." When Lincoln removed McClellan from command, the Curtin press immediately denied rumors that the governor had complained to the president about the decision.⁶⁶

⁶³ *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 28, 1863; *Tioga County Agitator* (Wellsboro, PA), October 9, 1863; *Huntingdon Globe*, October 13, 1863.

⁶⁴ Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, Mar. 3, 1862, Lincoln Papers.

⁶⁵ For more detail on the Altoona conference, see Stephen D. Engle, "It is Time for the States to Speak to the Federal Government": The Altoona Conference and Emancipation," *Civil War History* 58 (December 2012):416-450.

⁶⁶ *Christian Recorder*, Oct. 11, 1862; *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph* (Harrisburg), Nov. 21, 1862.

It may well have disappointed Curtin when McClellan supported Democrat George Woodward in the 1863 election. Fortunately, the endorsement came only on the day of the vote, and it did not stop the *Philadelphia Press* from misleadingly reprinting the laudatory 1862 letter to Curtin from McClellan, under the headline “Gen. McClellan Endorses Governor Curtin.” As much as radicals despised him, McClellan remained popular with soldiers and embodied a conservative Unionism. Until he became the Democratic presidential nominee on a peace platform in 1864, he was exactly the sort of figure with whom Curtin wished to be associated.⁶⁷

Andrew Curtin won reelection by 15,335 votes, less than 3% of the more than 500,000 cast. This halved his 1860 majority but reversed Democratic successes in 1862. Union newspapers across the North cheered the results in Pennsylvania and Ohio where Brough defeated Vallandigham. As Figure 7 shows, commentators interpreted these results as the people offering a stinging rebuke to Copperheadism. This victory was especially impressive since most soldiers had still not been able to vote. Nonetheless, MacVeagh and Bramlette had cajoled Secretary Stanton into agreeing to grant as many furloughs as possible to help “carry the election in Pennsylvania.” Campaign manager Wayne MacVeagh put the victory down to “the mute eloquence of disfranchised soldiers whose appeals came from camp, hospital and field to fathers, brothers and friends at home.” MacVeagh’s assertion rings true in terms of the influence of the soldiers, but rings somewhat hollow in being classed as “mute” given the extensive and intimidating ways that influence was exerted.⁶⁸

As the elections in Pennsylvania and Kentucky show, the heavy influence of the Union army on civilian elections contributed to a clear militarization of wartime politics. This is especially true when

⁶⁷ *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 13, 1863. Democratic chairman Charles Biddle wrote to McClellan on September 2, 1863, asking for an endorsement. It is not clear why McClellan took nearly six weeks to grant it, but his previous good relations with Curtin may have been a factor. See Charles J. Biddle to George B. McClellan, Sept. 2, 1863, box 39, folder 3, Biddle Family Papers (Collection 1792), HSP. For McClellan’s ideological position and appeal, see Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan’s War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

⁶⁸ Edwin Stanton to William Meredith, September 28, 1863, Meredith Papers, Box 74, Folder 7, HSP; Egle, *Andrew Gregg Curtin*, 163.

we consider the most egregious but less common instances of military interference. Across the loyal states, Union authorities arrested editors, preachers, and even gubernatorial candidates in the famous case of Clement Vallandigham. The image in Figure 8 from *Frank Leslie's* depicts a Confederate-sympathizing editor being tarred and feathered in Massachusetts and, unsurprisingly, men in uniform appear to be at the heart of the mob. In the border states, troops were stationed at the polls to ensure a “free franchise.” Soldiers themselves faced significant influence and intimidation when voting in the field in 1864. This militarization of politics mitigated against the invective that antebellum American political culture would normally have bestowed on such levels of military interference with civilian elections. As scholars like Jonathan W. White and William A. Blair have recently done, we need to take seriously the question of military interference across the Union, even while we acknowledge the maintenance of an impressively free franchise in most wartime elections.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Election of 1864*; William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

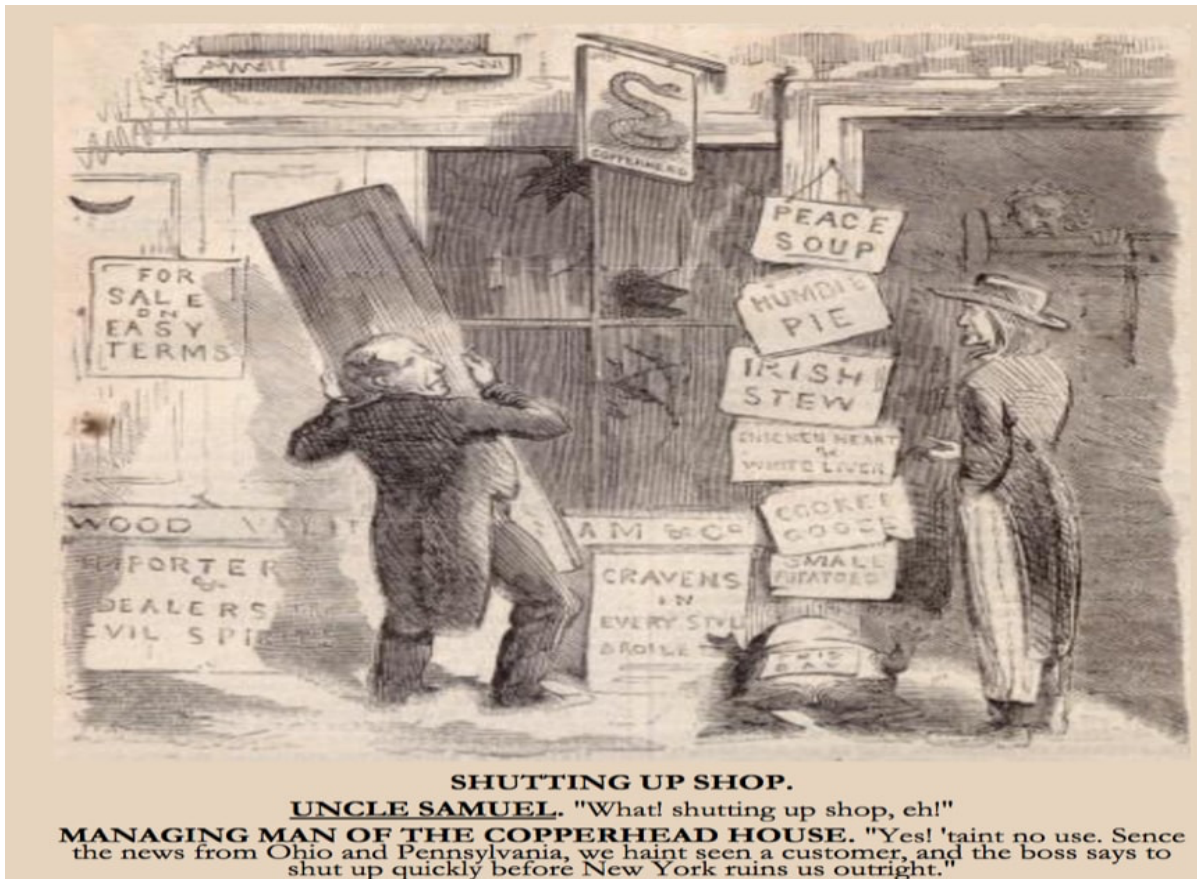


Figure 7: Harper's Weekly, November 7, 1863.

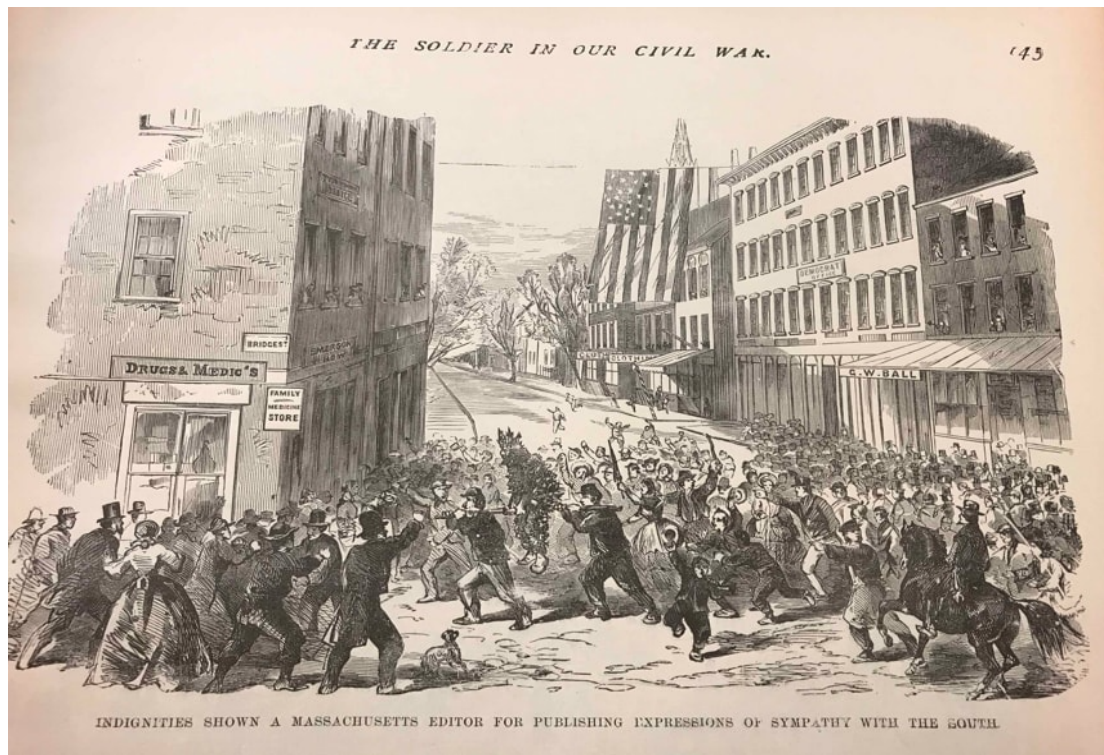


Figure 8: Paul Fleury Mottelay, *The soldier in our Civil War.: A pictorial history of the conflict, 1861-1865* (New York: S. Bradley Pub. Co.), 145.

Conclusion

Curtin's success demonstrated how centrist Union coalitions had enlarged the appeal of the Republican coalitions of 1860. Curtin secured more votes than he or Lincoln had received in 1860. Elsewhere, the results in 1863 proved even more dramatic in this respect. In Ohio, War Democrat John Brough, running as the Union Party candidate, crushed Peace Democrat Clement Vallandigham, securing 60% of the vote. The Buckeye state gave Brough a majority of over 101,000 votes, improving on the 55,000 majority they gave another War Democrat, David Tod, in 1861, and the 22,000 Lincoln secured over his combined opponents in 1860. California also mirrored the tremendous gains that Union parties achieved. In 1860, the Golden State gave Lincoln 32.3% of the vote, compared to the combined 60% they gave Douglas and Breckinridge. In 1863, the Union Party elected Frederick F. Low with 59% of the vote, adding 26,000 votes to Lincoln's total. In Kentucky, Bramlette achieved a lopsided victory even in a state that was, by 1863, fiercely opposed to President Lincoln. All these successes followed the Democratic victories in 1862. The dramatic reversals only a year later reflected the combined effect of the centrist Union politics that these parties espoused and the devastating impact that the Peace wing had on the fortunes of the Democratic Party in 1863.⁷⁰

As the year drew to a close, it seemed that the Union populace possessed the political courage for a continued war effort. Many centrist voters had come a long way from their pre-war moorings. The military necessities of war had transformed what ideological labels meant in terms of policy. Three years earlier, only abolitionists and some radical Republicans endorsed the idea of an immediate end to slavery. Now even conservatives like Montgomery Blair accepted the reality of emancipation while remaining a conservative thanks to his positions on the new issues of the day, such as Reconstruction. Ulysses S. Grant captured the transition that many voters made to reach an accommodation with freedom. In November 1861, Grant expressed his inclination "to whip the

⁷⁰ See Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1776-1860: The Official Results by State and County* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003).

rebellion into submission, preserving all constitutional rights,” and chided the radical press for pressing a war against slavery. Even in 1861, Grant acknowledged and accepted that emancipation might prove necessary but it had to come “legitimately,” once all could agree that the rebellion “cannot be whipped in any other way.” By August 1863, Grant wrote that “I never was an Abolitionest, not even what could be called anti slavery, but I try to judge farely & honestly and it become patent to my mind early in the rebellion that the North & South could never live at peace with each other except as one nation, and that without Slavery.” Grant had voted for James Buchanan in 1856 due to his fears that the radicalism of the nascent Republicans would lead to disunion, his greatest fear. In 1860, he considered himself a Douglas Democrat, though one warming to Lincoln’s party. Grant’s admission reflected how the shifting sands of party and ideology led many wartime voters into Republican dominated Union parties almost solely by way of their Unionism. The pragmatic basis on which Union party candidates secured election in 1863 laid the organizational foundation and electoral strategy for the National Union Party of 1864.⁷¹

⁷¹ Brooks D. Simpson, Stephen W. Sears and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, eds., *The Civil War: The First Year Told By Those Who Lived It* (New York: Library of America, 2011), 639; Simpson, ed., *The Civil War: The Third Year*, 501; Joan Waugh, *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 45; for an excellent discussion of how emancipation could be explained as a conservative position, see Adam I.P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York: Oxford University Pres, 2006), 124-153.

Chapter Five

1864: A Conservative Revolution

There may be no national party platforms as celebrated or infamous as those of the National Union Party and the Democratic Party in 1864. When they met in Baltimore, in early June of 1864, the National Union Party renominated Abraham Lincoln for the presidency, adopted a plank in their national platform that referred to slavery as a “gigantic evil,” and called for an amendment to the constitution that would “terminate and forever prohibit the existence of slavery within the limits of the jurisdiction of the United States.” They also declared that they would pledge “not to compromise with Rebels,” and to accept only “unconditional surrender” as the basis for peace. The Democratic Party met in late August, in Chicago, and agreed a platform that referred to the war as a “failure” and demanded “immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities.”¹

These elements of the party platforms have supported accounts of Lincoln’s reelection that suggest voters faced a stark choice. Republicans stood determined to win the war by military means and to take political steps to end slavery forever. Democrats abandoned and undermined the war, agitated for peace, and appealed shamelessly to racism and white supremacy. Only despair and military defeat could have elected George B. McClellan while Lincoln’s victory marked a triumph of loyalty and hope for a more progressive future.

This chapter offers a new narrative supporting four key arguments about the election of 1864. First, this campaign saw both political parties trying to chart a course for the political center. Lincoln’s National Union Party, more effectively than the Democrats, contained their internal divisions to more closely represent the beliefs of the majority of northerners in the middle of the political spectrum.

¹ Both platforms available online at The American Presidency Project - <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/index.php>.

Second, the tactics, strategies, and arguments put forth by each party sounded a remarkable echo of their successful gubernatorial campaigns of the previous three years. The states had served as vital testing grounds where governors had pioneered electorally viable centrist messages. Governors had established themselves as major national figures and spoke widely across the North on behalf of the presidential candidates. Third, although politicians revisited many familiar debates, differences over reconstruction policy stood as the great new issue in 1864. Both sides had long been thinking about how southern states should return to the Union, but general principles now became concrete proposals that generated fierce discussion and seeped into almost all dimensions of the presidential canvass. Finally, it is difficult to overstate the complexity and contingency of this year long campaign. Political and military events intertwined but never dictated each other and few certainties existed in a year when the public's optimism about the war and their perceptions of the parties vacillated wildly.

Historians have differed on the nature of both parties and the races they ran. Even though 1864 would seem to represent a crowning triumph for radical Republicans – securing proposal of an amendment to end slavery – the election more accurately represented the continuing control of moderates and conservatives within the newly crowned “National Union Party” coalition. After adopting the proposed amendment, the National Union Party downplayed the slavery question in favor of loyalty and patriotism. Lincoln's campaign focused, as ever, on convincing voters that he represented the best hope for saving the Union. Ironically, the same claim the Democrats made about McClellan.²

² James Oakes has hailed an election where Republicans put slavery front and center and had their “support for the Thirteenth Amendment vindicated at the polls,” a view shared by David Long. By contrast, Adam I.P. Smith has noted that “The National Union party did not renege on its commitment to emancipation in the campaign, but it certainly did not emphasize it.” Jonathan W. White stands closer to this perspective. Michael Vorenberg similarly notes that slavery has been overplayed as an issue in the 1864 election and that Republicans offered a narrow interpretation of the amendment when they did address it. James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: Norton, 2013), 476; Adam I.P. Smith, review of *Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln's Re-Election and the End of Slavery* by David E. Long and *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency* by John C. Waugh, *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 20 (Winter, 1999):73; David E. Long, *The Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln's Re-Election and the*

Despite some historians arguing that the Democrats “had long before 1864 ceased to support the war,” and ran “a campaign of unparalleled racial demagoguery,” most Democrats tried to run a pro-war campaign focused on the question of saving the Union. As Mark E. Neely has recently argued, scholars have exaggerated the significance of race and slavery in the contest. In nominating McClellan, a military hero, Democrats “followed the classic centrist pattern in American politics.” The inability of Democrats to marginalize or restrain their extreme wing severely damaged their centrist credentials by hanging a peace platform millstone around the party’s neck. Nonetheless, Democrats did not only run a war candidate on a peace platform, they ran a full war campaign on a peace platform.³

Both parties adopted substantial elements of the centrist campaigns that had brought them successes in gubernatorial politics of the previous three years. Republicans adopted nationally the “Union Party” label ubiquitous across the states, played down emancipation in favor of Union, stressed the doctrine of “military necessity” to justify their actions, and demonstrated their patriotism by choosing a Democrat for Vice-President who could appeal across party lines to War Democrats and other wavering conservatives. Democrats hoped to recreate the elections of 1862 by offering a similarly conservative, pro-war vision embodied in the person of General George B. McClellan. They hoped McClellan’s military career could repel accusations of disloyalty, allowing them to plausibly criticize the administration while defending the government. Ultimately, McClellan’s presence could not eclipse the party platform, but this did not preclude other elements of the Democratic message hitting home. Both parties vied to reach beyond their base to convert opposition voters and the still wavering conservative middle. The governors who had pioneered these messages and tactics remained

End of Slavery (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1994); Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014). Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³ Long, *The Jewel of Liberty*, 265; Oakes, *Freedom National*, 476; Mark E. Neely Jr., *Lincoln and the Democrats: The Politics of Opposition in the Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 85-135; Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 207.

crucial spokesman during the national election. Union governors John Brough, Andrew G. Curtin, and John A. Andrew, as well as Democrats Horatio Seymour and Thomas E. Bramlette, all headlined political gatherings within and beyond their own states.

The national election also mirrored state politics in hinging on internal political divisions as well as external competition. Democrats and Republicans had spent much of the war managing some level of disunity. Gubernatorial successes had depended on the more centrist elements maintaining control. In 1864, the Union Party better contained the ambitions of the radicals within their coalition and the failure of Democrats to marginalize their extreme wing ultimately sealed their fate. But Democrats professed great optimism for much of the year, largely because of the growing prominence of debates over the reconstruction of southern states.

Democrats presented a united front on how to treat the defeated states of the Confederacy while Lincoln's Union Party stood deeply divided. Understanding their contrasting visions for the future allows us to grasp the astonishing ideological shifts that took place during the war. They help us understand how a president who issued an emancipation proclamation and endorsed a constitutional amendment forever abolishing slavery could, nonetheless, face fierce opposition from radicals within his own party.⁴

Debates over reconstruction in 1864 showed just how rapidly the war forced Americans to recalibrate their political creeds such that support or acceptance of emancipation no longer marked a person as radical. Mark E. Neely has written that "it should constitute a key part of the enterprise of writing on the Republican party during the Civil War to help explain the triumph of radicalism."

⁴ William Harris is one of the scholars to cite reconstruction as a significant issue in the election. As Harris says, many accounts have "fail[ed] to recognize that reconstruction issues...punctuated much of the debate over war and peace in the campaign. In fact, all political elements touched upon reconstruction questions." William C. Harris, *With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 229. Using the term "reconstruction" rather than "reunion" or "restoration" is somewhat problematic as all these terms were used at the time and reconstruction generally meant a radical program rejected by Democrats. Nonetheless, while I show, at points, how Democrats rejected the term, I have consistently used "reconstruction" when discussing post-war plans for the sake of simplicity.

Radical policies triumphed because the war dragged them into the political center ground. Americans regularly commented on this development, as men who still considered themselves “conservative” wondered that they could now fairly be called an “emancipationist” or, even, an “abolitionist.” Policies changed so fast in these four years that their attachment to ideological markers shifted. By 1864, most northerners had accepted emancipation. Many only took this position because they deemed it a means to achieving military victory and to removing the only obstacle to the continued existence of the United States. Once conservatives came to accept emancipation, it no longer constituted a truly radical position. Democrats demonstrated this by making no mention of the proposed emancipation amendment in their party platform in 1864. Stances on reconstruction, not emancipation, now provided the most reliable indicator when judging a politician “radical” or “conservative” within the political lexicon of the time.⁵

The tight chronological narrative that follows demonstrates the “deep contingency” of the election’s outcome.⁶ Military events weighed heavily on political choices without dictating them. The Union military successes at Atlanta, and in the Shenandoah Valley undoubtedly transformed civilian morale and flipped the probability of Lincoln’s reelection. But the impact proved so dramatic because of the positions already taken by the Democratic Party. If the Democrats had run McClellan on a war platform, they might have won the election despite the upturn in Union military fortunes. Without those victories, Democrats may have triumphed even with their peace platform. The timings of both conventions could also have been different. The Democrats originally planned to meet on July 4,

⁵ Mark E. Neely, “Politics Purified: Religion and the Growth of Antislavery Idealism in Republican Ideology During the Civil War,” in Robert F. Engs and Randall M. Miller, eds., *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans’ First Generation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 106.

⁶ Ed Ayers coined this phrase for understanding the coming and the course of the Civil War and it is apposite here. As Ayers wrote, “an argument for deep contingency is based on the simple principle that the best explanation reckons with the most information,” and that when we accept and reckon with complexity rather than trying to see a way through it, we see that “the American Civil War stands as an example of how history can suddenly pivot and take a new direction,” as deep, large-scale structures and forces intersect with discrete events and decisions. Edward L. Ayers, *What Caused the Civil War?: Reflections on the South and Southern History* (New York: Norton, 2005), 135.

before deciding to postpone to August 29. The National Union Party might also have delayed. In March, a group of mostly New York Republicans including Horace Greeley, Francis Lieber, and New York City Mayor, George Opdyke, wrote Republican Party Chairman, Edwin D. Morgan, suggesting a postponement from June 7 to the “latest day possible...not sooner than September 1.” If the Union Party had postponed or Democrats had not, the platforms or candidates might have been different with unknowable but potentially momentous consequences. Counter-factuals aside, it is vital to recognize that contemporaries’ perception of the election swung drastically throughout the year. The chapter gives attention to both major parties and to the two fledgling political organizations – the Conservative Union Party and Radical Democratic Party – that sparked briefly before fizzling out. Their existence demonstrates the state of flux in party politics and reflects the belief that, as Jean H. Baker put it, political parties, “like ballroom dancers, cannot be appreciated without their partners.”⁷

Democratic Divisions

At the start of 1864, many mainstream Democrats felt hopeful. To understand why, we must revisit the second half of 1863. The first cause for optimism rested with a group of disgruntled politicians who met in August, in Rochester, New York, to inaugurate a new organization, the “Conservative Union Party.” These men hoped to “unite the Conservative elements of the country in the approaching Presidential campaign.” Inviting “Old Line Whigs – War Democrats – Conservative Men,” and anyone “opposed to secession, abolitionism or fanaticism,” they claimed to stand on the “Kentucky Platform of 1863,” that elected Governor Thomas Bramlette. These men wished to support the Democratic Party but detested Peace Democrats and declined to support Democrats like Clement

⁷ Joel H. Silbey, *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era, 1860-1868* (New York: Norton, 1977), 124; Petition to the National Union Party Committee, March 25, 1864, Folder 9, Box 80, Edwin D. Morgan Papers, New York State Library, Albany, New York; Jean H Baker, “A Loyal Opposition: Northern Democrats in the Thirty-Seventh Congress,” *Civil War History* 25 (June, 1979): 141. For more counter-factual musings, See William C. Harris, “Conservative Unionists and the Presidential Election of 1864,” *Civil War History* 38 (December 1992): 301.

L. Vallandigham in the fall elections. Instead, they met in December 1863 to choose a conservative pro-war alternative to Lincoln, nominating General George B. McClellan for president, alongside General William B. Campbell – a Mexican War veteran, briefly a Union army general, and southern Unionist from Tennessee – for vice-president. Even in 1863, McClellan was the overwhelming favorite to receive the Democratic nomination but these conservatives seized the initiative on who might run alongside him and on what type of platform.⁸

The Conservative Union Party was never likely to be a force on its own, but leading Democrats hoped to harness this movement to reconstruct their pro-war coalition of 1862. Leading War Democrat organizers – such as Dean Richmond and Samuel J. Tilden – negotiated with the Conservative Union movement from the outset and likely encouraged their actions in the hope that McClellan’s nomination by a quasi-independent group of conservatives could prevent Peace Democrats hijacking the party agenda. Early signs looked encouraging. The *Urbana Union*, an Ohio newspaper that considered itself independent and conservative, had backed the Union Party in 1861, celebrated Democratic gains in 1862, before again supporting the Union Party to defeat Vallandigham in 1863. From January 1864, the *Urbana Union* placed what they called the “Constitutional-Union Ticket” of McClellan and Campbell atop their masthead.⁹

An alliance with the Conservative Union Party might help prevent the gap between the War and Peace wings of the Democratic Party from becoming a chasm. The organizational hub for War

⁸ After the August meeting, these men next met in Cincinnati on December 3, 1863, before holding its convention in Philadelphia on December 23, 1863 to make final nominations for the presidential election. The party committee reconvened immediately before the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, on August 28, 1864, as they debated what final position to take in the canvass. They initially hoped to nominate Governor Bramlette for vice-president before he declined consideration. See invitations and meeting summaries in the papers of John B. Bruner, Folder 19, Folder 62, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky. For additional reporting of these meetings, see *Buffalo Evening Courier and Republic*, November 19, 1863, *Cleveland Daily Leader*, December 5, 1863, *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, December 28, 1863, and *Chicago Times*, August 29, 1864.

⁹ Men like R.F. Stevens, the secretary of the national committee, hailed from New York and simultaneously attended meetings of the New York Constitutional Union Party, a body that had been largely co-opted by New York’s War Democrats. For the overlapping personnel, see reports of the 1863 Constitutional Union convention in New York and the attendees at the McClellan Mass Meeting in New York in March 1864. *Evening Courier and Republic* (Buffalo), September 9, 1863 and *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), March 20, 1864.

Democrats lay in New York, where national party chairman August Belmont, along with Samuel L. M. Barlow, Samuel Tilden, Dean Richmond and Horatio Seymour, who provided financial support and organizational ties to Democrats across the nation. Samuel S. Cox, congressman from Ohio, served as another key orchestrator. Another Ohioan, Clement Vallandigham, remained the central figure among Peace Democrats, but Thomas H. Seymour of Connecticut and Fernando and Benjamin Wood of New York stood not far behind. As outlined in the introduction, the “War” and “Peace” labels often obscured as much as they revealed about Democratic identity. The line between these groups remained porous but the monikers had become more appropriate by 1864. Peace Democrats now publicly averred that war had failed to restore the Union. Disunion would never be acceptable but the time had come to suspend the killing and see whether Democrats could persuade the Confederacy to accept reunion through negotiation. War Democrats did not believe that most Peace Democrats *knowingly* risked disunion. But they suspected that Republicans correctly predicted that an armistice would lead to separation. Confederates, aware of how difficult it would be to restart the fighting after an armistice, would not negotiate away their independence. War Democrats continued to argue that negotiation should be a tool employed alongside ongoing military force.

War Democrats expected to control the agenda for the presidential election because of the chastisement voters dealt to peace candidates in 1863. On December 13, 1863 Samuel Cox wrote to Samuel Barlow that General McClellan had become a “political necessity” for the Democrats and took heart that “sentiment grows daily in that direction.” The Conservative Union Party provided further evidence of this and Cox suspected his extreme colleagues would “dare not bolt.” Even so, he told Barlow that they needed to pour “balm into the hearts of the soi disant Peace Democrats,” to ensure they would not wreck McClellan’s nomination. Even as Cox became more cognizant of the

determination of his peace colleagues, he still expressed confidence that he and his allies could control the party's destiny since "the masses are with us."¹⁰

Leaders like Cox knew that, politically, they had to regain voters' trust on the crucial question of support for the war. Only then could they focus on "the moderate men, to unite every element of opposition from Missouri, Ky, Md, as well as the War Dems who bolted Vallandigham." These arguments reflected principle as well as political calculation. War Democrats believed they represented the party's true identity. As Barlow wrote in February 1864, "the mission of the democratic party is to make war, to preserve the national honor and territory and to aggrandize its power. Such a party cannot make peace, or speak of peace, unless these objects are obtained." Democrats had dominated the nation's political history by growing the country militarily and only a McClellan war candidacy could continue that tradition.¹¹

Reconstruction Rising

If they could quiet the peace men, Democrats could focus on an issue where they stood in near perfect unity: reconstruction. All Democrats desired a quick restoration of the old order once the rebels surrendered. Extreme punishment might be due to leading Confederates, but forgiveness for most white southerners would them to remember their prior affection for the Union. Southern states would immediately regain their constitutional rights to order their own societies within the confines of the constitution. Union armies should be immediately disbanded and the federal government rapidly shrunk in size and cost. What exactly this all meant for slavery was unclear, but that bothered few Democrats. The war had broken the Slave Power. If slavery survived in some form, most Democrats might even see it as beneficial in managing the transition of African-Americans from slavery to

¹⁰ S.S. Cox to Samuel Barlow, December 13, 1863, December 3, 1863, and November 21, 1863, Box 46, and S.S. Cox to Samuel Barlow, March 10, 1864, Box 50, all Samuel Barlow Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California [repository hereafter HL].

¹¹ S.S. Cox to Samuel Barlow, November 21, 1863, Box 46, Barlow Papers, HL; Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, 124.

freedom. Democrats saw electoral potential in their position because of the divisions they saw brewing among their opponents.

Conservatives and radicals within the Republican coalition had barely reconciled on the question of emancipation when they began to drift apart on reconstruction. Radicals feared that the Emancipation Proclamation might prove a false dawn unless guaranteed by a host of further measures. Lincoln, after all, had issued his edict as a necessary war measure, the legality of which would be questioned after the conflict ended. What would guarantee freedom for the millions of African-Americans beyond the reach of Union armies? What about slaves in loyal border states to whom the proclamation did not apply? An amendment to the constitution would help, but, even then, radicals realized that without a more thorough overhaul of southern society, ex-Confederates might circumscribe and make vulnerable the future freedom of African-Americans. And, in late 1863 and early 1864, President Lincoln offered no support for a constitutional amendment.

Frederick Douglass and Charles Sumner led calls for emancipation to be the start, not the end, of a radical agenda. Only a few months after the final Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass identified the “greatest danger” as being a drift “back into the whirlpool of Pro-Slavery Compromise at the end of the war.” Charles Sumner shared Douglass’ fears and had little faith that Lincoln would address them. In an October 1863 article for the *Atlantic Monthly*, Sumner argued that Congress held control over the process of reconstruction and that only Congress could be trusted to ensure that each former Confederate state did not “reenslave every colored person within its jurisdiction.” To prevent this, Congress must realize Douglass’ vision by making “every slave free, and every free man a voter.” The soil of the South could then be divided among “patriot soldiers, poor whites, and freedmen.” Radicals thought increasingly that it might require black suffrage and land redistribution to make the rebel states

ready to rejoin the Union and they knew this would necessitate a far-reaching program of reconstruction.¹²

Postmaster General Montgomery Blair led the conservative Republican backlash against Sumner's proposals in a speech entitled "On the Revolutionary Schemes of the Ultra Abolitionists, and in Defence of the Policy of the President." Blair challenged radical theories that rebel states, by seceding, had "committed suicide," and that they should return to territorial status under congressional authority. Blair, like Lincoln, claimed secession illegal and that the states had only been "paralysed" by "persons...guilty of treason." Once loyal individuals held the reins, these states would resume their rightful place within the Union. Sumner's plans would crush out the "loyal men of the South," upon whom the region's future must depend. Only amnesty and encouragement could lift the scales from the eyes of the masses of deluded Confederates. This argument dovetailed with Lincoln's repeated invocations of southern unionism and the fame of prominent southern loyalists like Andrew Johnson and William Gannaway "Parson" Brownlow. It mirrored what many Union governors had been saying on the stump and showed a degree of common ground between Democrats and non-radical Republicans on reconstruction.¹³

These very public disputes dismayed Republicans and delighted Democrats. An official in the Interior Department wrote after Blair's speech of the "war between the administration and the radicals," which made clear that "the split is now defined in what was, at Chicago, the Republican Party." The official added that he considered it clear that "Mr. Lincoln stands at the head of the Conservative branch of the anti-democratic party of the nation." Michigan's radical Republican

¹² Frank Freidel, ed., *Union Pamphlets of the Civil War, 1861-1865*, Volume II, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 820, 852-3; Brooks D. Simpson, ed., *The Civil War: The Third Year Told By Those Who Lived It* (New York: The Library of America, 2013), 120, 636.

¹³ [Montgomery Blair], *Speech of the Hon Montgomery Blair, on the Revolutionary Schemes of the Ultra Abolitionists, and in Defence of the Policy of the President: Delivered at the Unconditional Union Meeting, Held at Rockville, Montgomery Co., Maryland, on Saturday, October 3, 1863* ([New York]:[D.W. Lee], 1863), 4, 8-10; accessed through HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://babel.hathitrust.org>.

senator, Zachariah Chandler, worried this assessment might be accurate and implored Lincoln to choose a radical path. Chandler claimed that every man in the North backed Lincoln on “radical measures” but that “conservatives and traitors are buried together, for God’s sake don’t exhume their remains.” Lincoln responded that he hoped to “stand firm enough to not go backward, and yet not go forward fast enough to wreck the country’s cause.” Lincoln’s subsequent annual message left no doubt that, however admirable he thought their goals, Lincoln had no intention of following the radical blueprint.¹⁴

As part of his annual message on December 8, 1863, Lincoln put forth a “Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction.” Lincoln offered a full pardon and restoration of rights (excepting property in slaves) to all those – barring some categories of leading Confederates – who would take an oath promising future loyalty to the Union and Constitution and who would abide by wartime legislation and proclamations relating to slavery. Once ten percent of the 1860 electorate in a state had taken the oath, they would be eligible to reestablish their government with the full rights of any other state. Lincoln let it be known that, so long as they recognized the “permanent freedom” of former slaves in their new constitutions, he would not object to measures in relation “to the freed people...consistent as a temporary arrangement with their present condition as a laboring, landless, and homeless class.” Although vague, this nodded to apprenticeship schemes piloted in Louisiana that fell far short of economic independence. While the proclamation cemented Lincoln’s commitment to

¹⁴ T.J. Barnett to Samuel Barlow, October 6, 1863, Box 45, Barlow Papers, HL; Zachariah Chandler to Abraham Lincoln, November 15, 1863, Lincoln Papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed online at www.loc.gov/collections/abraham-lincoln-papers/ [hereafter cited as Lincoln Papers]; Abraham Lincoln to Zachariah Chandler, November 20, 1863, Lincoln Papers As well as being a minor official, Barnett was something of a mole in the administration for Democrat Samuel Barlow who had helped secure him his position. He supplied a regular trove of Washington gossip, which he also used in his role as an anonymous Washington correspondent for the Democratic *New York World*. Barnett begun the war considering himself a conservative opposed to Lincoln but over time became increasingly admiring of the president and critical of many of the decisions of the Democratic Party.

emancipation, it did not envision any sizeable or permanent post-war role for the federal government acting to protect or increase the rights of freed African-Americans.¹⁵

Lincoln's message received initial praise but discontent loomed. Moderate New York lawyer and diarist George Templeton Strong wrote that Lincoln's message "finds very general favor," and even some Democrats cautiously approved the proposal for apprenticeship schemes for freed blacks. Governor Horatio Seymour took a true democratic position in protesting that the 10% provision made a mockery of majority rule – a line of attack that radical Republicans would subsequently adopt. For now, most radicals cautiously welcomed the inclusion of emancipation as a condition for reunion. Abolitionist Wendell Phillips, never scared of being a party of one, immediately attack the conservatism of the proclamation. In time, many would join him.¹⁶

1864

The northern optimism in spring 1864 that Grant might finally defeat Lee's army only added urgency to disagreements over plans for the post-war South. Loyalists in Union-held Confederate states began organizing governments for immediate readmission under the terms of Lincoln's proclamation. In each state, Lincoln sided with more conservative factions. In Louisiana, he privately suggested consideration of granting the vote to some African-Americans but accepted publicly Nathaniel P. Banks's labor order. Radicals interpreted the president's actions as an indication that black suffrage or land redistribution would not be forthcoming. Congressional radicals made clear they would not recognize Lincoln's governments and started working on their own reconstruction bill.¹⁷

¹⁵ Legal historian Laura Edwards has noted that the ten percent plan reveals Lincoln's "remarkable faith in the existing structure of government, particularly the authority given to the states." Laura Edwards, *A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 93.

¹⁶ *Star of the North* (Bloomsburg, PA), December 23, 1863. Harris, *With Charity for All*, 134-142; John C. Rodrigue, *Lincoln and Reconstruction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), 74.

¹⁷ Discussion drawn from William C. Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States: Preserving the Union* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2014) and Rodrigue, *Lincoln and Reconstruction*.

Away from Washington, abolitionist orators like Anna Elizabeth Dickinson and Wendell Phillips derided Lincoln's plans. Phillips claimed the president willing to leave "the black man naked, homeless, with no education, no property," and "under the control of the late slaveholders." Dickinson called for sweeping measures since "freedom can never be too strong, and slavery never too weak." As historian James M. McPherson wrote, the Proclamation had now "crystalized radical opposition to the president." Although most radicals decided to remain within Lincoln's tent for now, a misfit group of abolitionists, radicals, and some War Democrats met in Cleveland on May 31 to create a new party and nominate a presidential ticket.¹⁸

The hodgepodge of attendees at the "Radical Democratic" convention highlighted discontent and revealed the instability of party politics. Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton all offered limited early support in the hope that a truly radical platform might emerge. The presence of a handful of War Democrats ensured an incongruous ticket and platform. John C. Frémont, abolitionist favorite and Republican presidential candidate in 1856, headed the presidential ticket with War Democrat John C. Cochrane as his running mate. The platform backed a constitutional amendment ensuring "all men absolute equality before the law," and Congress was to control reconstruction, splitting confiscated rebel property between soldiers and settlers. To placate Democrats, the platform denounced Lincoln's suspensions of habeas corpus across the northern states.¹⁹

The potential appeal of this Radical Democratic ticket suffered an immediate blow with Frémont's letter accepting the nomination. Radicals had been disappointed by the lack of an explicit

¹⁸ James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 260; *Philadelphia Enquirer*, April 22, 1864; William E. Gienapp, *This Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 185-192; Harris, *With Charity for All*, 129; Lincoln asked Hahn, Louisiana governor, to consider "the very intelligent, and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks," suggesting this would help "to keep the jewel of liberty within the family of freedom." But he also assured and warned Hahn that he voiced this "not to the public, but to you alone," quoted in Rodrigue, *Lincoln and Reconstruction*, 81-82.

¹⁹ McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 260-285; Vorenberg, *Final Freedom*, 118-121.

call for black suffrage and Frémont then repudiated specifically the land redistribution plank. He went on to damn Lincoln's "disregard of constitutional rights" and "violations of personal liberty and the liberty of the press." Frémont's harangue would alienate many Republicans and seemed unlikely to convert Democrats. As *Harper's Weekly* illustrated (Figure 1), the mainstream Union Party enjoyed mocking Frémont's candidacy. But anxiety remained. Like the Conservative Union Party, the Radical Democrats never seemed likely to challenge on their own, but even a small vote tally might swing a close election. If the National Union Party proved unpalatably conservative, Frémont might provide a rallying point, or stalking horse, for a larger radical breakaway.²⁰

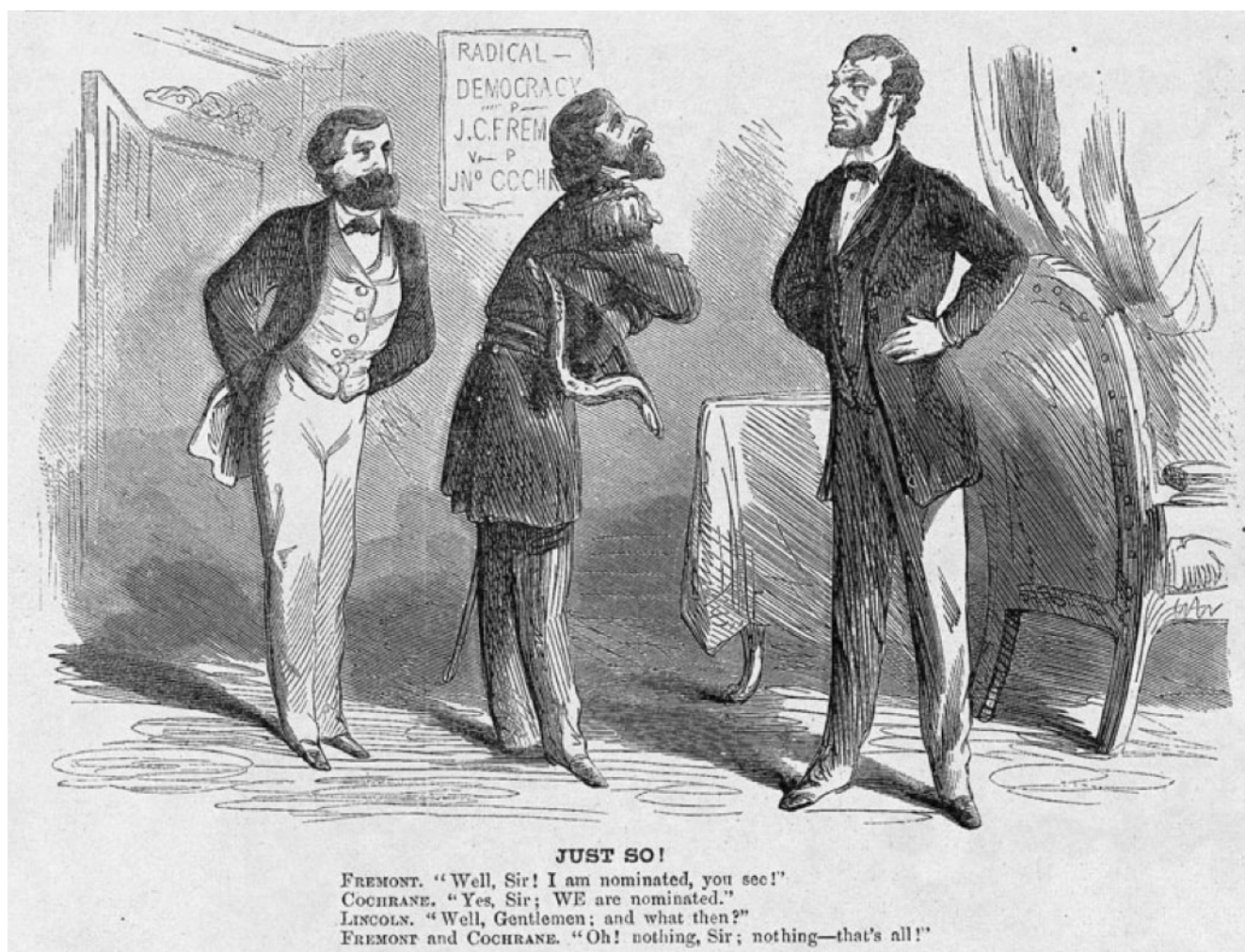


Figure 1: *Harper's Weekly*, June 18, 1864.

²⁰ *New York Herald*, June 6, 1864.

Baltimore

Ahead of the National Union Party convention in Baltimore in early June, radicals and conservatives prepared for a test of strength. While harmonious when facing their Democratic opponents, internally they had spent three years vying for the soul of the party. Military events and fierce advocacy had propelled the radicals' great issue – emancipation – into debate and then reality. But organizationally, the conservatives had generally controlled policy and messaging. In states like Pennsylvania, Ohio, and California, centrists crowded out their radical colleagues as they welcomed swing voters and War Democrats into Union Party coalitions. Testament to this phenomenon, Michael F. Holt has found that, by 1863, 80.4% of congressional races registered as Union against Democrat, not Republican against Democrat. In 1864, the figure rose to 83%. The convening of a National Union Party represented the culmination of this process.²¹

The decision to abandon the Republican label seems to have happened organically, following the example of the states. Former Ohio governor, William Dennison Jr., stressed that the condition of the nation had “compelled the formation of substantially new political organizations; hence the origin of the Union party.” At least one governor, Addison C. Gibbs of Oregon, urged Lincoln directly to adopt the Union Party banner. Oregon's politics followed a similar pattern to California's and Gibbs explained to Lincoln that governance on the Pacific Coast hinged on an alliance of Republicans and Douglas Democrats under a “Union” label. The governor warned that a “Republican” presidential ticket would bring disaster. In that case, Gibbs suggested, “we may learn when it is too late that there is something in a name.” The fact that they christened themselves the *National* Union Party is telling of

²¹ Michael F. Holt, “A Moving Target: President Lincoln Confronts a Two-Party System Still in the Making,” (Paper presented at the Annual Symposium of the Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, IL, February 2004), 2.

how Lincoln's organizers acknowledged that they adopted a proven formula already existing across the states.²²

Proceedings in Baltimore demonstrated radicals' influence but the ultimate ascendancy of the moderates and conservatives. Although disgruntled with the president, radicals acknowledged the president's past contributions and his wide popularity. The cartoon from the *New York Illustrated News* (Figure 2) captures the sense that while many Unionists – from Anna Dickinson to James Gordon Bennett – looked for alternatives, they struggled to find anyone capable of filling Lincoln's boots. Above all, the possibility that Ulysses S. Grant might be on the verge of a decisive breakthrough in Virginia ensured that no real doubt existed over the president's renomination. The long summer would change these calculations, but, for now, disagreements focused on Lincoln's running mate and on whether delegates from the rebel states would receive a voice and a vote.

The very opening of the convention signaled that the radicals found themselves outnumbered. Robert J. Breckinridge, a former Whig slaveholder from Kentucky, was made temporary chair and announced to the audience that “as a Union Party I will follow you to the ends of the earth, and to the gates of death. But as an abolition party – as a Republican party – as a Whig party – as a Democratic party – as an American party, I will not follow you one foot.” Breckinridge, a recent slaveholder, accepted the end of slavery. But a genuine Union Party had to oversee emancipation to ensure it remained a means rather than an end.²³

²² *Proceedings of the National Union Convention: Held in Baltimore, MD., June 7th and 8th, 1864* (New York: Baker & Godwin, 1864) 26; Addison C. Gibbs to Abraham Lincoln, September 24, 1863, Lincoln Papers. Michael Holt has argued that when Lincoln embraced the Union moniker it reflected his desire to “replace the Republican party with a new bisectonal organization to be called the Union party.” At the least, Lincoln endorsed the ongoing efforts across the North to expand the organizational reach and ideological breadth of the party. Michael F. Holt, “Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Union,” in Michael F. Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 330.

²³ *Proceedings of the National Union Convention: Held in Baltimore, MD., June 7th and 8th, 1864*, 7-8.

The presence and prominence of men like Breckinridge angered radicals who desired a purely Republican organization and tried to prevent the seating and granting of voting rights to delegations from Confederate states. Arguments went back and forth but the convention eventually seated delegations from all states except South Carolina, and granted voting rights to those from Tennessee, Louisiana, and Arkansas – the three states where Lincoln’s reconstructed governments had advanced the furthest. Radicals would have liked to use the platform to articulate the need for a more thorough reconstruction. But, as Alexander K. McClure – a Pennsylvania newspaperman, politician, and extremely close Curtin ally – remembered, the majority at the convention stood “in favor of various shades of generous methods to accomplish reconciliation and reunion.” Reconstruction appeared nowhere in the platform and the granting of voting rights to states undergoing reconstruction alongside the placement of a Tennessean Andrew Johnson on the ticket, represented a powerful symbolic victory for President Lincoln.²⁴

²⁴ Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Winston, 1905) II: 145.



Figure 2: *New York Illustrated News*, March 5, 1864.

The decision to replace New Englander Hannibal Hamlin with Andrew Johnson as Lincoln's vice-president made perfect sense to anyone who had observed state politics during the previous three years. Johnson had drawn large crowds on a speaking tour in 1863 that took in Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Columbus, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, New York City, Baltimore, and Washington DC. In the wake of his vice-presidential nomination, speaking requests poured in from northern states. Organizers in Ohio promised "no name in the nation" could better rouse their state, Schuyler Colfax vowed that "no one man living could do us more good" in Indiana and Illinois promised "an additional attendance of at least twenty thousand" should Johnson headline their rally. National Committee

Chairman and *New York Times* editor, Henry J. Raymond, urged Johnson to appear in key swing states and to send at least one speech to “have it printed and spread broad cast all over the country.”²⁵

Johnson’s rhetoric mirrored that of Union governors and symbolized the popularity of the national political centrism. Johnson explained his support based on patriotism not policy. All controversial policies served temporary “military necessity.” On emancipation, Johnson had celebrated, in 1861, the North’s unwillingness “to make war upon any peculiar institution of the South.” In 1863, he defended Lincoln’s emancipation proclamation by saying that “I am for the Government of my fathers with negroes. I am for it without negroes. Before I would see this Government destroyed I would see every negro back in Africa, and Africa disintegrated and blotted out of space.” By 1864, Johnson supported the proposed thirteenth amendment because “experience has demonstrated its [slavery’s] incompatibility with free and republican governments.” Only this trajectory could reconcile emancipation to the nation’s conservatives. A leading Republican from Maine, Woodbury Davis, urged Governor John Andrew to work against Johnson because, while he acknowledged the Tennessean to be “opposed to slavery,” he was also unequivocally “for a government of white men.” Davis’s assessment captured why Johnson connected with so many white northerners.²⁶

Lincoln wanted Johnson on the ticket precisely because of what he demonstrated about the National Union Party. Pennsylvanian Alexander McClure wrote after the war that Lincoln instructed him to work for Johnson’s nomination, which the president wanted because it would “desectionalize

²⁵ Leroy P. Graf and Ralph W. Haskins, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson: Volume 6: 1862-1864* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1983), 148-162, 165-166, 168-174, 175-194, 200-205; Leroy P. Graf, ed., *The Papers of Andrew Johnson: Volume 7: 1864-1865* (Knoxville, The University of Tennessee Press, 1986), 58, 60, 110, 113, 152, 153, 163, 98.

²⁶ As Matt Speiser has argued, Johnson embodied the “Republican Party’s transformation between 1860 and 1864;” Matt Speiser, “The Ticket’s Other Half: How and Why Andrew Johnson Received the 1864 Vice Presidential Nomination,” *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 65 (Spring 2006): 43. Woodbury Davis to John Andrew, May 24, 1864, Box 13, Folder 17, John A. Andrew Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts (hereafter, Andrew Papers, MHS).

the Republican party” and meet the “strong political necessity for nominating a distinctive War Democrat not then connected to the Republican party.” McClure’s claims correlate with the fact the two other men most seriously considered to replace Hamlin – Benjamin F. Butler and Daniel S. Dickinson – had, like Johnson, also been Breckinridge Democrats at the start of the war. Appealing across party lines to Democrats formed a central component of Lincoln’s and the Union Party’s strategy and Johnson’s place on the ticket reflected this. Assessing the proceedings at Baltimore, the *New York Herald* - an independent but generally Democratic newspaper with the largest circulation in the nation - observed that the radical agenda had been “turned out of doors.” The assessment rang true even with the thirteenth amendment safely in the platform.²⁷

A Summer to Forget

In the weeks after the Union Party convention, the North digested the indecisive and bloody news from the Overland campaign. Instead of a battle every few months, battles came every few days. Grant suffered approximately 65,000 casualties, 39 percent of his army. The Confederate Army hurt more but Richmond did not fall and Sherman remained outside Atlanta. Northern morale plummeted and tensions between Congress and the White House rose with the summer heat.²⁸

The first flashpoint came with Lincoln’s pocket veto of Congress’ plan for reconstruction, the Wade-Davis bill, passed at the start of July. This bill dictated that former Confederate states could only establish new governments once 50% of the population had sworn an ironclad oath promising not just future loyalty, but denying past support of the Confederacy. The bill mandated that new state constitutions would have to ban slavery. To secure a majority in Congress, managers had shorn the bill of many of its more radical components such as black suffrage. The bill would most effectively have delayed reconstruction until after the war and placed the process in congressional hands. Lincoln

²⁷ McClure, *Old Time Notes*, 2:137-143; *New York Herald*, June 9, 1864. Matt Speiser conclusively settled the debate about Lincoln’s input. Matt Speiser, “The Ticket’s Other Half.”

²⁸ Margaret E. Wagner, Gary W. Gallagher, and Paul Finkelman, eds., *The Library of Congress Civil War Desk Reference* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 304.

received the bill only hours before the end of the legislative session and declined to add his signature, effectively vetoing it.

Lincoln rejected the Wade-Davis bill for reasons of practicality and principle. The president, unsurprisingly, did not wish to delay reconstruction until after Confederate military defeat, when his war powers would no longer be in effect. As well as ceding control of the process, this would abandon the fledgling southern governments that he believed helped to win the war in the present. In principle, Congress' proposals hinged on the belief, which Lincoln never shared, that secession robbed states of their constitutional rights. Specifically, the bill repudiated the longstanding political orthodoxy that Congress did not possess the power to interfere with slavery in the states. While Congress' bill mandated emancipation, Lincoln's proclamation only incentivized voluntary compliance. Lincoln's veto helped him restrain radical proposals and provide support for the thirteenth amendment, which would achieve permanent emancipation while lessening the likelihood of more extreme measures. As Christian G. Samito has written, the thirteenth amendment would "help to preserve federalism by precluding more radical proposals." But, for the amendment to become law, several Confederate states would have to approve it. This furthered Lincoln's opposition to the Wade-Davis Bill which would delay the return of rebel states to the Union and, therefore, the ratification of the thirteenth amendment. Radicals fumed at Lincoln's actions.²⁹

To compound Lincoln's strained relations with radicals, a hair-brained peace scheme damaged the president's reputation with conservatives. Reflecting the despair of the northern population, Horace Greeley, the radical but unpredictable editor of the New York *Herald Tribune*, pressed Lincoln to meet supposed Confederate peace negotiators who appeared at Niagara claiming authority from Jefferson Davis. Lincoln doubted the messengers' credentials but decided to try and elicit an admission that the

²⁹ Christian G. Samito, *Lincoln and the Thirteenth Amendment* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), 62. The general discussion of Lincoln's actions and motivations here draws on Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863-1869* (New York: Norton, 1974), 72-99 and Rodrigue, *Lincoln and Reconstruction*.

Confederacy would consider no peace without independence. But rather than wait for their terms, Lincoln erred in writing a letter, subsequently published by the sham negotiators, that laid out his own conditions. In these, Lincoln included peace, restoration of the Union, and “the abandonment of slavery.” This document, which became known as the “To Whom It May Concern” or “Niagara” letter, would haunt Lincoln for the rest of the year.

The response to the letter reveals how many northerners still considered it vitally important that emancipation remained subordinate to Union. This letter seemed to raise emancipation to the same plane by suggesting that Lincoln would not allow the fighting to stop until southern states had completely dismantled the institution of slavery. In an embarrassing development, Ohio’s Union Party lieutenant governor, Charles Anderson, refused to join Governor Brough in campaigning for Lincoln because of the Niagara terms. In a lengthy and embittered letter, Anderson remembered the president’s famous words to Greeley explaining that all his actions served to “save the Union and neither to save or destroy slavery.” Anderson felt bereft that “mad abolitionists,” had now “influenced Mr. Lincoln,” and considered that the president might as well “attempt to row up the Niagara in a particularly frail birch canoe, with a particularly weak feather for a paddle, as to talk...of abolishing slavery ‘as a sine qua non and condition precedent to Re-Union.’” Anderson mused that if the “peace faction” succeeded at Chicago then he would have no option but to vote for Lincoln as the lesser of two evils, but he would not speak for him. A Democratic supporter, Charles Robinson, wrote that the letter “takes us War Democrats clear off our feet, leaving us no ground to stand upon.”³⁰

Lincoln’s misstep left his party vulnerable on the question voters cared most about throughout the war: which candidate, or party, was most able and willing to restore the Union. Lincoln knew that his letter changed nothing practically since Jefferson Davis would never settle for anything less than

³⁰ Michael Vorenberg, “The Deformed Child’: Slavery and the Election of 1864,” *Civil War History* 47 (September, 2001): 254, 242; Charles Anderson to Chairman of the State Union Executive Committee, August 22, 1864, Box 20, Richard Clough Anderson Papers, HL; Rodrigue, *Lincoln and Reconstruction*, 91.

independence. But Democrats helped spread the belief that the Confederates might accept reunion and many northerners simply objected to the principle of appearing to place emancipation alongside Union. Lincoln regretted the wording of his letter not because he wished to backtrack on slavery, but because he wished to make clear that the bloodshed would end immediately when the rebels surrendered. The emancipation process would continue via amendment and through his restored governments. For once, Lincoln had failed to consider carefully the implications of the words he used and Democrats delighted in the president's self-inflicted plight. One of several cartoons to reference the Niagara "To Whom it May Concern" letter, Figure 3 portrays the president as a sportsman unable to shoot the small and scrawny "CSA" bird while falling backwards under the recoil from his own gun, marked "To Whom it May Concern."

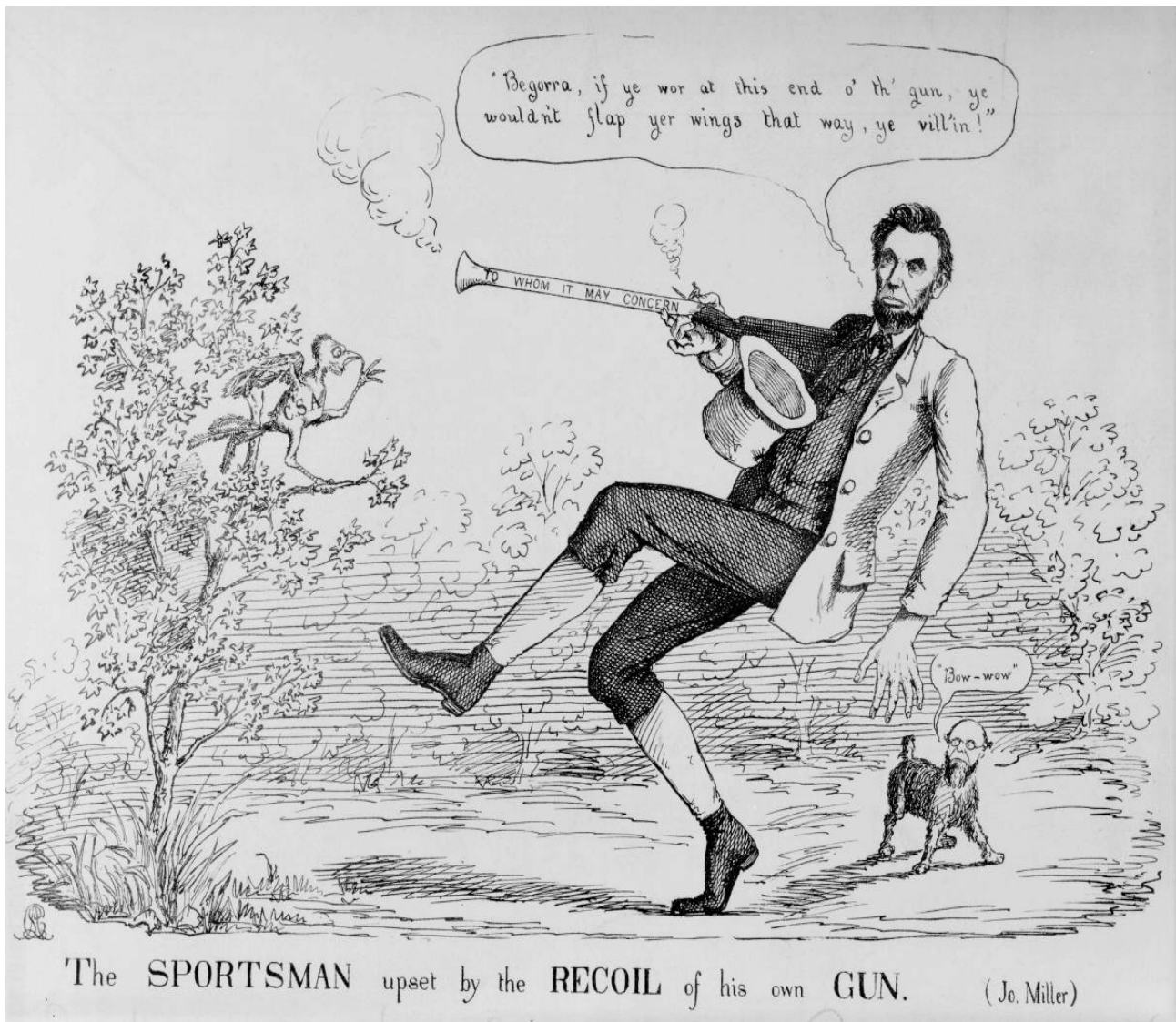


Figure 3: Library of Congress, 1864.

In early August, disgruntled radicals released a further shot across the presidential bow in the form of the Wade-Davis manifesto. The document issued by Senators Benjamin F. Wade and Henry Winter Davis did not represent all radicals, let alone all Republicans in Congress. The venom of the document clearly came from the personal slight the authors of the Wade-Davis Bill felt. Nonetheless, in accusing Lincoln of “dictatorial usurpations” and claiming that “a more studied outrage on the legislative authority of the people has never been perpetrated,” the document indicated a severe rift between Lincoln and radicals within his party.

With no good news from the front and fallout from the Niagara letter festering, Lincoln and his allies despaired. Henry Raymond, Union Party chairman and editor of the *New York Times*, wrote the president on August 22 that the tide stood against them everywhere. He pointed to the lack of military success and the Niagara letter. Raymond stated that “the suspicion is widely diffused that we can have peace with Union if we would,” but “we are not to have peace in any event under this Administration until Slavery is abandoned.” Raymond urged the sending of peace commissioners to Richmond on the sole basis of returning allegiance to the Union and Constitution. Raymond believed that if Davis could be made to reject these terms, it would “reconcile public sentiment to the War, the draft, & the tax as inevitable necessities,” and ensure victory in November. Lincoln initially proposed sending Raymond to Richmond. He also drafted a public letter stating that the war “will be carried on so long as I am President for the sole purpose of restoring the Union.” On reflection, Lincoln dropped the Raymond plan and Frederick Douglass helped convince Lincoln not to send the letter. For now, Lincoln suffered. On August 23, a jubilant Democrat wrote New York Governor Horatio Seymour that “Lincoln may twist and struggle as he pleases...[but] he cannot get out of the Niagara net.” The same day, a week before the Democratic convention, President Lincoln penned his famous blind memorandum predicting his defeat in November.³¹

With the administration mired in despondency, Governor Andrew and the radical wing of the party looked ever more seriously at plans to replace President Lincoln. Numerous reports reached Lincoln over the late summer of Andrew’s agents sounding out Republicans across the North about their willingness to jettison the president. Andrew even reached out, astonishingly, to Governor

³¹ Henry Raymond to Abraham Lincoln, August 22, 1864, Lincoln Papers; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 767-769; Vorenberg, “The Deformed Child,” 250. In July, Lincoln had also given passed to James F. Jaquess and James Gilmore to travel through the lines to Richmond to discuss, unofficially, peace terms with senior Confederate officials. Remarkably they managed to meet with Jefferson Davis and extracted from him the pledge that only independence would satisfy the Confederates. Accounts of the meeting were published in the *Atlantic monthly* but Democrats continued to claim that Davis’ position could not be otherwise while Lincoln placed emancipation as a roadblock to peace.

Seymour. In mid-August, Andrew suggested meeting for a “frank and confidential conversation.”

While acknowledging they differed widely on policy, Andrew hoped they might find ways to “strengthen the arms of our National power...warm and invigorate the patriotism of the people.”

Seymour visited Andrew in Boston but, unsurprisingly, they failed to agree on a mutually acceptable way forward. The very existence of the meeting speaks volumes of how low morale fell in August. In terms of assessing partisan debate, it also reveals that, when not politicking, many Republicans like Andrew clearly recognized Democrats like Seymour as representing a *loyal* opposition.³²

Military stalemate represented the biggest threat to Lincoln’s re-election but these internal divisions exacerbated the problem. The party stood unified behind the thirteenth amendment, but when the House of Representatives voted on it a week after the convention, it fell thirteen votes short of the required two-thirds majority. With Lincoln and the radicals blocking each other’s proposals for reconstruction, the party could offer voters little certainty on either the terms of reunion for former Confederate states or the future status of slavery. On the eve of the Democratic convention, Lincoln’s prospects looked bleak.

Chicago

Despair across the North posed equally great dangers for the Democratic Party. In a cartoon from July (Figure 4), *Harper’s Weekly* foresaw that the nadir in northern morale would empower Peace Democrats to demand concessions from their colleagues and the presumptive nominee, George McClellan. In the cartoon, Fernando Wood, former mayor of New York and notorious Peace Democrat, stands ready to rip apart his “Democratic Party” jacket if a pleading McClellan will not “say peace.” In early August, conservative Republican Thurlow Weed claimed that senior War Democrats like Samuel Barlow feared that extreme peace advocates within the Democratic party might even help

³² Henry Greenleaf Pearson, *The Life of John A. Andrew, Governor of Massachusetts, 1861-1865* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and company, 1904), 2:156-57.

precipitate outbreaks of rioting in five mid-western states in protest at the forthcoming draft. Weed reported that this “so alarm[ed] the high Democracy” that they arranged a meeting “to consider whether if Mr. Lincoln would accept and avow the Crittenden Resolution, declaring the objects of the war, they would not come out for his re-election. McClellan was consulted and approved.” Without accepting this remarkable claim at face value, it shows the effects of war-weariness and peace fever on parties already in flux. War Democrats feared some of their own colleagues to the extent of flirting with conservative Republicans who, in turn, considered pressing their party to abandon emancipation if it could bring peace and unity.³³

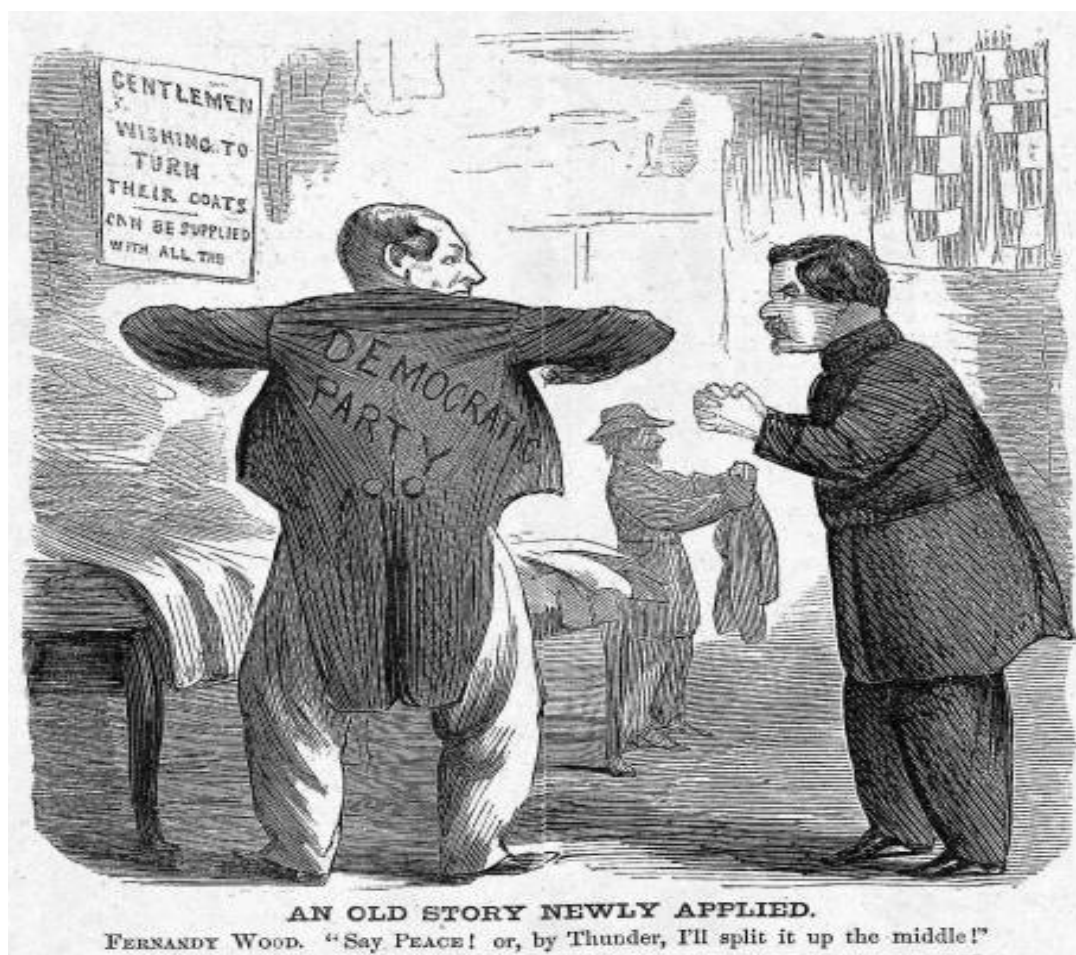


Figure 4: *Harper's Weekly*, July 9, 1864

³³ Thurlow Weed to William Seward, August 10, 1864, Folder 9, Reel 84, Microfilm Edition, *Papers of William Henry Seward* (Woodbridge, CT: Research Publications, 1981). For Weed's general stance, see Glyndon G. Van Deusen, *Thurlow Weed: Wizard of the Lobby* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947). For the Crittenden Resolution, see Chapter 2, above.

War Democrats failed to control their extreme wing at Chicago and suffered the consequences. Horatio Seymour, president of the convention, tried to articulate the awkward Peace and Union compromise that emerged. The New York governor affirmed that there was no man in the convention “who does not love the Union...who does not desire peace...who is not resolved to uphold the great principles of constitutional liberty.” War Democrats prioritized the presidential nomination, which went easily to General George McClellan. With Clement Vallandigham on the platform committee, Peace Democrats secured their objective in the infamous plank stating that “after four years of failure to restore the Union by the experiment of war,” the time had come that “immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities.” More surprisingly, the vice-presidential nomination also went to a Peace Democrat, George H. Pendleton of Ohio. James Guthrie, a Kentucky War Democrat received the most votes in a first ballot that included eight candidates. But with War Democrat votes split, a drawn-out nomination battle loomed that would highlight the split in the party. War Democrat managers, not yet comprehending how their opponents and much of the nation would interpret the platform, risked another concession to the peace men and agreed to Pendleton.

The peace plank needs contextualization. The platform probably sealed the Democrats’ fate but, in the immediate moment, at least some War Democrats believed they had finessed the issue. James Gordon Bennett’s *Herald*, reported on September 1 – before military news arrived from Atlanta - that “The main feature of the Chicago Convention was the utter and final defeat of the Woods, Vallandigham and the other copperhead peace men.” How could the *Herald* make this claim? In full, the “war failure” plank stipulated that a negotiated peace would be attempted “on the basis of the Federal Union of the States.” War Democrats hoped this wording contained the potential damage by making clear that they would accept only peace *and Union*. As Michael Vorenberg has noted, Democrats intended the platform as a retort to Lincoln’s Niagara letter. As Seymour said, “Mr. Lincoln values many things above the Union; we put it first of all” and are willing “to see if Christian charity or

the wisdom of statesmanship may not work out a method to save our country.” In framing the Democrats as supporting *Union by any means* and Lincoln as *Union only with emancipation*, Democrats hoped to have found a loyal formula.³⁴

The bloody hopelessness of that summer led others besides Peace Democrats to mull negotiation. Republicans Horace Greeley and Henry Raymond both suggested overtures to the Confederacy and the independent but Democrat leaning James Gordon Bennett put forth the most extended proposal for an armistice in the pages of the New York *Herald*. Bennett’s plan mirrored an armistice that took place in Europe in the early summer of 1864 during the Second Schleswig War. The salient details consisted in the fact that, after peace talks between Denmark and Prussia failed, war resumed. Bennett repeatedly cited this precedent to argue that Union and Confederate representatives could talk while their armies remained ready to resume immediate hostilities. If a peace based on Union proved elusive, fighting would restart. Bennett’s platform might have proved less damaging.³⁵

This contextualization matters because historians have often seen the issue of peace in black and white, leaving the impression that Republicans never wavered in supporting war and that Democrats advocated peace and disunion. Such judgments do a disservice to the immense burdens war placed on the northern population and the uncertainty people faced when trying to judge the route to reunion. It did not seem impossible that if Confederates believed their gamble for independence looked doomed, they might accept reunion on the Democrats’ less punitive terms rather than fight on and risk

³⁴ *New York Herald*, September 1, 1864; Thomas M. Cook and Thomas W. Knox, eds. *Public Record: Including Speeches, Messages, Proclamations, Official Correspondence, and Other Public Utterances of Horatio Seymour* (New York: I. W. England, 1868), 231-233 [hereafter cited as Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*].

³⁵ Bennett’s plan bore some similarities to a proposal Thurlow Weed put to Lincoln the previous November. Weed suggested a ninety-day armistice in the wake of a military victory during which pardon and amnesty would be offered to all Confederates. If they refused, harsher measures could be adopted by the Union with greater support.

a reconstruction overseen by radical Republicans. Nonetheless, even many disconsolate northerners distrusted the plank adopted at Chicago.

War Democrats failed to ensure their platform stated what would happen should Confederates reject peace and Union. This made it seem that Democrats placed peace alongside, if not above Union. Even former president, James Buchanan, watching events unfold from his estate in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, told a friend that the platform was “rather muddy: Peace would be a great blessing; but it would cost too dear at the expense of the Union.” Democrats had repeated the mistakes of 1863 when they allowed extreme peace men like Vallandigham to secure gubernatorial nominations. This had prompted even Democratic publications, like *Vanity Fair*, to depict Governor Seymour (whose 1862 election they had supported) struggling to ride the “War” and “Peace” Horses to the White House (Figure 5). In 1864, the Union Party supporting *Harper’s Weekly* adopted the same metaphor with added venom. Now McClellan, wearing a woman’s bonnet, balanced precariously between a War Horse and George Pendleton’s Peace Donkey, complete with devil’s tail. These images resonated with an electorate that struggled to believe that peace and war could be pursued simultaneously.³⁶

³⁶ James Buchanan to Lewis Coryell, September 6, 1864, Folder 14, Box 5, Lewis Coryell Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia [repository hereafter HSP].

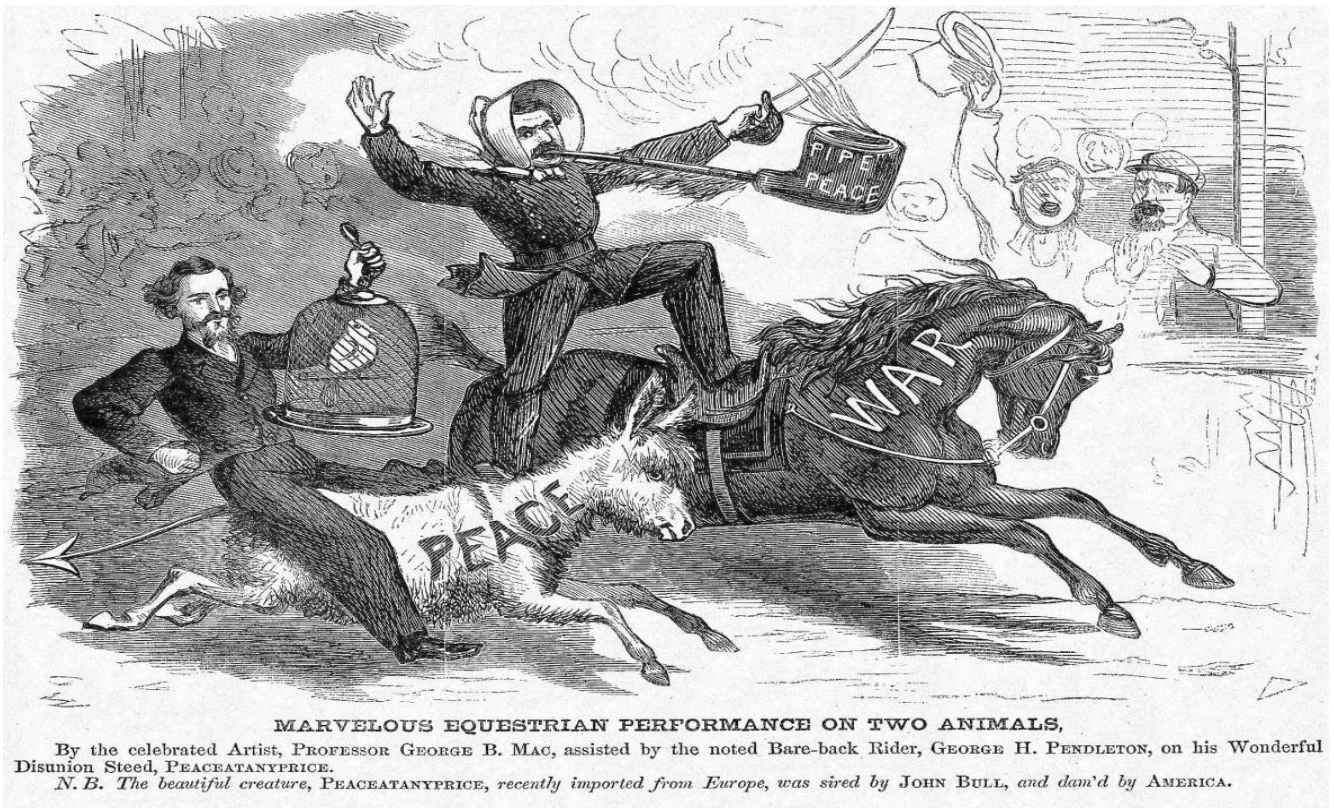


Figure 5: Vanity Fair, June 20, 1863 and Harper's Weekly, October 8, 1864.

Many War Democrats knew the folly of their actions even before improved military news reached the North. Republican newspaper Noah Brooks reported that, as the peace resolution was read, “S.S. Cox clasped his hands in his lap and dropped his head, a picture of despair. August Belmont...looked profoundly sad.” As news seeped out from Chicago, a prominent Boston conservative immediately wrote McClellan that “your election on the platform they have placed you on is impossible.” On September 1, Daniel J. Devlin, a New York Democrat wrote told Samuel Barlow that the platform had “disappointed thousands of wavering Republicans who were ready and anxious to come over to us.” This evidence shows that news from Atlanta tended to exacerbate criticism of the platform rather than creating it. But the upturn in military fortunes certainly made undoing the platform’s damage much more difficult.³⁷

Atlanta

News of the fall of Atlanta on September 3 hit the northern public like the rain that breaks a drought, transforming the political landscape overnight. Suddenly, Union victory seemed not just possible but likely, maybe even imminent. All summer the speculation had been that the Union Party might split apart, now Democrats struggled for cohesion. The *Herald*, previously approving of the convention, performed an astonishing volte-face, decrying the “secession platform” and the nomination of a “practical secessionist” for vice-president. Bennett called for McClellan to damn the Peace Democrats and plot an independent course. If the Democratic convention had met two days later, it is highly unlikely they would have called the war “a failure.”³⁸

War Democrats and undecided conservatives hoped that McClellan’s letter of acceptance might right the party ship by repudiating the platform and the peace men. William Cassidy, an editor of the

³⁷ Silbey, *A Respectable Minority*, 131; George Francis Train to George McClellan, August 31, 1864, included in printed circular in Box 13, Folder 25, Andrew Papers, MHS; Daniel Devlin to Samuel Barlow, September 1, 1864, Box 51, Barlow Papers, HL. David Long makes this point that the platform has been underplayed by historians in relation to Atlanta. Long, *The Jewel of Liberty*, 236.

³⁸ *New York Herald*, September 3, 1864.

Democratic *New York World*, wrote Samuel Barlow on September 5 that the platform – a “horrid piece of patchwork” – had enlivened Republicans but that “the General’s letter of acceptance might set all right again.” Cassidy did not demand an absolute commitment to war, but an explicit statement that negotiations could take place only “on the basis of Union” and “if that is refused the peace must stop.” Cassidy described closely the position Bennett laid out in his armistice proposals. Although he referred to the peace men privately as “fools,” McClellan would not publicly berate them but still put space between him and the platform by adopting something like the Cassidy and Bennet position on negotiation.³⁹

McClellan’s letter demonstrated the basis on which the Democrats fought the rest of the campaign. The general did not take the unequivocal pro-war tone of his famous West Point speech in June, but stated that in any negotiation, the “re-establishment of the Union in all its integrity” must be the “indispensable condition in any settlement.” Until the Confederacy accepted such terms, war would continue. He referenced Lincoln’s Niagara terms by stating “The Union is the one condition of peace,” and obliquely referenced emancipation by calling Union the “sole avowed object” of the war. Figure 6 shows how Democrats believed this to be their trump card with the northern masses: while Lincoln sought “no peace without abolition” and Davis would accept “no peace without separation,” McClellan cared only that the “Union must be preserved at all hazards.”

On reconstruction, McClellan pledged that any rebel state, once returning their allegiance, would be restored immediately with “a full guarantee of all its constitutional rights.” The general also pledged to reverse the excesses of the Lincoln administration by respecting the constitutional rights of the states and the individual. From Boston, news came that some young men “heretofore lukewarm or undecided” had been convinced that the general was “the best man either if we are to negotiate, or

³⁹ William Cassidy to Samuel Barlow, September 5, 1864, Box 50, Barlow Papers, HL; Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan’s War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for Union* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 383.

fight.” If the Democrats had enshrined McClellan’s letter as their platform, they might have fared better before the electorate. Considering Chicago, the letter only went so far.⁴⁰

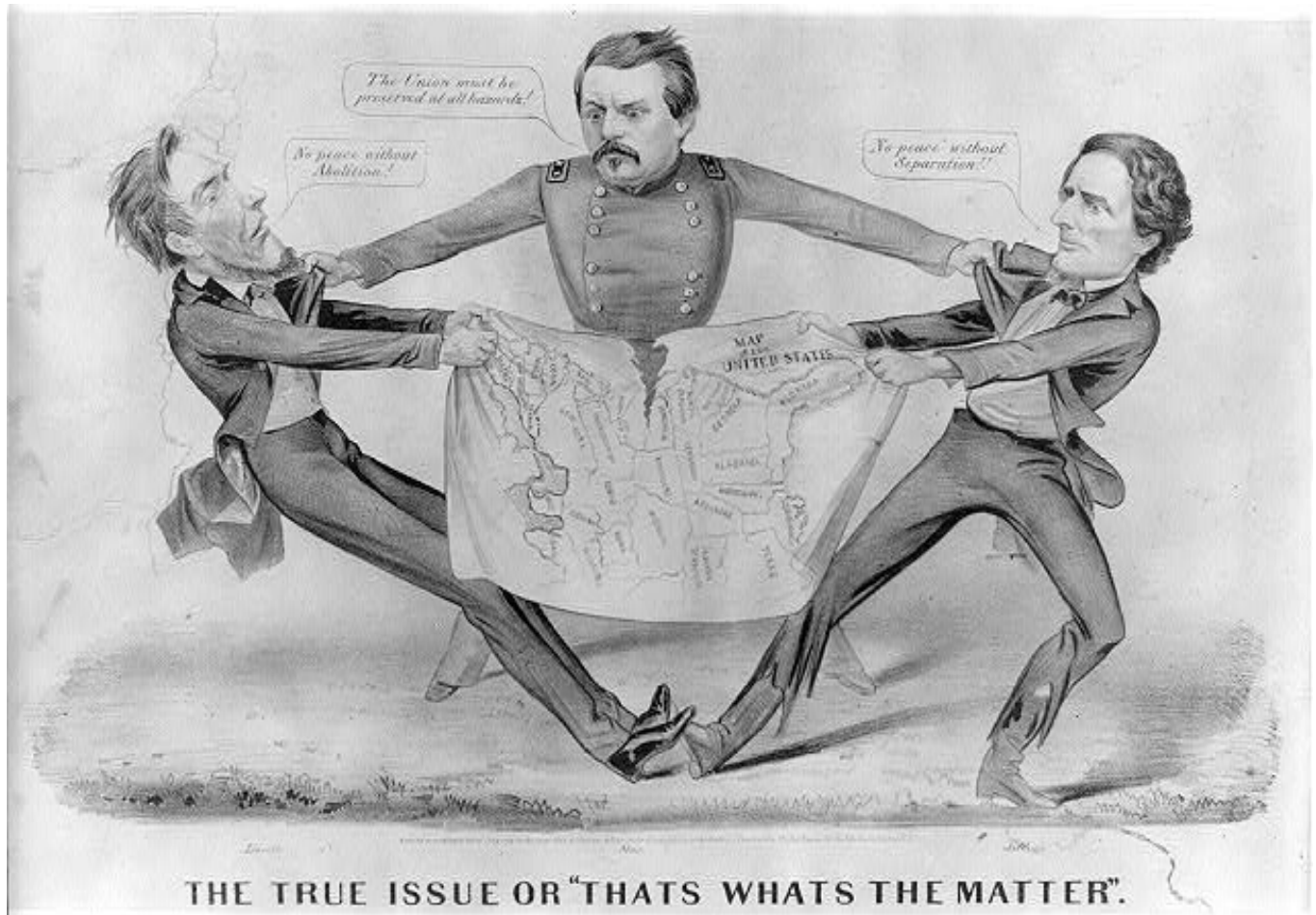


Figure 6: New York, Currier & Ives. *The true issue or "That's what's the matter"*. United States, ca. 1864.

McClellan’s letter revived Democratic energies but had mixed success among conservatives outside of the party. Maria Lydig Daly, a New York War Democrat, reported that “McClellan’s letter made a great commotion, frightening the Republicans, dissatisfying the peace men, but contenting the moderate people.” Democrats gained a further boost when Millard Fillmore, the former Whig president and weather vane for many conservatives, let it be known that he supported McClellan. But many other

⁴⁰ McClellan acceptance letter in Aaron Sheehan-Dean, ed., *The Civil War: The Final Year Told By Those Who Lived It* (New York: Library of America, 2014), 377-380. McClellan held no strong views on slavery and exhibited prejudice but also occasionally sympathy towards slaves. For an extended discussion, see Neely, *Lincoln and the War Democrats*, 124-135. McClellan’s West Point oration had taken a strong conservative pro-war stance. War Democrats had distributed it to delegates at the convention in Chicago; David Alan Johnson, *Decided on the Battlefield: Grant, Sherman, Lincoln and the Election of 1864* (New York: Prometheus, 2012).

old conservative Whigs could not stomach the platform. Orville Hickman Browning, Lincoln's long-time friend from Illinois, expressed the desires of many conservatives when he stated his hopes for a new "party between extremes, composed of the true patriots of all parties, which would have before it, as its sole purpose, the suppression of the rebellion." While they flirted with McClellan's candidacy, conservatives like Browning and Massachusetts's Edward Everett would ultimately judge Lincoln's Union Party to be the better conservative option of two imperfect choices in 1864.⁴¹

In the wake of Atlanta's fall and McClellan's letter, the campaign settled into patterns that stayed largely consistent through election day. Both parties steered away from the most noticeable features of their respective platforms. Campaign songs and cartoons emphasized this point. Few Democratic materials acknowledged the peace plank and few Union ones included the emancipation amendment. Suiting their core purpose to rally the faithful, songs and cartoons focused on biting stereotypes of their opponents. Democrats crowed that abolitionists or "nigger lovers" would no longer guide the ship of state and skewered Lincoln for making jokes while sending soldiers to die.⁴² Union Party backers took every opportunity to paint McClellan as the Confederacy's last hope and emphasized that the only route to peace went through military victory and a famous cartoon (Figure 7) depicted Union generals as the only "true peace commissioners." *Harper's Weekly* published instructions for a parlor game where contestants had to guess whether a quotation came from a Copperhead or a Confederate. In their very different ways, both parties worked to convince voters that they *could* win the war, and that they *would* do so as soon as possible.⁴³

⁴¹ Maria Lydig Daly, *Diary of a Union Lady, 1861-1865*, ed. Harold Earl Hammond (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1962), 302; Henry Joseph Gardner to Samuel Barlow, September 16, 1864, Box 51, Barlow Papers, HL. For the support McClellan generated among New England conservatives, see chapter 3, above. For a more detailed discussion of the response of these northern conservatives, see Harris, "Conservatives and the Election of 1864." Fillmore Letter endorsing McClellan printed in *Sonoma Democrat* (Sonoma, CA), November 5, 1864.

⁴² For discussion of how Democrats attacked Lincoln's humour, see Richard Carwardine, *Lincoln's Sense of Humor* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2017).

⁴³ Based on reading the complete sample of songs and pamphlets related to the 1864 election accessible through the Library of Congress here - <https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/elections/election1864.html>

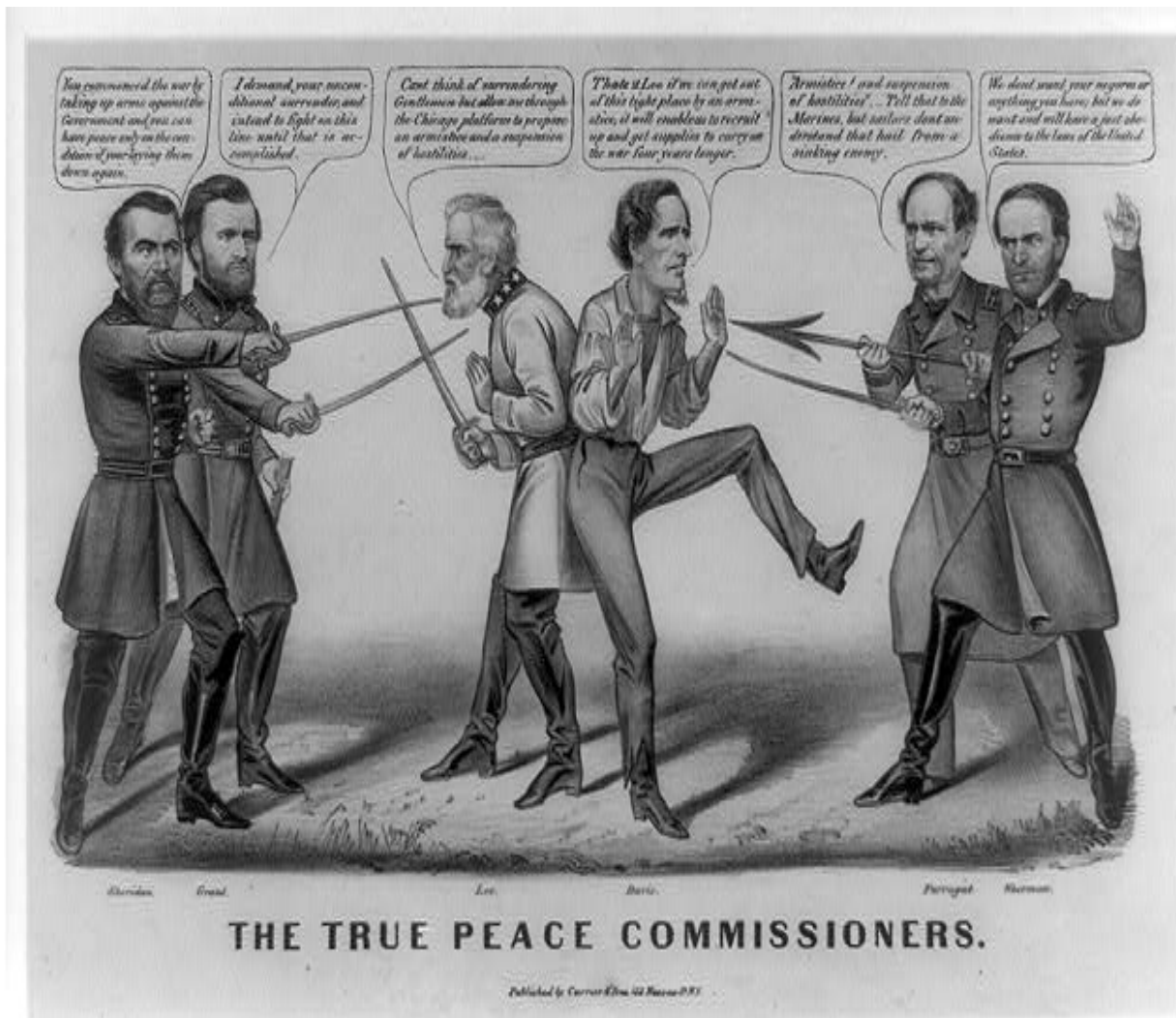


Figure 7: Currier & Ives, New York, 1864. Retrieved from Library of Congress.

Fall Campaigns

In early September, Union governors helped end radical plans to call a new convention to replace Lincoln. On the same day news began to filter in from Atlanta, Horace Greeley, Theodore Tilton, and Parke Godwin – abolitionist editors in New York – sent letters to all governors asking them three questions: did they think Lincoln could win? Did they think he could win their state? And would they support Lincoln’s replacement with an alternative candidate? Replies quickly filtered in and offered a near unanimous judgement in Lincoln’s favor. Even Governor Andrew concurred although he judged Lincoln “essentially lacking in the quality of leadership.” Only Curtin judged that his state

hung in the balance and might support McClellan if he denounced the platform. Again, timing mattered. If governors had received these letters two weeks earlier, they would all likely have been far less optimistic about Lincoln's chances. As it was, Tilton and Greeley accepted the near consensus and used their newspapers, the *Independent* and the *Tribune*, to argue that all Republican forces must now unite behind Lincoln. John C. Frémont officially abandoned his candidacy and the president rewarded radicals for their show of unity by accepting the resignation of their conservative arch-nemesis, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair.⁴⁴

Radical Republican discontent had come from a Unionism as earnest as Lincoln's. Men like Andrew genuinely believed that, in catering to conservatives over a host of issues, Lincoln endangered the inseparable causes of Union and emancipation. But now clear on the Democratic alternative, Tilton spoke for many when he said that "we cannot afford to run the risk, by division, of giving victory to the outrageous principles put forth at Chicago." Wendell Phillips stood almost alone in his unwillingness to advocate for Lincoln. He used the *Liberator* to argue that "we have always said the Union is nothing weighed against justice. Why change?"⁴⁵

With radicals back inside the tent, Lincoln and his advocates tried to close the rift with conservatives opened by the Niagara letter. In early September, Secretary of State Seward gave a speech in Auburn, New York, subsequently circulated as "Union Campaign Document No.1," in which he gave an "explicit" answer that should the rebels surrender, he had no doubt they would receive "an answer prompted by a desire for peace, with the maintenance of the Union." Conservatives immediately hailed the speech while radicals and abolitionists disparaged it. On the very same day, Governor Brough gave a speech in Ohio – also circulated as a pamphlet – that amplified Seward's

⁴⁴ John A. Andrew to Theodore Tilton, Horace Greeley, and Parke Goodwin, September 3, 1864, Theodore Tilton Letters, New York Historical Society, New York, NY [repository hereafter NYHS]; Theodore Tilton to John A. Andrew, September 5, 1864, Box 14, Folder 1, Roll 20, Andrew Papers, MHS. The full collection of gubernatorial replies are contained in the Theodore Tilton Letters, NYHS.

⁴⁵ Theodore Tilton to John A. Andrew, September 5, 1864, Box 14, Folder 1, Roll 20, Andrew Papers, MHS; *The Liberator*, 28 October, 1864.

message. Brough said that he “would not have gone quite so far as the President did in his ‘To whom it may concern,’” and promised that the rebels can have peace “any time, by laying down their arms, and yielding obedience to the laws and the Constitution.” Brough would repeat this message in speeches given in New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio during September and October. The opening issue of a new Lincoln campaign newspaper in Philadelphia – *The Dial* – stated bluntly that “Mr. Lincoln has time and again declared that the moment the rebels lay down their arms the war will be at an end.” A campaign song entitled “To Whom It May Concern,” even emerged to carry the message to the masses.⁴⁶ Emancipation mattered, but Lincoln never intended it to delay peace and Union. After four years of fighting, any sense that a commitment to black freedom was delaying the Union’s restoration could be electorally disastrous.⁴⁷

The National Union Party, unsurprisingly, put Union front and center in their campaign. Orators stressed the legacy of the founders, the economic and social mobility the nation offered, and particularly that they fought for self-government. In a world where monarchies predominated, northerners should unite around democracy and demonstrate to the world the viability and vitality of their system of governance. Such sentiments abounded in private diaries and public speeches.

Emancipation took a back seat, featuring prominently in only 28 of 213 pamphlets and broadsides. James G. Blaine, a Republican congressman from Maine, explained that “the struggle for the presidency demanded harmony and by common consent agitation on the [emancipation] question was abandoned.” Plenty of white and black abolitionists noticed this. Theodore Tilton lamented that

⁴⁶ William H. Seward, *Issues of the Conflict—Terms of Peace* (Washington, D.C.: McGill & Witherow, 1864), 7-8; For positive responses to Seward’s speech from conservatives, see Lucius Fairchild to Abraham Lincoln, September 13, 1864, Lincoln Papers online. For radical criticism, see *The Liberator*, October 28, 1864; John Brough, *The Defenders of the Country and Its Enemies: The Chicago Platform Dissected* (Cincinnati: Gazette Co. Printing House, 1864), 5; *The Dial*, September 8, 1864; Carl Lazare and Dexter Smith, “To Whom It May Concern,” G. D. Russell & Company, Boston, 1864. Notated Music. Retrieved from www.loc.gov.

⁴⁷ The president’s own December 1864 message to Congress would match his surrogates almost word for word. Lincoln stated that Confederates could “at any moment, have peace simply by laying down their arms and submitting to the national authority under the Constitution.” Gienapp, *This Fiery Trial*, 212-216.

“so many voices speaking for the Union cause, are silent on this question [slavery].” After the “National Convention of Colored Men,” held at Syracuse, New York, in October 1864, organizers printed and circulated ten thousand copies of the convention’s “Address to the People of the United States” written by Frederick Douglass. The address endorsed neither candidate since “the Democratic Party belongs to slavery” and the “Republican Party is largely under the power of prejudice against color.” Douglass and most black leaders urged voters to back Lincoln, but, as historian Larry E. Nelson put it, they did so “as the lesser of two evils.”⁴⁸

White northerners had come an enormous distance in four years but wanted an electoral banner that reflected the still predominant reasons for which they had first gone to war. A song entitled “How the Soldiers Talk,” printed in August in *Harper’s Weekly*, captured this sentiment:

*The negro—free or slave
We care no pin about,
But for the flag our fathers gave We mean to fight it out;
And while that banner brave
One rebel rag shall flout,
With volleying arm and flashing glaive By Heaven ! we fight it out !*

The level of prejudice and Union priorities of the electorate made it prudent to downplay race and slavery, especially when the party platform already cemented a commitment to emancipation.⁴⁹

Still, some governors pressed the emancipation issue. Governor Andrew helped secure equal pay for African-American soldiers in 1864 and always hailed the utility and morality of universal freedom. In far off California, Governor Frederick F. Low proved more willing than most to express similar views on the stump.⁵⁰ To an election rally of 8,000 in Sacramento’s Union Park, Governor Low

⁴⁸ Smith referenced and Blaine quoted in Philip Shaw Paludan, “War is the Health of the Party: Republicans in the American Civil War,” in Engs and Miller, eds., *The Birth of the Grand Old Party*, 65; Tilton speech reported in *The Liberator*, 28 October, 1864; Larry E. Nelson, “Black Leaders and the Presidential Election of 1864,” *The Journal of Negro History* 63 (January 1978):52-53, 55.

⁴⁹ “How the Soldiers Talk,” *Harper’s Weekly*, August 20, 1864.

⁵⁰ Privately, Low also intervened in local politics to secure congressional nominees that he could trust to vote the right way “when the great struggle comes” to decide whether “Negro slavery in the United States should by law cease to exist.” Frederick Low to County Committee of Santa Clara County, June 27, 1864, Governor’s

ended by looking forward to “the destruction of human slavery,” and the “dawn of universal freedom throughout the world.” The fact that Californians had been, as Governor Low acknowledged regularly, “so free from the trials and tribulations of this war” may have made it easier for Californians to adjust to racial upheavals. But the rapid post-war collapse of California’s dominant Union Party over the Reconstruction amendments suggests that Low may have been ahead of his constituents.⁵¹

An outlier on emancipation, Governor Low employed a common tactic in equating Democratic support with treason. For some this reflected genuine conviction, for many it signified an electoral strategy. Writing to a Democratic office-seeker, Governor Low laid out his doubt that “any man who is truly and ‘practically’ loyal can affiliate with such a party” since by doing so he “indirectly (whether he thinks so or not) give[s] aid and comfort to the Enemy.” The governor concluded that nobody with a “shadow of disloyalty” would receive “any appointment from me.” Low was unusual in castigating all Democrats. He probably did so because California’s Union Party had absorbed so many War Democrats already, leaving few potential converts. Most Union Party speakers differentiated among their opponents.⁵²

The best means to tarnish the loyalty of *all* Democrats came through association. As Governor John Brough stated, how could loyal War Democrats align themselves with “the most accursed band of traitors this side of Richmond”?⁵³ The attempt to shame War Democrats by damning their colleagues found its apogee in a report issued in October by Judge Advocate General Joseph Holt. Holt’s report concerned secret societies, all associated with the peace wing of the Democratic Party, that he claimed constituted a “Western Conspiracy in aid of the Southern Rebellion.” Holt’s report is better viewed as a campaign document than a serious estimation of pro-Confederate mobilization in the North.

Letterbooks on Microfilm, Roll 1, MF 3:6 (34), California State Archives [repository hereafter CSA]; *Daily Alta California*, June 10, 1864; William E. Bigglestone, “Lincoln and the Northern California Press, 1860-1865,” (Master’s Thesis, Stanford, 1951), 79-87.

⁵¹ *Sacramento Daily Union*, November 4, 1864.

⁵² Frederick Low to J.D. Redmond, June 3, 1864, Governor’s Letterbooks, CSA.

⁵³ John Brough, *The Defenders of the Country*, 9.

Historian William A. Blair has called it “hair-raising” with good reason. Holt suggested that the secret societies of the Order of American Knights and Sons of Liberty might have 800,000 to 1,000,000 members before settling on the figure of 500,000 as a “tolerably faithful view...of its true force.” Of this number, the report claimed that 340,000 men were “capable of being mobilized for effective service.” Lincoln, however, doubted repeatedly the reports from the Mid-West. The biggest problem with Holt’s report is that – for a pro-Confederate movement with over 300,000 men ready for service – they achieved very little.⁵⁴

The activities attributed to pro-Confederate organizations involved small scale instances of discouraging enlistment, helping men avoid the draft, or providing aid to deserters. Such actions constituted a serious problem but it is a stretch to see them as treasonous. The United States had never drafted men to serve before. No consensus existed in nineteenth-century America about whether men had a duty to fight and many communities attached no stigma to those who wished to sit out the war. In addition, focused studies of Democratic communities in Pennsylvania have revealed that draft resistance often had more to do with long-standing class disputes than anti-war or pro-Confederate sentiment. Historians should be wary of conflating anti-draft or even anti-enlistment activity with pro-Confederate sentiments and treason. A minority of Peace Democrats probably genuinely sought to aid the Confederacy, but on nothing like the scale alleged by Holt.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 214; *Report of the Judge Advocate General on the "Order of American Knights," or "Sons of Liberty": A Western Conspiracy in aid of the Southern Rebellion* (Washington, D.C.: Chronicle Print, 1864), 5-6, 10, accessed through HathiTrust Digital Library, <http://babel.hathitrust.org>. Stephen Towne’s recent work has supported these claims by showing that the governors of Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois deemed credible many threats from pro-Confederate organizations linked to the Democratic Party’s Peace wing. Towne adds to Jennifer Weber’s claim that the Copperheads posed a clear danger to the Union war effort. Stephen Towne, *Surveillance and Spies: Exposing Confederate Conspiracies in America’s Heartland* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015).

⁵⁵ For debates around obligations of service, see Joan E. Cashin, “Deserters, Civilians, and Draft Resistance in the North,” in Joan E. Cashin, ed., *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 262-286 and J. Matthew Gallman, *Defining Duty in the Civil War: Personal Choice, Popular Culture, and the Union Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). For community studies of draft resistance, see Robert M. Sandow, *Deserter Country: Civil War Opposition in the Pennsylvania Appalachians* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009) and Grace Palladino, *Another*

The War Democrat Strategy

Focusing on the attempts to demonize Democrats neglects the extent to which Union campaigns sought to convert them. As Secretary of State Seward said in a speech after Union Party victories in 1863, Democrats had proved their loyalty “in the field...in the Cabinet; they are in the canvass, counseling, voting, fighting, generously, loyally, nobly.” Seward, like many of the northern governors, strongly advocated bringing Democrats into the fold. Election campaigns always complicated this process by creating imperatives to simultaneously convert Democrats and to berate those who stayed aloof. But centrist governors had lead the way in finding ways to reach across the aisle and the national campaign adopted this War Democrat strategy and employed many of the governors’ messages and tactics.⁵⁶

In Pennsylvania and Ohio, Governors Curtin and Brough reused the “military necessity” arguments that had served them so well against Clement L. Vallandigham and George W. Woodward the previous year. Brough acknowledged that “criticism might be made [of the administration], but this is not the time for it.” He urged his former Democratic colleagues to vote not for Lincoln, his party, or any particular policy, but for the nation.⁵⁷ Curtin had never been a Democrat but he made the same case by avoiding policy altogether. A typical account stated that he “entered into no discussion of political topics, but confined himself to exhortations to the people to perform their duty to their country, to the soldiers in the field, to themselves.”⁵⁸ Curtin frequently surrounded himself with Democratic converts. In 1864, the Pennsylvania Union Party unveiled John Cessna – Democratic

Civil War: Labor, Capital, and the State in the Anthracite Regions of Pennsylvania, 1840-1868 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990).

⁵⁶ *New York Times*, November 5, 1863; for discussion of Seward and Thurlow Weed’s desire for Union Party fusion movements, see Van Deusen, *Thurlow Weed*, 297-298.

⁵⁷ Brough, *The Defenders of the Country and Its Enemies*, 5; *Sacramento Union*, November 7, 1864.

⁵⁸ *Daily Evening Bulletin* (Philadelphia), November 5, 1864.

speaker of the Pennsylvania house through 1863 – as the latest addition to their ranks. Cessna would join Curtin on the stump making centrist, Unionist appeals to Pennsylvania’s Democrats.⁵⁹

Another continued element of the War Democrat strategy involved exercising restraint in criticism of George B. McClellan. Governors understood McClellan’s continuing popularity with the soldiers and recognized his fundamental loyalty. Governor Brough took care to praise McClellan personally but to bemoan that he had become an “instrument in the hands of evil men” who, if placed in charge of the government, “would turn it over to the rebels.” In Pennsylvania, McClellan’s home state, Curtin spoke in October alongside three soldiers, two who considered themselves “lifelong Democrats.” General Joshua T. Owens vowed that he would not “say one word against” the general who he respected “as a man and as a soldier.” But he knew he could not follow him “surrounded by the associates among whom he stands.” By 1864, soldiers’ hatred of Peace Democrats ran deep and this tactic helped reap maximum benefits for the Union Party cause.⁶⁰

The War Democrat strategy had its most resounding and significant success among the soldiers of the Union army in an election that represented the apex of the militarization of wartime politics. Democrats hoped McClellan could bring soldiers who had been antebellum Democrats back into the fold. The Union Party responded with speeches and letters from generals and everyday soldiers. Just as governors like Curtin, Brough, and Andrew had benefited from being “the Soldier’s Friend,” so Lincoln cultivated and benefited from a relationship with the troops – as “Father Abraham” – that saw them collectively view him as their protector and advocate, as well as commander-in-chief. For the first time in American history, soldiers voted in vast numbers in the field and 78 percent of them chose Lincoln. These ballots probably swung New York and Connecticut and provided Lincoln’s margin of victory elsewhere. Jonathan W. White has investigated the complicated contours of soldier politics and

⁵⁹ Cessna appeared alongside Curtin at a rally in Lebanon in late October. *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph* (Harrisburg), October 27, 1864.

⁶⁰ Brough, *The Defenders of the Country and Its Enemies*, 6-7; *Philadelphia Press*, October 22, 1864.

revealed that military superiors at all levels, including Secretary of War Stanton, often influenced voting procedures to benefit Union politicians. But many Democratic soldiers still chose freely to cast their vote for the president in 1864, as they had for governors like Curtin and Brough. The fact that they did not see this as a vote for the Republicans, but against the Peace Democrats and for the war, only provides further evidence for the success of the Union Party's War Democrat strategy.⁶¹

In late October, John W. Forney, a former Douglas Democrat and influential Pennsylvania ally, wrote to the president about the importance of War Democrats. Forney averred that Union majorities in Pennsylvania and elsewhere were only possible because of thousands of Democratic voters who had crossed the aisle. Forney warned Lincoln that he must take the opportunity to “recognize and distinguish leading Union Democrats in every part of the country.” Those Republicans who refused to acknowledge leading Democrats as equals within the Union movement risked driving “hundreds of thousands...back into the Copperhead organization.” Forney listed men like John A. Dix, Daniel S. Dickinson, David Tod, John Brough, Joseph Holt, and John Conness, all Democrats whom played vital roles in securing Union victories in the states of New York, Ohio, Kentucky, and California. Most of these men had acted with the Union Party since 1861, but Dix stayed aloof until 1864.⁶²

With bipartisan national popularity, Dix provided Lincoln a vital late boost in the campaign. As detailed in chapter 3, Dix had earned great renown early in the war and Democrats and Republicans considered him seriously as a gubernatorial nominee in 1862. In 1864, Dix rejected overtures about serving as Lincoln's vice-president by saying that acceptance would imply his concurrence in the administration's “political measures & there is more than one of those measures to which I cannot give

⁶¹ White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*. Lincoln and his surrogates also reached out repeatedly to the newspaper editor most likely to win them Democratic votes, James Gordon Bennett. Bennett's New York *Herald* had the largest circulation in the nation and, as one ally wrote Lincoln in September, its influence was “almost incalculable”. While the president would not receive an endorsement, the fact the *Herald* declined to back McClellan represented a victory in itself. For Lincoln attempting to bring Bennett on side, see correspondence between Lincoln and Abram Wakeman during 1864 in Lincoln Papers.

⁶² J.W. Forney to Abraham Lincoln, October 24, 1864, Lincoln Papers.

my assent.” But nor could Dix stand by and see his old party run on a platform that called the war effort “a failure.”⁶³ On November 1, Dix helped organize a “War Democratic Convention” in New York that pledged to represent the true Democratic Party of “Jefferson and Jackson.” Dix spoke alongside other Democratic speakers such as Edwards Pierrepont, and General Daniel E. Sickles at a meeting that aimed to “detach as many Democrats as possible from the support of the Chicago Convention,” and then to “lay the foundation for the reorganization of the Democratic party under better auspices.” The meeting adopted pro-war resolutions damning the peace plank but supported the conservative position on reconstruction.

After the election, Dix wrote to Lincoln congratulating him on the “defeat of the peace party,” and claiming that his meeting of War Democrats had “drawn off from McClellan,” a number of votes “much greater than the majority for the Union ticket.” In a state as close as New York, where Lincoln won by 6,000 votes out of more than 700,000 cast, Dix’s claim is possible, however egotistical. While Lincoln’s Union Party did not meet every expectation of these conservative men, they clearly outperformed the Democratic Party in appealing to this part of the political center.⁶⁴

The strength of the War Democrat strategy rebukes the staple but stale view that nineteenth century elections hung on mobilizing the base, not on appealing across party lines. In competitive elections, converting or keeping home enough people to swing the outcome is more significant than the fact that a majority vote as they always have done. Civil War era politicians looked constantly for converts and neither party focused solely on mobilizing their base. As a Connecticut Union Party official wrote in frustration about an overly partisan orator, “the object of speaking is to win votes from our opponents...if the speaker be of Democratic antecedents all the better – He can make appeals that our old line Whigs and Republicans cannot.” At the individual level, Maria Lydig Daly, a War

⁶³ *Harper’s Weekly*, September 10, 1864; John A Dix to Isaac Sherman, June 6, 1864, Box 6, Isaac Sherman Papers, HL; War Democratic Convention reported in *New York Times*, November 2, 1864.

⁶⁴ John A Dix to Abraham Lincoln, November 12, 1864, Lincoln Papers.

Democrat in New York, described visiting her father in 1864 and converting him from Lincoln to McClellan's cause. Such instances took place throughout the North.⁶⁵

October Omens

The first real indicator for how the election would play out came with the October elections in the crucial states of Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. In Pennsylvania, the Union Party struggled to present a united front because of the persistent vitriol between Governor Curtin and Simon Cameron. Cameron headed the state campaign committee and Curtin and his allies stood aloof. A worried member of the state supreme court wrote President Lincoln that Curtin remained "the most important man in this state," and that to win in November, they had to have the governor's "great influences in the state, and particularly with the soldiers." Only a few days later, John Forney echoed this message stating that "Curtin's friends are cold," and that without them, the state lay in the balance.⁶⁶

When results came in, Indiana and Ohio returned relatively comfortable Union margins, but initial returns from Pennsylvania suggested that the Democrats had won. After counting the full vote, Unionists held a narrow advantage, but it augured a knife edge contest the following month. Philip Sheridan's victories in the Shenandoah Valley campaign had augmented the morale boost from the fall of Atlanta and helped move these three doubtful states into the National Union Party's column. Even so, when Lincoln went over to the telegraph office to pore over the October data, the president began tallying up his estimates for November and put his predicted margin of victory at only 120 electoral votes to 114. Lincoln gave Pennsylvania to McClellan along with Illinois, New Jersey, New York,

⁶⁵ Smith, *No Party Now*, 137; Daly, *Diary of a Union Lady*, 303. For the contours of this historiographical debate, see the Introduction, above.

⁶⁶ John M. Read to Abraham Lincoln, September 8, 1864 & September 19, 1864, John W. Forney to Abraham Lincoln, September 14, 1864, William D. Kelley to Abraham Lincoln, September 30, 1864, Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, October 6, 1864, all Lincoln Papers.

Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, and Delaware. Eyes in Washington turned to Pennsylvania to diagnose what had caused the disappointing returns.⁶⁷

Within Pennsylvania, the Curtin and Cameron factions blamed each other. Curtin and McClure cited Cameron's poor organization and narrow partisanship. Cameron claimed the problem lay with Curtin having appointed an insufficient number of Republican commissioners to facilitate soldier voting. In August, Pennsylvania's voters approved a constitutional amendment allowing soldier voting in the field by a two to one margin – a result that showed many Democrats rising above narrow partisan considerations. While he wholeheartedly supported soldier voting, the partisan nature of the soldier voting bill appalled Curtin. Angering Republican loyalists including Cameron and Secretary of War Stanton, the governor used the authority granted him to appoint a reasonable number of Democrats as election agents to oversee voting in the field. This may have marginally increased the Democratic vote, but, given 68% of the Pennsylvania ballots cast went Union, it hardly warped the result. When Lincoln met with Pennsylvania election agents he told them "I want to get all the votes I can of course but play fair gentleman, play fair." The president clearly knew the process would ensure support from men in uniform.⁶⁸

Even with the security of the soldier vote, Lincoln wished to take no chances in November and met with Curtin in Washington to secure his more active participation in the canvass. The governor began to provide Lincoln updates and made a series of campaign appearances as his health allowed. With Curtin came the vital backing of his close allies and organizers – Wayne MacVeagh and Alexander McClure – who now made their own speeches and fired up their campaign machines as they

⁶⁷ Abraham Lincoln's tabulations for the upcoming 1864 election. HM 2032, Thomas T. Eckert Papers, The Huntington Library. This episode has been profiled by the Huntington Library blog - <https://blog.decodingthecivilwar.org/2016/10/18/october-surprise-1864-edition/>

⁶⁸ [Margaret McKelvy Bird and Daniel W. Crofts, eds.,] "Notes and Documents: Soldier Voting in 1864: The David McKelvy Diary," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 115 (July 1991):377; McClure, *Old Time Notes, Vol 2*, 129-131. The Pennsylvania percentage was 10% below the national average of soldier votes at 78% but with McClellan hailing from Pennsylvania this seems unsurprising. Figures from White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*, 173.

had done in 1863. These changes came too late for October, but they would bear fruit in the presidential contest.

Many governors played prominent roles in the later stages of the Union Party campaign. As well as Curtin, Governors Brough of Ohio and Andrew of Massachusetts would be enlisted by national party chairman Henry Raymond. Raymond arranged a joint speaking tour for Brough and Andrew to speak on six consecutive nights in cities across upstate New York. Coverage of these events reported the governors “electrifying” immense crowds at Albany, Rome, and Utica. Andrew would miss the second half of this speaking tour after suffering a severe nose bleed of a kind that had nearly killed him four years earlier. But placing the radical Andrew and centrist Brough on the same platform, albeit briefly, demonstrated important unity within the Union Party in the later stages of the campaign.⁶⁹

Brough continued to headline events, with Governor Oliver P. Morton of Indiana drafted in as a replacement to accompany him. At their Albany meeting, Brough spoke for two hours after a grand torch-lit procession. Brough steadily worked through the themes of the Union Party campaign. The question before the electorate was simple: “Union or Disunion.” As an old Democrat who had voted for Douglas in 1860 and still had “no partisan feelings” in favor of Lincoln, he implored his “democratic brothers” to back the Illinoisan. He asked them to remember that “we Democrats were always the war party” but that McClellan could lead no war while standing on the Chicago platform. As well as in New York, Brough reiterated these themes in his native Ohio and in Pennsylvania. The petty vitriol Democrats directed at Brough - calling him “fatty Brough,” the “Behemoth,” and the “half-human hippotamus from Ohio,” only suggested attempts to divert attention from his effectiveness as a speaker.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Henry J. Raymond to John A. Andrew, September 29, 1864, & October 6, 1864, Box 14, Folder 4, and Box 14, Folder 5, Roll 20, John A. Andrew Papers on Microfilm, John A. Andrew Papers, MHS; *New York Times*, October 20, 1864 & October 21, 1864; *Buffalo Daily Courier*, October 24, 1864.

⁷⁰ *Albany Evening Journal*, October 27, 1864; *Daily Ohio Statesman* (Columbus), November 1; *Syracuse Daily Courier and Union*, October 25, 1864.

Governor Curtin was promised as a speaker at events in New York, but his fragile health limited his appearances. One of the largest rallies he spoke at, in October, served to honor the recently passed Pennsylvanian General David Bell Birney. Curtin spoke only of his pride at honoring a soldier who had always told the people to “stand by the flag.” He urged care for the families and orphans of all fallen men like Birney and said not a word on policy. Coaxed to utter a few impromptu words that evening, Curtin averred that “we all want peace,” and that only the rebels delayed the war’s end. As soon as they would “lay down their arms...they can have, as some of them pretend to desire, the Union as it was, and the Constitution as it is.” As they campaigned for Lincoln, Union governors stuck close to the centrism they had pioneered.⁷¹

The Democratic Campaign

Democrats faced an uphill task after the October election results and General Philip H. Sheridan’s ongoing success in the Shenandoah Valley. The platform would be avoided and even the vice-presidential candidate, George Pendleton, would be persuaded into issuing a public letter affirming his Unionism. They placed hope in McClellan’s popularity, his personal soundness on the war, and his ability to front an anti-radical message. Governors Bramlette and Seymour would help take this message to the electorate, but both had struggled with the realities of governing as a loyal opposition.⁷²

A year and a half in office had seen Seymour take more strident positions in opposition to the Lincoln administration, but his opposition never merited accusations of disloyalty. As detailed in chapter 4, his relations with the administration had soured noticeably after the New York draft riots that many Republicans blamed him for inciting and failing to suppress. Although combative, Seymour still functioned collaboratively with the Lincoln administration and other state executives. The

⁷¹ *Cleveland Daily Leader*, September 12, 1864; *Philadelphia Press*, October 22, 1864.

⁷² Pendleton letter in the *Findlay Jeffersonian* (Findlay, Ohio), October 17, 1864. A Union paper characterized this attempt to “redeem Pendleton from his wretched Copperhead record” as merely adding “hypocrisy” to his other vices; *Cleveland Daily Leader*, October 24, 1864.

governor protested but always complied with federal drafts and the many ad hoc requests for men. These actions probably helped him persuade Lincoln and Stanton to revise the quotas for New York City. At the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery, newspapers reported Seymour traveling down by train with his gubernatorial colleagues, interacting collegially and joining his counterparts in giving rousing patriotic speeches to soldier units from their respective states. Indeed, Seymour's loyal course always enraged a minority within his party. James W. Wall, a Peace Democrat senator from New Jersey, confessed that Seymour's support of a "vigorous prosecution of the war," was as "incomprehensible to me as scotch metaphysics." But for most Democrats, Seymour remained the party's leading figure.⁷³

Governor Bramlette faced his own tribulations in Kentucky. As detailed in the previous chapter, he had come perilously close to an utter breakdown in relations with Washington over the issue of African American recruitment. Bramlette eventually secured some concessions from Lincoln but ultimately had no choice except to urge his citizens to comply with African-American enrollment and hope for redress at the ballot box. In a trying year, Bramlette even came under attack from Confederates when General John Hunt Morgan attacked Frankfort in June and demanded the city's surrender. The governor holed up in the state arsenal with a contingent of Union troops until relief came. Bramlette experienced personally the common feeling in Kentucky of being assailed from both sides. While his governance remained loyal and cooperative to some extent, on the stump, Bramlette raged that black troops had been raised in Kentucky "in palpable and direct violation of the promise given to me by the President" and that his protests only "sometimes" drew concessions from Lincoln's administration.⁷⁴

⁷³ Neely, *Lincoln and the Democrats*, 120-121; James Wall to Samuel Barlow, Box 45, Barlow Papers, HL. For the report of the journey to Gettysburg, see *Philadelphia Press*, November 21, 1863.

⁷⁴ Thomas E. Bramlette to Stephen G. Burbridge, March 14, 1864, Burbridge Correspondence, 1864, Filson Historical Society, Louisville, Kentucky; Harris, *Lincoln and the Border States*, 237-242; *Richmond Weekly Palladium* (Richmond, Indiana), June 29, 1864; Thomas Speed, *The Union Cause in Kentucky, 1860-1865* (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1907), 238.

Although scarred and somewhat tarnished by office, Bramlette and Seymour remained key Democratic spokesmen. Seymour had played a central role at the convention and would give speeches in Milwaukee and Philadelphia, as well as in New York where he ran for reelection to the governorship. Bramlette's fierce denunciation of both radicalism and secessionism made him a beloved figure among War Democrats and an ideal surrogate for McClellan in Kentucky.

Constitutionalism

Democrats reiterated many of the constitutional arguments regarding civil liberties and military arrests that they had made in 1862. Mark E. Neely has recently attacked the constitutionalism of the Democratic Party late in the war, saying that they “floundered from careful dissent in 1862 into desperate pseudo-constitutional posturing by 1864.”⁷⁵ But when it came to issues of civil liberties, Democrats continued a steady drum beat of criticism throughout the war. The Democratic platform included a lengthy plank indicting the “subversion of the civil by military law in States not in insurrection; the arbitrary military arrest...of American citizens in States where civil law exists in full force; the suppression of freedom of speech and of the press.” Democrats refused to acknowledge that either presidential war powers or the 1863 Suspension of Habeas Corpus Act made these actions legal and constitutional. As Horatio Seymour said, anyone who claimed “that Abraham Lincoln...may rightfully do what George Washington would not do in the darkest days of the Revolution, does not know what Constitutional liberty is.” Such statements accompanied a fierce rejection of the Union Party's “military necessity” arguments, which Democrats deemed an open-ended invitation to unlimited presidential power likely to culminate in “centralization” and “military despotism.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Neely, *Lincoln and the Democrats*, 143. This seems incongruent with Neely's assertion, elsewhere in the book, that the Democrats ran a “presidential campaign notable for its moderation.” Neely's critique focuses on the idea of a convention of the states, a more desperate and recent innovation, but hardly central to their overall constitutional critique.

⁷⁶ See William Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), for a balanced consideration of the excesses of the Lincoln Administration during the war.

Again, Neely has dismissed such “constitutional posturing” as the predictable response of partisan oppositions in America during wartime. But Democrats knew the past fate of the federalists and the dangers of wartime criticism. They acted, at least in part, because the idea that war produced tyranny inimical to individual freedom and self-government tapped into an idea that had roots deep in the political psyche of most nineteenth century Americans. Northerners of all political parties inhabited what Timothy Huebner has called a “culture of constitutionalism,” that defined the United States against the example of European monarchies and ensured that all antebellum administrations adhered to minuscule standing armies even in the face of existential foreign threats. During the war, northerners kept this intellectual inheritance in mind when they struggled to grapple with conscription, emancipation, martial law and military arrests. To modern eyes Democratic constitutional critiques might seem spurious and unpatriotic, but the arguments they made resonated with people of the time and help explain the votes they continued to receive.⁷⁷

Reconstruction

Speaking at a McClellan ratification meeting in Frankfort, Governor Bramlette disowned the peace plank and focused voters’ gazes on what they wanted military victory to secure for the future. Bramlette promised that Kentuckians stood not for a “*reconstructed Union*,” nor even a “*restored Union*,” but for “a *preserved Union*.” Radicals who yearned for “reconstruction” wished to destroy the constitution as readily as the rebels. Bramlette backed McClellan as the only candidate who would not require the southern states to be “revolutionized” and who would ride the “thoroughbred noble charger ‘Union’ as the one condition of peace,” a horse “bred by Washington, sired by the Constitution.”⁷⁸

Like Bramlette, Seymour sought to move the debate past Union military victory. Speaking in Philadelphia in October, Seymour vowed that should the Confederacy fall within a month, people

⁷⁷ Horatio Seymour speech in Philadelphia, October 5, 1864, Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 255.

⁷⁸ Bramlette speech at McClellan ratification meeting, Frankfort, September 19, 1864, document KYR-0003-023-0006, Kentucky Governors Project, accessed at civilwargovernors.org.

would suddenly recognize the radicals' intention to provide "military governments at the South." Then northerners will discover that "more men will be needed to keep the South in subjection...than are required to drive the armies of rebellion from the field." Instead of bringing peace, victory will "perpetuate and make enduring all the worst features of this war." For evidence of how the Lincoln administration's turn to radicalism made lasting peace with the South impossible, Seymour cited the border states. Loyal Kentucky, who had resoundingly chosen Union of her own volition in 1861, now stood betrayed and chafed under military occupation of the federal army. If even Unionist states could not tolerate Lincoln's terms of peace, what chance existed that South Carolina, Georgia, or Alabama would?⁷⁹

Seymour acknowledged differences between Lincoln and congressional radicals but argued that their varying plans would both prevent soldiers returning home. Sumner's plan to reduce the South to "colonies" would necessitate a vast occupying army but so would Lincoln's ten per cent plan. If only ten percent of the population are to rule, "who is to hold the other nine-tenths in subjugation?" Even if Lincoln wished to welcome back the South on conciliatory terms, Seymour argued that he remained "manacled" to Congress and their legislative agenda. This showed Seymour using the same guilt by association tactic against Lincoln that Republicans used against McClellan. Whatever form reconstruction took under the administration, it would require further drafts, further taxation, further death and further destruction.

This nightmare scenario required a Union riposte. Pennsylvania's Union Party turned the tables with a pamphlet arguing that these consequences would be the result of a Democratic victory bound to result in disunion. In such an event the Democratic government will be forced to institute "a military system which will put every man in the army for years! Destruction of the public credit requiring taxation will consume the substance of poor and rich! [and] yearly invasions, destroying property and

⁷⁹ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 248-261.

paralyzing industry!” Neither party believed the northern people had the stomach for a post-war occupation of the South.⁸⁰

Seymour’s dystopian vision struck fear and apprehension into the minds of some northerners. However irresponsible and exaggerated his prophesy, it did not take a great stretch of imagination to recognize that persuading former Confederate states to enact emancipation, let alone black voting or land redistribution, would require significant northern military presence. Turning a negative association into a positive attribute, Seymour asked voters to allow the Democratic Party to draw on their “ancient affiliations” with the South to guarantee a quick and lasting reunion. In raising the prospect of a vast army of occupation, Seymour employed an unsavory but resonant electoral tactic.⁸¹

The Democratic message resonated with conservatives but it still battled against the influence of the platform. In late October, the closest thing to an institutional manifestation of the old Whig Party – the Conservative Unionist Party – issued their final official statement endorsing McClellan and hoping to offset other old Whigs like Edward Everett and conservative Democrats like Dix who had publicly cast their lot with Lincoln. Some other leading former Whigs like New Englander Robert C. Winthrop joined them in backing McClellan and Kentucky editor George D. Prentice pleaded that “the Whig who now refuses to act with the Democratic party is an apostate” to the principles of Clay and Crittenden.” But even the Conservative Union Party felt the need to explicitly disown the peace plank. They backed McClellan despite a platform that caused many other conservatives to abandon him.⁸²

Conclusion

As the telegram machines hummed on the evening of November 8, it became clear that Lincoln had been overwhelmingly reelected. The president received 55 percent of the national vote and 212 electoral votes, losing only the states of Kentucky, New Jersey, and Delaware. Over 2.2 million voters

⁸⁰ Quoted in Smith, *No Party Now*, 133.

⁸¹ Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 258.

⁸² Harris, “Conservative Unionists and the Presidential Election of 1864,” 315; Conservative National Union Address in the *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, October 24, 1864.

chose Lincoln against 1.8 million that backed McClellan. The election took place in a highly combustible moment after four years of turmoil on the battlefield, in politics, and on the home front. Far from pre-ordained, the outcome balanced delicately on the combination of military progress, civilian morale, and the positions taken and rhetoric delivered by politicians. While each affected the other, none decided the election independently. Any generalization about an entire electorate is fraught with difficulties but this chapter has, nonetheless, attempted to suggest why Lincoln won convincingly and why 45 percent of the country supported his opponent.

Amid great uncertainty, the Union Party benefited from having taken a centrist position appealing to the largest portion of the electorate and resilient in the face of unpredictable military outcomes. Even if voters accepted their fundamental Unionism, the Democratic Party gambled in calling for an armistice. This proposal, premised on considering the war effort a failure, tied their political fortunes to continued military stalemate. Most campaigning saw both sides attempt to convince voters that their candidate had the best credentials to end the conflict in a manner that would restore peace and Union on a lasting basis. Lincoln and the Union Party offered the more convincing vision. The people chose Lincoln because they wanted to preserve the Union, they believed that war still represented the most likely means to do so, and they judged that they could not trust that responsibility to a party that had called the war a “failure.” Radical plans for reconstruction may have scared voters, but they invoked less fear than nightmares of permanent disunion. And as soon as Democrats advocated stopping the fighting *before* opening negotiations, many northerners interpreted this as starting down a slippery slope to Confederate independence.

The Union Party had managed their internal divisions more effectively than the Democrats. Radical Republicans and abolitionists had long driven a progressive agenda without which policies like emancipation and black military service might have been decades delayed. Nonetheless, these measures became reality only because the necessities of war moved the political spectrum and allowed these to become centrist positions. As centrist positions, they served as military necessities and the end

rather than the beginning of the conflict's social transformations. Without this centrist explanation of justification and timing provided by Lincoln and the governors, the mass of northerners might well have rejected emancipation and black military service outright. Radicals and conservatives within Lincoln's coalition ultimately found common ground before the electorate. As a result, Lincoln's administration achieved some remarkable progressive ends through more conservative, centrist means and justifications.

The final reckoning of the six states considered in this dissertation shows the strength of Union party politics. Lincoln had won five in 1860 and lost Kentucky. In 1864, he garnered the same tally but with some very different margins. In California, he increased from 32.3% of the vote to 58.6%, in Ohio, from 52.3% to 56.4%, Massachusetts, 62.9% to 72.2%, in Kentucky, from 0.9% to 30.2%. In New York, he dropped from 53.7% to 50.5% and in Pennsylvania from 56.3% to 51.6%. Overall, Lincoln received 350,000 more votes than four years earlier. The centrist politics of Union parties had played a pivotal role in the impressive feat of maintaining and enlarging the coalition that first elected Lincoln.⁸³

Race featured in the Democrats' 1864 campaign but not as part of the uniformly anti-war, race-baiting campaign commonly associated with them. Political songs and cartoons fired up the base using old attacks conflating Republicans with abolitionism. Democrats crowed that abolitionists or "nigger heads" would no longer guide the ship of state after McClellan's victory. Cartoons like the infamous "Miscegenation Ball" represented the most extreme example of these types of attacks. But in most of the North these tactics emanated from Copperheads and not the larger War Democratic mainstream.

⁸³ There are factors to consider in the decreases in New York and Pennsylvania. New York and Pennsylvania had some of the most internally divided Union Parties. The personal and ideological battles between Weed and Greeley factions in New York and Curtin and Cameron factions in Pennsylvania always posed a challenge to efficient and united organization. As discussed in chapter 1, New York and Pennsylvania also provided some of the most conservative northern support for Lincoln in 1860. The war strained the principles conservatives held dear and some defected to a Democratic Party more united and formidable than in 1860. The number might have been far higher if not for the centrist strategies of Union Party politicians.

When race appeared in Democratic materials, it tended to appear as a corollary to a larger attack and rarely offered focused criticism of emancipation or black military service. Only in states like Kentucky, where Unionism went hand in hand with pro-slavery beliefs, did Bramlette and others show no qualms about directly trying to funnel anger at emancipation and black military service into Democratic votes. Most Democrats understood that the northerners views about slavery had evolved a fact reflected in slavery's absence from the Democratic platform. Exempting their extreme elements, most Democrats followed the Union Party in avoiding emancipation as a central feature of their songs, cartoons, and speeches.⁸⁴

Positively, Democrats focused on the person of McClellan and his representation of a pro-war conservative Unionism. They continued to mount established attacks on infringements of constitutional liberties and presented a united front on reconstruction in stark contrast to their divided opponents. War Democrats voiced the same conservative criticisms they had since 1862. But their convention stance on peace would feature ubiquitously in the Union Party campaign and doomed Democratic hopes for victory. This folly showed how their extreme wing had grown through the war and how, at the lowest moment of national morale, the party acquiesced and lost sight of the larger cause. But it is nonetheless true that discussions of armistices and negotiation with the Confederacy dropped dramatically out of Democratic rhetoric after news of Atlanta. They only truly ran an active peace campaign for two days.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ "McClellan will be president," and "Our "Mac" shall march to Washington," J. F. Feeks, *New-York*. Retrieved from the Library of Congress songsheet collection. Mark Neely has an extended discussion of the "Miscegenation Ball" cartoon, highlighting the degree to which it should not be seen as indicative of any official Democratic campaign. Neely, *Lincoln and the Democrats*, 107-114. Cartoons and songs also frequently attacked Lincoln's sense of humor, deemed inappropriate for a man with the responsibility of sending men to their deaths. For an extended discussion, see Carwardine, *Lincoln's Sense of Humor*.

⁸⁵ Mark Neely has recently judged that the Democrats offered no consistent critique in their 1864 campaign, instead adopting a scatter gun approach "resembling the unleashing of a swarm of gnats." This overlooks the degree of substance and consistency in Democratic attacks throughout the war; Neely, *Lincoln and the Democrats*, 113.

When reflecting on the significance of the election, many scholars have cited the very fact that it took place. The administration gave no serious consideration to cancelling or postponing the election and historian David E. Long sees this as a remarkable affirmation of “the belief in democratic government as defined by the Constitution.” Long is right, but he gives credit only to the Lincoln and his Union Party. We should not be surprised that the election happened because it reflected an overwhelming shared belief in democracy across the entire North and both parties.⁸⁶

Given that they held the national reins of power, the Union Party deserve credit for their willingness to trust the people even to defeat. Lincoln’s blind memorandum exemplifies this, as does the election of Horatio Seymour as governor of New York. In the middle of the war, Republicans allowed a Democrat to lead the state that contributed the most money, the most men, the most materiel to the war effort. Most Democrats shared this faith in democracy, with some exceptions. James Wall, the New Jersey Democrat mentioned earlier, expressed that under Lincoln’s despotism he could hope only for “reconstruction after separation, in some far off century.” Even this hope lay beyond California Democrat and mining magnate Samuel Butterworth. Convinced that the “degenerate tribes of the North” would reelect Lincoln, he declared himself “an advocate of constitutional monarchy – or despotism restricted by timely assassination.”⁸⁷ Such views existed, but they always constituted a very small minority of the Democratic masses.

Democrats shared the fundamental belief in the Union and the democratic system that provided its beating heart. Governor Bramlette never failed to remind his audiences that only one route lay open for remedying the “evils in legislation” of the administration, namely “the peaceful medium of the ballot-box.” Seymour always echoed this point and made clear that it represented the great difference between the North and the South. Seymour always acknowledged that his northern opponents acted

⁸⁶ Long, *Jewel of Liberty*, xix; William Blair has also commented that it “truly was a wonder that the election came off.” Blair, *With Malice Toward Some*, 216.

⁸⁷ James Wall to Samuel Barlow, Box 45; Samuel F. Butterworth to Samuel Barlow, October 22, 1864, Box 50, both in Barlow Papers, HL.

lawfully and hence could be put “down by the ballot.” Rebels “have not contented themselves with the ballot, but have chosen the bayonet and the bullet...with the bayonet and the bullet we must meet them.” Democrats and Republicans fought bitterly during the war, but in election after election they upheld the fabric of self-government through the peaceful transition of power after democratic votes. Maria Lydig Daly perfectly embodied this phenomenon. Daly despaired at Lincoln’s inability to win the war and expressed desperation at the thought that Lincoln might serve more four years. Daly worked tirelessly for McClellan. When Lincoln won, she placed her trust in democracy, writing “Vox Populi, vox Dei. So it must be for the best,” and recommitted herself to supporting the war effort.⁸⁸

People of all political persuasions thought that holding and respecting elections constituted a fundamental American principle and a major reason for fighting the war. Protecting self-government had united the North in 1861 all northerners judged secession an entirely unjustifiable response to a free and fair election. This belief in the democratic process remained core to northern politics throughout the war. It formed part of the centrist common ground so rarely noticed in northern politics. Even though clear and important differences existed, northern parties had more in common than we think. Despite the inflammatory rhetoric of wartime elections, they still served a unifying purpose. They helped Americans to debate and digest every new, unprecedented policy, to publicly mourn and rage over every military defeat, and to put their opposing visions for the future before the judgment of their peers. And in the aftermath of each peaceful election that decided the nation’s path on these questions, they accepted the outcome and planned for the next. Whether their peers had handed them victory or defeat, the process helped reminded them of why they fought.

⁸⁸ Speech of Gov. Bramlette, McClellan Ratification meeting at Frankfort, September 19, 1864, KYR-0003-023-0006, 4, 8, accessed at civilwargovernors.org; Horatio Seymour speech, Brooklyn, October 22, 1862 in Cook and Knox, *Public Record of Horatio Seymour*, 84; Daly, *Diary of a Union Lady*, 302, 304, 312.

Conclusion

In August 1866, the National Union Party met in Philadelphia, two years after it had renominated Abraham Lincoln for president. Henry J. Raymond, editor of the *New York Times*, remained the party chair and several former members of Lincoln's cabinet – William H. Seward, Gideon Welles, Montgomery Blair, Edward Bates and Hugh McCulloch – either attended or supported the convention. Some messaging sounded unchanged from 1864. The meeting declared that “National Union should be the watchword of every true man,” asserted the “supremacy of representative government,” and celebrated that the war had “put an end, finally and forever, to the existence of slavery.” Even so, none of the 7,000 spectators who watched this three-day convention could be fooled into mistaking this gathering for Lincoln's Union Party.¹

The convention opened with a carefully orchestrated set-piece. Deliberately protesting the continued exclusion of nine southern states from the Union, the convention opened with delegates representing all thirty-six states processing through the Wigwam to whoops and cheers. At the head of this parade of sectional reconciliation and friendship, South Carolina's imposing James Lawrence Orr, recently of the Confederate Senate, walked arm-in-arm with Massachusetts' diminutive Union general, Darius Nash Couch. Critics immediately lampooned the symbolism of these men's relative statures and cartoonist Thomas Nast placed their image at the center of his scathing *Harper's Weekly* cartoon (Fig. 1). As the delegates passed, the band played “Rally Round the Flag, Boys,” then “the Star Spangled Banner,” before switching seamlessly into “Dixie.” Confederate General Richard S. Taylor and Union General George A. Custer led the cheers for Union. On the second day of proceedings, an Ohio delegate rose and, after some protest, was permitted to read a letter from Clement L. Vallandigham. Vallandigham, the war's most notorious Copperhead, expressed his support for a gathering animated

¹ *The Proceedings of the National Union Convention: Held at Philadelphia, August 14, 1866* (Washington, D.C.: National Union Executive Committee, 1866), 5, 1, 18; Thomas Wagstaff, “The Arm-in-Arm Convention,” *Civil War History*, 14 (June 1968), 102.

by a “spirit of wisdom and patriotism.” The reading of Vallandigham’s message was a rare unplanned moment during three days where convention managers strictly prevented impromptu speeches from delegates. While this may have prevented off-message sentiments from being voiced, the very presence of Copperheads and Confederates doomed the viability of the movement with much of the Union rank and file.²

Yet in the early months of 1866, a new national movement seemed like it might capture moderate support. William Seward and Henry Raymond envisioned the National Union Movement as a chance to separate moderate Republicans from the radicals. To that end, Raymond desired President Andrew Johnson to accept the “reasonable, wise, and popular” Fourteenth Amendment and worked to ensure that former Peace Democrats and ex-Confederates should feature minimally at the National Union Convention. But with an intractably opposed president and men like Montgomery Blair and Gideon Welles working against him, it quickly became clear that Raymond’s hopes were illusory. A month before the convention, *Harper’s Weekly* decried as “simply dishonest” the attempt to represent the convention as the actions of “the great Union party of the country,” when the majority of its followers wanted nothing to do with the traitors and sympathizers preparing to gather in Philadelphia.³

Frustrated by President Johnson’s absolute determination to undo congressional Reconstruction and appalled at those flocking to his banner, moderate and even conservative Republicans abandoned the president. Three influential New York newspapers, Raymond’s *Times*, James Gordon Bennett’s *Herald*, and William Cullen Bryant’s *Evening Post* had all offered tentative support for the idea of a new political movement. But as the *Post* wrote, “The country is not blind; the people...feel that many of the Republican leaders are blunderers; but they remember that they are at least faithful to the

² *The Proceedings of the Nation Union Convention*; Roy F. Nichols, “A Great Party Which Might Have Been Born in Philadelphia,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 57 (October 1933):359-374; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion: A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 94.

³ Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), 406-7; *Harper’s Weekly*, July 14, 1866.

Union...and the country will stick to them rather than go with such company as is now on the way to Philadelphia.”⁴ A conservative Republican from Indiana complained that if Johnson was “determined that we should choose between Radicalism and Copperheadism...there is a danger of making Radicals of us all.” Sensing an opportunity, moderate Republicans mitigated radical proposals sufficiently that the conservative and usually Democratic *Herald* could abandon the president while still crowing that Congress had defeated the schemes of Thaddeus Stevens.⁵

Johnson tore apart Lincoln’s Union Party coalition through his unwillingness to compromise and his disregard for state sanctioned and grassroots racial violence breaking out across the South. Where Lincoln and Union governors had carefully calibrated their positions and tactics to maintain their coalitions of conservatives, moderates, and radicals, Johnson set these groups against each other. In place of careful rhetoric, Johnson proclaimed the resolutions at the National Union convention endorsing him to be a “second Declaration of Independence” and then embarked on his disastrous “swing around the circle” tour where he compared himself to Christ in the persecution he suffered from radicals determined to destroy the nation. Embracing and emboldening rebels and Copperheads, Johnson put at risk the fruits of emancipation and the security of the Union. Republicans began to wave the bloody flag as they lambasted a movement that could only hope to stand on the constitutional arguments of Alexander H. Stephens and the shoulders of those who opposed Lincoln, North and South. Northerners rejected candidates backing Johnson in the 1866 mid-terms and provided Congress the majorities needed to cement their vision of Reconstruction. The National Union movement launched at Philadelphia never became a party and Johnson proved unable to secure the backing of either Republicans or Democrats for a reelection bid in 1868.⁶

⁴ Michael Les Benedict, *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction, 1863-1869* (New York: Norton, 1974), 194.

⁵ Mark Wahlgren Summers, *A Dangerous Stir: Fear, Paranoia, and the Making of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 139.

⁶ Patrick W. Riddleberger, *1866: The Critical Year Revisited* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979), 214.



Figure 1: Harper's Weekly, September 29, 1866.

Andrew Johnson's presidency inaugurated a series of new political realignments throughout the period of Reconstruction that entangled many Union governors during their post-war careers. John A. Andrew, Massachusetts' great radical governor, looked destined for a prominent future. But in 1865 and early 1866, Andrew made it clear, perhaps unsurprisingly for a state executive, that he did not believe in the theory of state suicide and opposed radical plans for Reconstruction. In his valedictory address, he defended the president's actions as proving that "the National Government is not drunk with power; that its four years' exercise of the dangerous rights of war has not affected its brain. It has shown that the danger of despotic centralism, or of centralised despotism, is safely over." Andrew did not believe he had abandoned African-Americans but averred that their ultimate welfare could not come at the expense of southern whites. The only solution Andrew could envisage was complete amnesty for rebels and full political rights to the black man. Andrew uttered criticisms of Johnson in 1867 but also declared that he "utterly reject[ed] the dogma of impeachment." When trying to explain his stances, Andrew wrote that "In respect to principles I am always radical. In respect to measures I am always conservative." Most would have balked at this as a characterization of his early career, but the experience of office had certainly moved him in this direction. Some had begun to talk of the renowned war governor as a possible running-mate for Ulysses S. Grant before Andrew died suddenly in October 1867, tragically young at the age of forty-nine.⁷

Whether or not influenced by the strains of their wartime service, two of Ohio's governors similarly did not survive long after the conflict. John Brough died in office in 1865, while his predecessor, David Tod, cited ill-health as the reason for turning down Lincoln's offer to become secretary of the treasury in 1865, passing away in 1868. William Dennison, Ohio's Republican governor at the war's outset, did accept Lincoln's offer to become postmaster general in 1864. Dennison continued under President Johnson and was initially seen as a key Republican backer of the

⁷ Henry Greenleaf Pearson, *The Life of John A. Andrew, Governor of Massachusetts, 1861-1865* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904) 2: 278, 320-321.

Tennessean within the cabinet. Nonetheless, as Johnson veered into combat with most of his party, Dennison balked. Along with James T. Speed and James Harlan, Dennison resigned from the cabinet when the call was issued for the 1866 National Union Convention. Dennison remained active in Ohio Republican politics and President Grant appointed him as President of the Board of Commissioners for the District of Columbia in the 1870s. Although losing out on a senate nomination in 1880, Dennison remained politically active to his death in 1882.

California's wartime governors, Leland Stanford and Frederick F. Low, both had long post-war careers but with only sporadic political prominence. With Democrats reasserting control of the Golden State from 1867, Leland Stanford focused on business. In these years, he truly became the railroad tycoon as which he is best known while also serving one term in the US Senate in the late 1880s. In 1885, he established his most enduring legacy, Stanford University, with an initial endowment of forty million dollars. Stanford's gubernatorial successor, the Union Party's Frederick Low, served President Grant during his first term as Minister to China, after which Low returned to a career in finance.

Serving Kentucky as governor until 1867, peacetime proved almost as turbulent as war for Thomas E. Bramlette. Trying to restore order and harmony amid continuing guerilla violence across the state, Bramlette pardoned offenses committed by soldiers on both sides of the conflict and restored full rights to returning Confederates. The restored political clout of ex-Confederates helped ensure that Bramlette found few supporters for his call for Kentucky to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. The governor urged his constituents to accept slavery's inevitable demise and, by ratification, avoid further acrimony with the national government. Although they had enjoyed a tempestuous relationship, on Lincoln's death, Bramlette issued a surprisingly warm message suggesting that history might judge that "he was right and we were wrong." But most Kentuckians disagreed with Bramlette on Lincoln and on emancipation and their sentiments ensured that the Bluegrass state would not ratify the Thirteenth Amendment until 1976. Post-war Kentucky was a hostile place for African-Americans and, since the state never seceded, the federal government had little power to intervene while Governor

Bramlette had little inclination. Reflecting the mood of his state, Bramlette condemned the policies of congressional Reconstruction with all the venom he had previously spat at rebellion. Even so, his wartime unionism made him unpalatable to the type of Democrats now controlling the state and his hopes of securing a senate nomination went nowhere. Bramlette campaigned for Horatio Seymour in 1868 but mostly returned to law practice until his death in 1875.⁸

Despite his fragile wartime health, Andrew Gregg Curtin would have several political encores after the war. While initially supportive of Andrew Johnson, Curtin soon joined most of the Union Party in opposition to the president's vetoes of the Civil Rights and Freedman's Bureau bills and in support of the Fourteenth Amendment. Curtin hoped to receive a senate nomination in 1866 but lost out narrowly, and not for the first time, to the machinations of Simon Cameron. In 1869, Grant appointed Curtin to the post of ambassador to Russia, where he served until he broke with Grant to support the Liberal Republican movement in 1872. Calling for an end to corruption and to Reconstruction, Curtin lined up alongside such luminaries as Charles Sumner, Charles Francis Adams, David Davis, and Horace Greeley in opposing Grant. Curtin received 62 votes for the presidential nomination at the Liberal Republican Convention and commentators touted the governor heavily as a possible running mate for Adams or Davis before the delegates settled on Greeley. For Curtin, this break with Republicans served as a stepping stone into the Democratic Party. By 1881, Curtin began the first of three terms as a Democratic congressman before his death in 1894.

Horatio Seymour had the most notable political swansong. Narrowly defeated for reelection as governor in 1864, Horatio Seymour remained a prominent Democratic leader and served as chairman of the national convention in 1868. Democrats considered many options for who to run against

⁸ *New York Times*, April 23, 1865; Thomas E. Bramlette, Message of Governor Thos. E. Bramlette, to the General Assembly of Kentucky, December Session, 1865, 4 December 1865, Office of the Governor, Thomas E. Bramlette: Governor's Official Correspondence File, Messages to the General Assembly, 1863-1867, BR1-320 to BR1-333, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, KY; E. Merton Coulter, *The Civil War and Readjustment in Kentucky* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926), 257-366.

Republican candidate Ulysses Grant, settling on Seymour as a compromise candidate after more than twenty indecisive rounds of balloting. Seymour tried repeatedly before and during the convention to decline the nomination. While uncertainty remains and historians differ, he was most likely genuine in his disavowals. Before the convention, Seymour worked, as strange as it may sound, to secure support for Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase. Always desirous of the presidency, Chase had attracted Democratic attention with his handling of President Johnson's impeachment trial and his stances on the money question which appealed to Eastern Democrats. Seymour's support for Chase also confirmed that race remained a secondary concern for the New Yorker. Seymour had helped facilitate several New York Democrats voting for passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 and although he had opposed congressional radicals at every turn, he did not share the desire of some Democrats to inaugurate a counter-revolution. Seymour primarily wished to move on in peace and put the nation back on a sound financial footing. These priorities allowed him to entertain Chase's terms for accepting the Democratic nomination which would have been universal suffrage alongside universal amnesty for white southerners, even if the latter might prove to negate the former.⁹

Seymour's route to the 1868 nomination does not separate him from the virulent racism that punctuated the Democratic presidential campaign. Cognizant of the bubbling anger in the white South and observing northern states continuing to reject black suffrage in referenda, Democrats shamelessly catered to white prejudice. Politicians and the party press either outright denied, or offered ludicrous justifications for, the heinous violence and intimidation practiced against African-Americans across much of the South. Vice-presidential candidate Frank P. Blair offered some of the most extreme rhetoric, playing into the hands of Republicans painting the Democrats as pro-Confederate fanatics. Seymour took to the campaign trail in October and presented voters a far more moderate voice.

⁹ Stewart Mitchell, *Horatio Seymour of New York* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938), 383-410; for Seymour and the Thirteenth Amendment, see Lawanda Cox and John H. Cox, *Politics, Principle, and Prejudice, 1865-1866* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 20-21.

Although he lost heavily in the electoral college, Seymour ran the Union's greatest military hero remarkably close. Grant received 52.7 percent (Lincoln had received 55% in 1864) to Seymour's 47.3 percent, a popular vote margin of three hundred thousand votes. To the embarrassment of Republicans, Seymour won New York, very nearly took Pennsylvania and California, and, almost certainly, won the white vote of the nation. Grant's popular margin came from newly enfranchised African-Americans. Following his defeat, Seymour took on the role of elder statesman in New York Democratic politics and refused, successfully on these occasions, several attempts to draft him for statewide office.¹⁰

The diversity of paths walked by Union governors point to the difficulties of holding together party coalitions once the war ceased. While Lincoln surely would have fared better than Johnson, some political fragmentation was probably inevitable given the centrist tactics employed during the conflict. Arguments of "military necessity" had restrained personal feuds and postponed judgments on questions of policy. Even in 1864, Lincoln's party had offered voters no clear sense of what post-war reconstruction would entail. The requisites of war and widespread agreement on the importance of salvaging the Union had allowed differences to be managed between those who sought a fundamental restructuring of the nation's racial and governmental structures and those who wished to reaffirm the pre-war Union with the Thirteenth Amendment as the only necessary adjustment.

Perhaps the wartime Union coalition could never have survived long after the surrender at Appomattox. The Confederacy had posed an existential threat to the Union – the only cause with broad enough support to sustain such a vast military conflict. But if war had been a necessary condition for the success of centrist politics, it had not been sufficient. Union governors and President Lincoln had skillfully navigated their way through roiling political waters in the face of powerful swells. The centrist tactics and messaging they employed held together the political fabric of the Civil War North

¹⁰ Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion*, 140-152; Mitchell, *Horatio Seymour*, 411-486.

long enough to realize their fundamental goals of ensuring the survival of American nationality and the demise of slavery.

Governors had employed centrist tactics and messaging that held together the political fabric of the Civil War North. While partisanship remained fierce, governors had enlarged their governing coalitions by reminding all northerners of shared beliefs. In a fluid party structure, former political opponents came together to defeat a rebellion that threatened the legacy of the founders, the economic opportunities of free labor in a growing and united nation, and the very practice of democracy. Northerners understood that they fought for the principles of self-government and almost unanimously rejected utterly the notion that secession following Lincoln's legitimate election could be justified under the right to revolution articulated by the Founders. Governors further rebuked secession by continuing to exercise their state rights in a political system that Confederates claimed had become a centralized despotism. When they could not forge consensus over policies like emancipation, governors nonetheless helped cement them by accepting differences of opinion on measures they classified as military necessities to defeating the Confederacy. Matching action to words, governors stood at the center of an astonishing northern mobilization that paired state action and private enterprise. State executives built national reputations as they armed and equipped their citizens for war while ensuring the welfare of dependents on the home front. Nineteenth-century Americans hailed their governors as conduits through which their state identities served the shared Union cause. At a time when politics seemed to have failed and division to have triumphed, Union governors played a critical role in building the civilian coalitions of support necessary to defeat the Confederacy and realize their fundamental goal of saving the Union.

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